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Editorial

I am delighted to introduce the 25th edition of the ITB Journal, the academic journal of the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown. This special edition presents a diverse offering of papers from the Humanities Department at ITB reflecting the vibrant role research plays in the department. The topics presented have a universal appeal and range from social policy to accessibility of education to identity, social justice and much more.

The first paper by Aoife Prendergast, 'Interprofessional Education – Challenges in Contemporary Social Care Placement Education – A Reflection', draws attention to the increasing emphasis on all health and social care professionals to learn how to be competent collaborators. This emerging shift in education has led to a new interest in different approaches to the delivery of health and social care professions education which embraces more opportunities for interactions amongst and between learners across disciplines.

The second paper, 'Discussion, Cooperation, Collaboration: The Impact of Task Structure on Student Interaction in a Web-based Translation Exercise Module' by Mary Ann Kenny addresses the major challenge facing the online translation instructor in designing learning opportunities that encourage communication and the sharing of ideas between students. It draws on an empirical study carried out at Dublin City University and asks how such group interaction may be facilitated. In particular, it evaluates the impact of task structure on student interaction in an online translation exercise module and concludes that online interaction is most successful in discussion groups, followed in order of positive outcomes by cooperative groups and collaborative groups.

The third paper by Kevin Murphy, 'The Social Pillar of Sustainable Development: A literature review and framework for policy analysis' attempts to develop a clearer understanding of what the social pillar of sustainable development means and how it relates to the environmental pillar. In doing so, this paper provides a conceptual framework identifying four overarching social concepts – public awareness, equity, participation and social cohesion - and links them to environmental imperatives.

The fourth and fifth papers in this edition venture into the virtual worlds of video gaming and the virtual learning environment. In the fourth paper, 'Virtual Interaction: A Real Alternative', Lavinia McLean and Emmet Tuite report on a project they undertook which was intended to respond to difficulties students encountered while on placement in social care settings. In this paper, it is argued that an online support strategy may be the key to providing the necessary support the students need while on placement. This student-led initiative goes beyond the traditional model of support that social care students receive during placement and allows students to engage in reflection with the support of their peer group and academic staff throughout placement. The fifth paper is a collaborative empirical study undertaken by Lavinia McLean from ITB and Mark D. Griffiths from the International Gaming Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University called 'Violent video games and attitudes towards victims of crime: An empirical study among youth'. This study addresses the on-going debate over the impact of violent video games on young people. In particular it investigates the relationship between playing violent video games and attitudes towards victims of crime and examines the potentially dehumanising effects they can have.

The sixth paper by Gaël Le Roux, 'From Granddad's to Granddaughter's binge drinking: a recent evolution of heavy episodic alcoholic consumption in Ireland' is based on an empirical study which is aimed at understanding how female students perceive and explain the feminisation of binge drinking among their age group in Ireland. It focuses on older

generations and the female student's quest for gender and ethnic identity as possible explanations for their increasing level of episodic heavy alcohol consumption.

'Equality of access to higher education: discussion of emerging issues regarding the performance of migrants at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown' is the title of the seventh paper and is a collaborative article by Ruth Harris and Bríd Ní Chonaill. This paper presents the findings of a small-scale study of the impact of English language competency on the performance of migrants in higher education and is based on a case study of first year social studies students at ITB. ITB is located in Dublin 15, an area with one of the highest proportions of migrants nationwide and this diversity is reflected in the ITB student population also. Some of the issues that emerge from this study include factors impacting performance and progression such as written production and mastery of academic English. The eighth paper by Colette Murray, 'A Minority within a Minority? Social Justice for Traveller and Roma Children in ECEC', discusses recent policy developments at European level regarding Roma and Traveller integration and Early Childhood Provision and draws on the Irish experience for analysis and insights on policy and practice. This article examines the problems associated with integration strategies to date for Travellers and Roma and at the minority within the minority, Roma and Traveller children and concludes that it is nonetheless possible to move on from fragmented initiatives and towards systemic change.

The final paper, 'Community Education and the Labour Activation Challenge' by Liam McGlynn is a comprehensive literature review which seeks to address the research question: *In what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?* It is set against the backdrop of a world attempting to recover from the global economic crisis of 2008 and presents evidence of the contribution that community education is making toward labour market activation in Ireland.

We hope that you enjoy the papers in this issue of the ITB Journal.

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Interprofessional Education

Challenges in contemporary Social Care Placement Education

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Abstract

It is vital in contemporary practice that interprofessional education is effective and it requires engagement from students from a variety of different professions using interactive learning methodologies to develop social care professional student's knowledge, skills and attitudes, behaviours and perceptions. Interprofessional education is a complex adult learning (andragogy) approach that is most effective when integrated throughout a programme of study moving from the basic to the most complex learning activities that bridge the gap from post-secondary to practice education settings. Educational accreditation standards being developed to stimulate the advancement of interprofessional education will have an impact on policies in both academic and practice settings.

A Reflection

Learning to become a competent social care professional has always been a two part process – that which focuses on “classroom or lecture” teaching, and that which engages students in an apprenticeship with qualified professionals in real-life settings. Third level academic institutions depend upon practice settings for an apprenticeship education of their social care professional students. Practice education settings require competent professionals to deliver excellent levels of high quality care to individuals. Until recently, the delivery of health and social care professions education has been almost entirely discipline based, with each discipline educating their own students in isolation – whether on campus or in the community. Currently, there is an increasing emphasis on all health and social care professionals to learn how to be competent collaborators. This emerging shift in education has led to a new interest in different approaches to the delivery of health and social care professions education which embraces more opportunities for interactions amongst and between learners across disciplines.

Presently in the Irish context, there is limited research on professional supervision and practice education in social care. Additionally, there is no regulated framework or consistency of professional standards for placement educators in the social care profession. The professionalization of Social Care has changed the landscape for Social Care workers, educators and indeed service users in Ireland. Regulation of the Social Care profession is set to be implemented by the Health and Social Care Professional Council (CORU) in the next two years. CORU is Ireland's first multi-professional health regulator. It was set up under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. CORU sets out to identify the competence of the individual social care practitioner and sets standards of these competencies such as effective communication, personal and professional development, interpersonal and professional relationships.

Practice education placements for social care students have always been a highly valued and important component of their professional education (Baldry Currens & Coyle 2013, Gidman 2013). Practice education immerses students into real-life situations, providing practical, hands-on experience for skill developments, offers immediate application of knowledge and professional socialisation, qualities that enact theories of situated learning (Lave & Wenger

1991, Knowles et al. 2011) Through their own actions students come to realise the knowledge they need for future practice (Marshall & Cooper 2001). “The defining characteristic of work-based learning is that working and learning are coincident” (Boud 2001, p34).

Practice education settings are being recognised as ideal environments in which students can witness and practice how to work interprofessionally with other in multidisciplinary teams, that is, to learn about, with and from each other, for the purpose of collaboration to improve the quality of care (WHO 2010). It is now recognised that effective interprofessional education (IPE) requires active engagement of students from different professions using interactive learning methodologies to develop a professional student’s knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours and perceptions. IPE is a complex adult learning (andragogy) approach that is most effective when integrated throughout a programme of study moving from the basic to the more complex learning activities that bridge from post-secondary to practice education settings.

Practice education is understood to be a core component of any health or social care professional programme of studies that is devoted to applying the principles of a profession to professional practice, in the contemporary workplace. Practice education is organised and complements activities and programmes provided by communities in a number of formats e.g. disability, mental health, primary care. Practice education comprises both the placement of students in such agencies, and the education provided to those students by qualified practitioners or practice educators. The term Practice Education serves two purposes. Firstly, to encompass a variety of technologies used by health and social care disciplines to describe supervised learning experiences such as the most common “clinical practice” mainly used by nursing and allied health professions and “field experience”, used by social work. Secondly, practice education indicates that supervised learning in a practice environment is part of an educational continuum that extends from on-campus classrooms to a variety of practice settings.

The education of social care students relies upon practice settings for the delivery of a significant part of the education and training required for graduation. The role of practice settings in supporting this educational mandate, however is often not reflected in a country’s post secondary system – health and social care policies and procedures. It is clear that education of health and social care professionals is undertaken in an exceedingly complex and constantly changing environment. No matter what area or jurisdiction is asked in the social care sector, it is almost universally agreed that it is exceptionally difficult to provide students with adequate practice opportunities that are embedded into educational programmes through accreditation expectations. Financial constraints on social care and education alike have resulted in changes to programmes and staffing cutbacks which in turn has decreased the flexibility for social care and community organisations to effectively support education for practice. Meanwhile, major technological changes in both social care and education sectors are dramatically influencing the education process and contributing to growing pressures relating to the development of the social care workforce.

Staffing patterns have changed with fewer supervisory and management positions, increased flexibility in hours, temporary and part-time contracts and often less experienced staff. At an organisational level, these factors combine to decrease the ability and flexibility to effectively support students in practice education settings both for their professional training, and for interprofessional learning. It has become increasingly difficult to provide the breadth of practice education placements that are considered sufficient and appropriate to meet

competency requirements. Frequently, employers in the social care sector complain of students graduating as “practice ready” but not “job ready”.

From an educational perspective, changes in social care are requiring new skill sets and a different type of graduate, regardless of the discipline. Curricular changes to meet required new skills influence practice education; for example, through the need for diverse learning settings at earlier stages of a professional educational programme. These changes create increasing challenges and demands in the coordination of, and communication about, learning experiences provided under the rubric of practice education.

The literature relating to practice education highlights a number of themes including the benefits for students, organisations and practice educators / supervisors, supports required for effective practice education and the respective responsibilities of educational and social care organisations. The benefits are well known. For students, they include the exposure to everyday contemporary practice, the ability to apply theory into practice, increased competence and the strengthening of skills and self-confidence (Letizia & Jenrich 1998). The benefits perceived by practice educators include their own personal satisfaction from sharing knowledge and expertise, stimulation of their own personal growth, honour and recognition for their work, an abiding satisfaction from watching the student grow, and the opportunity to teach and improve their own teaching skills (Dibert & Goldenberg 1995, Ferguson 1996). The benefits for organisations are clear and include the new ideas and enthusiasm that students bring to an organisation, the ways in which student teaching enhances staff confidence, expertise and recruitment and the opportunities afforded to staff to undertake special projects of research with students.

Despite the identified benefits, there are a number of issues associated with practice education. These include, but are not limited to the fact that selection of practice educators is often made on the basis of which individuals in an agency are available to supervise a student or students, rather than by demonstrated adult learning skills; for example expertise, leadership, sound decision-making, communication, interest in professional growth, comprehensive knowledge base, organisational abilities, effective teaching skills and commitment to the role of practice educator (Letizia & Jenrich 1998). Practice educators are frequently given little or no preparation to take on the many roles required of them, including the complexities of appropriate and informed evaluation of their own teaching, and what students have learned (Letizia & Jenrich 1998). Many practice educators experience difficulties understanding the expectations of an academic programme or his/her role as an educator, particularly that of evaluator of student competencies. It has been frequently observed that practice expertise does not necessarily translate into supervisor skill (Keith 1993). Because of the different nature of classroom learning versus practice learning, there are frequently discrepancies between the goals of social care and educational institutions, and because of the intense nature of practice, burnout of practice educators is not recognised or clearly understood on the academic side, particularly when practice workloads are heavy and there is little or no recognition of the important role played by practice educators in social care education.

Clearly, the importance of coherently and congruently planned collaboration, and clear and frequent communication between and among educational programmes, agencies and practice educators cannot be over emphasised. As agencies move closer to interprofessional learning and practice, the roles of professional education and interprofessional education will need to be clearly placed in an appropriate context. It is supervisor burnout that has attracted the most

concern and a number of possible mechanisms have been suggested to recognise and support the important role played by practice educators /supervisors.

There are a number of approaches that could not only address the problem of supervisor burnout but which at the same time could facilitate and sustain appropriate practice education contexts.

Firstly, at senior management level, there must be a strong commitment of all stakeholders to collaborative practice, and to the shared goal of facilitating the highest level of practice education to ensure a competent workforce which is prepared for interprofessional collaborative practice and care. It must be recognised by social care and educational organisations that there is a collective responsibility and benefit to the provision of high quality practice education. Social care organisations need qualified and competent staff to meet human resources and service plans based on the needs of their clients. Higher education institutions have the responsibility to ensure the provision of a competent graduate. Efforts to ensure “practice ready” and “job ready” professionals are of benefit to all – the students /graduates, receiving social care, organisations, educational institutions and ultimately the clients and communities served.

Secondly, there must be recognition and support for practice educators, and established mechanisms to develop supportive relationships and open lines of clear communication. The literature identifies a number of opportunities for recognising additional workload responsibilities for practice educators. These include, but are not limited, the following; the use of financial awards; credit towards an educational degree; reduction in workload during periods of practice education placements, demonstration of value and appreciation through recognition events and written letters, formal recognition mechanisms; cross-appointment to the educational institution; development of clear role expectations; guidance and support in developing learning possibilities; appropriate and useful feedback on teaching; facilitation of research opportunities and consultation with the academic department; greater access to email and internet. In particular, ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) for practice educators is important, including: formal training in the principles and methods of evaluation; new learning related to both disciplinary areas of practice and emerging interprofessional teaching methods; access to reduced fees for CPD; agreement on leave for; and allowing a period of adaptation (e.g. 3 months) for staff introduced to a new area/unit, before being expected to supervise and support a student. CPD for practice educators lies at the core of learning enhancement. How we see ourselves as practice educators is just as important as the competence and insight that we develop over time. It is crucial that practice educators reflect on and update their practice, monitor and develop their own professional impact, and draw on evidence and research in order to inform their practice.

Thirdly, in order to maintain an effective and successful practice education programme, practice educators must have access to academic support in order that they have up to date information on changes within academic departments, and knowledge and understanding of the evaluation of the student performance, outside of practice education settings.

Lastly, given the many changes occurring in contemporary social care and education practice, there is an urgent need for partnership, coordination and communications between organisations. This includes better communication regarding curriculum change and development; a shared understanding of the academic and professional objectives of practice education; and a shared knowledge of how to manage difficulties and conflict in practice education settings. Practice education needs innovation models for interprofessional learning

programmes, based on the social care needs of the population, which would provide valuable insights into how professional knowledge and skills might be best employed to address social care workforce shortages.

Currently there is no universal database or inventory of practice education placements that is able to identify links between social care and educational institutions, the numbers and types of students placed and a large number of related demographic items of interest. Developing such data would provide an opportunity to better assess current practice education and evaluate opportunities for improving the coordination and appropriateness of these placements for interprofessional learning across Ireland.

In conclusion, practice education represents what Rittel & Webber (1973) have called a “wicked problem”. Wicked problems are “difficult or impossible to solve. Their solutions depend on incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognise. And they are confounded by complex interdependencies between actors and agents”. If ever there was a wicked problem, innovation in practice education is surely one. What could be more complex than relationships with higher education institutions, and the health and social care sector – and the professions? As interprofessional education advances and new expectations and responsibilities are placed on practice education, it will require acute attention to detail in the future.

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Discussion, Cooperation, Collaboration: The Impact of Task Structure on Student Interaction in a Web-based Translation Exercise Module¹

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Abstract.

A major challenge facing the online translation instructor is to design learning opportunities that encourage communication and the sharing of ideas between students. This article asks how such group interaction may be facilitated and evaluates, in particular the impact of task structure on student interaction in an online translation exercise module. Drawing on an empirical study carried out at Dublin City University during the academic year 2003/14, the article compares levels of intermessage referencing, the number and size of message clusters, and extent and type of cognitive presence evident in messages posted by students given three different types of task structure: those involving discussion groups, cooperative groups and collaborative groups. The article concludes that online interaction is most successful in discussion groups, followed in order of positive outcomes by cooperative groups and collaborative groups.

Keywords. Online learning, E-learning, Task structure, Discussion group, Cooperative group, Collaborative group, Cognitive presence, Intermassage reference analysis, Message cluster, Interaction, Translation training.

1. Introduction

Interaction may be considered a defining feature of all education (Garrison and Anderson 2003:41). Dewey described the educational experience as a “transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (1938:43). The learning ‘environment’ referred to by Dewey may include on the one hand human and non-human actors, e.g. other students and instructors, and on the other hand information and content. Thus learning occurs as a result of teacher-student, student-student and student-content interaction. However, central to the learning process are human interactions, what Palloff and Pratt refer to as “the interactions among students themselves, the interactions between faculty and students, and the collaboration in learning that results from these interactions” (2007:4).

The online environment may not initially appear to be an obvious medium for interaction between learners. When internet-based instruction first made its appearance on the educational stage in the late 1980s, it was viewed as an extension of distance learning, “characterized by a kind of electronic correspondence study” (Dirkx and Smith 2004:133) in which learners interacted with large volumes of printed material and, occasionally, with an instructor. Over time, **e-learning** came to be recognized as offering certain pedagogical advantages over its older, distance-learning relative: not only could the World Wide Web be used to store and deliver vast quantities of information by electronic means, but internet-enabled computer-mediated communication added “the most critical feature of the formal education process - interaction between and among teacher, students, and content” (Garrison and Anderson 2003:41). Yet despite the promise that e-learning might hold for translator training, little research has so far been published on the subject.

Against this background, this article sets out to explore how group interaction may be facilitated and evaluated in online translator training settings. Based on an empirical study

¹ A version of this paper was first published in *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* 2(2), 2008, 139-64

conducted at Dublin City University (DCU) in the academic year 2003/4, it looks in particular at the impact of task structure on online student interaction. The article begins with a review of relevant literature in the fields of computer-mediated communication, translation pedagogy, and group learning, and goes on to describe the study carried out at DCU. The article has a contribution to make on a number of fronts: it explores the implications of designing translation instruction for Web-based delivery, it adds to the literature on online group-learning structures, and it presents a model for instructors and researchers to investigate the quality of student interaction in an online translation classroom.

2. Review of the literature

2.1 Computer-mediated communication

In its broadest sense, **computer-mediated communication** (CMC) refers to any kind of text-based discourse in which messages are transmitted and received using computer technology. Some writers include video, audio and graphics in their definition of computer-mediated communication. However, the majority of widely-used virtual learning environments such as Moodle® and WebCT® continue to support primarily text-based communication, i.e. electronic mail, bulletin boards and computer conferencing. In many educational publications (e.g. Warschauer 1997), use of the term ‘CMC’ is restricted further to asynchronous (participation occurs with a time delay, as in email communication), text-based computer conferencing supporting communication that is many-to-many (all participants can post, read and respond to all postings). It is in this sense that the term ‘CMC’ is used in the present article.

The benefits of asynchronous text-based communication in the context of group activity and student interaction have been widely discussed in the research literature (see e.g. the online *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*) and may broadly be classified into two types. Firstly, asynchronous communication has *organisational* benefits. Group projects may be facilitated throughout the entire working week, several discussions may be supported simultaneously, and students may initiate conversation with each other and with the instructor at any time. Secondly, and more significantly, asynchronous communication may be said to benefit the *learning process*. Warschauer pinpoints the ability “to freeze a single frame and focus attention on it” as one of the great strengths of computer conferencing (1997:472), enabling participants to take time to reflect on and compose reactions to discussions and course material. Garrison and Anderson emphasize the learning advantages afforded by the interactive and reflective features of asynchronous communication: “the capability to precipitate private reflection as well as public discourse within a community of learners” (2003:23).

2.2 E-Learning and translator training

The literature on e-learning in the field of translator training is conspicuous in two respects. Firstly, there is a general paucity of research publications on the subject. No published textbook exists in the area, although a number of papers have appeared in journals (e.g. Reinke 1997, Gillespie 2000, Millán-Varela 2001, Folaron 2002, Massey 2005, Kenny 2006) and in a collection published by the Intercultural Studies Group at the University of Tarragona in Spain (Pym *et al.* 2003). Secondly, there is an absence of empirical investigation reporting and evaluating in a systematic way the experience of delivering translation programmes online. What literature does exist tends to be of a conceptual nature, focusing on design principles (e.g. Reinke 1997) and on providing a rationale for creating e-learning opportunities within translator education (e.g. Folaron 2002). In particular, the question of online interaction between course participants is barely addressed, and where it is,

no attempt is made to evaluate the quality of the group-learning experience. One early exception is Reinke (1997), who draws on Paulsen's (1995) distinction between four pedagogical techniques for computer-mediated communication (CMC), one-alone, one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many, and examines how Paulsen's pedagogical techniques may be used to support six teaching strategies identified by Nord (1996). However, while Reinke's article contains some useful instructional suggestions, his evaluation of the different strategies remains speculative in nature as the following statement illustrates:

Gegenüber einer traditionellen Face-to-Face-Lernsituation *könnte* die Online-Diskussion zu einer gleichmäßigeren Beteiligung aller Gruppenmitglieder führen, wenn der Einzelne in der Diskussion anonym bleiben kann. (Reinke 1997:149) [Compared to a traditional face-to-face learning situation, online discussion *could* lead to more equal participation by all group members if the individual can remain anonymous in the discussion; translation and italics mine.]

Other studies that touch on group-learning techniques in the online translation classroom include Gillespie (2000), Millán-Varela (2001) and O'Hagan and Ashworth (2002). Gillespie (2000) describes using computer conferencing to support one-to-one communication between students and tutors and between pairs of students, but in his study the full potential of computer conferencing to support group work is not investigated. Similarly, Millán-Varela (2001) discusses the implementation of an electronic mailing list for an online distance MA in Translation Studies but finds that students are reluctant to use it because of "lack of time and too much self-awareness" (2001:133). Finally, O'Hagan and Ashworth (2002) describe in brief a virtual translation course at the University of Hawaii in which students post assignments to a bulletin board for peer review and gain experience working in virtual teams on group translation tasks. On the basis of this experience, the authors list some of the benefits and drawbacks of using text-based, asynchronous communication to deliver Web-based translator training.

2.3 Student interaction in classroom-based translator education

In the context of face-to-face translator training, two main arguments are put forward in the literature for the integration of teamwork and group interaction into the instructional situation. The first may be termed the 'workplace argument'. This is based on the consideration that teamwork plays a pivotal role in the authentic translation workplace (Vienne 2000, MacKenzie and Vienne 2000, Nord 2005). Vienne, for example, argues that in their future professional lives, translators "will overwhelmingly have to work in co-operation with other translators" (2000:96). Notwithstanding the fact that the greater part of the actual translation task goes on in the individual translator's mind (Mossop 2001 :xv), professional translators must liaise with colleagues when translating different parts of a larger document or when translating the same source text into a number of target languages. This is illustrated by Kelly (2005:33), who identifies as key components of the interpersonal competence required of the professional translator the

ability to work with other professionals involved in [the] translation process (translators, revisors, documentary researchers, terminologists, project managers, layout specialists), and other actors (clients, initiators, authors, users, subject-area experts).

The second rationale for making student interaction a cornerstone of translation instruction may be termed the 'pedagogic argument'. This position is championed by Kiraly (2000, 2003), who argues that learners working in groups help one another to construct knowledge and to learn the skills required of the professional translator. Drawing on the vast body of

literature on social constructivism, he identifies as an essential feature of the social constructivist translation classroom a group-learning environment “including not only interaction among students but also the extensive involvement of the students in every aspect of the teaching/learning process” (Kiraly 2003:30). Group interaction enables students to develop, share and evaluate multiple perspectives by bringing their subjective viewpoints to the learning situation and testing these against the ideas and beliefs of the group. Disparate views are evaluated in order to arrive at an interpretation that is relevant and acceptable to the majority. In this way, meaning and knowledge are negotiated and constructed through interaction and discussion. The act of collective learning fulfils the dual goals identified by Kiraly: “meaning-making on the part of the group” and “the appropriation of cultural and professional knowledge on the part of each individual group member” (2000:36).

2.4 Instructional implications: how to structure group interaction

The two rationales for group learning in the translation classroom outlined above have important, and divergent, instructional implications. The ‘workplace’ argument suggests that students should interact in small groups to create a group translation, with each member assuming a different role – that of terminologist, translator, reviser, project manager – as this is what happens in the authentic translation workplace. Hence, Nord (2005:218) calls for the organization of group translation projects “where each student has the chance to play various roles: that of client, of reviser, of terminologist, of documentation assistant, of free-lancer, of in-house translator working for a translation company, etc.”. The ‘pedagogic’ argument implies a less structured approach and allows for the production of translations on an individual or group basis. Students work in parallel on the same tasks and provide both cognitive and emotional support to one another through dialogue and conversation. As Gonzalez Davies points out, there is room on the translation curriculum for both ‘real-life’ tasks “that imitate professional assignments, or take the professional world into the classroom” and pedagogic activities that “help to explore and practise the skills that will enable the students to perform according to professional standards later on” (2004:19).

In order to address the question of how group interaction in an online translation classroom may be structured, we need to turn to the literature on group learning in general and on Web-based group learning in particular. Graham and Misanchuk (2004) distinguish four types of learning structure. These are labelled: (1) independent or self-study; (2) discussion groups; (3) cooperative groups; and (4) collaborative groups. In order to make the distinction between the four learning structures clear, Graham and Misanchuk use the term **interdependence**, which they define as learners’ “dependence on each other to accomplish the learning goals” (ibid.:183). The level of interdependence present in each of the four learning structures is depicted in Figure 1 (from Graham and Misanchuk 2004:184), which displays the four types of learning structure on a scale from no interdependence to high interdependence.

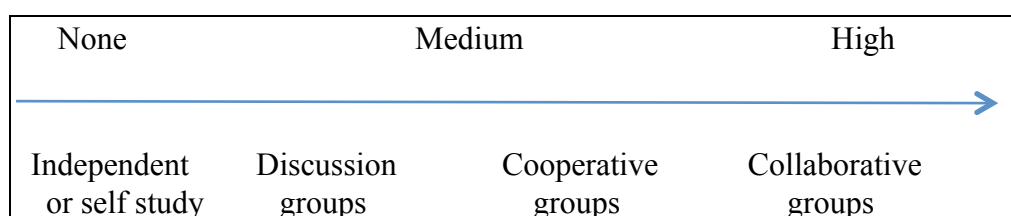


Figure 1. Level of interdependence in a learning environment

The low end of the spectrum shown in Figure 1 is typical of independent or self-study programmes where learners are dependent only on themselves (and perhaps a grader) to

achieve their learning goals. At the opposite end of the scale, Graham and Misanchuk place collaborative groups which “have a common purpose”, where “all group members contribute to all significant aspects of the group’s work” (ibid.:183) and where a group grade is issued for a common learning product. Instructional strategies involving medium levels of interdependence include discussion groups and cooperative groups. According to Graham and Misanchuk, discussion groups can involve a range of interdependence but “typically individuals are assessed on their individual insights and contribution” (ibid.:184), i.e. on an individual learning product. Finally, cooperative groups have a “‘divide and conquer’ mentality where the group divides the work into chunks that can be done independently, and then assigns the pieces to individual group members” (ibid.). Graham and Misanchuk argue that in cooperative groups, interdependence tends to occur mainly at the administrative level where decisions are made on matters relating to task division and allocation.

In what follows below, the three terms used by Graham and Misanchuk to denote group structures are adopted and applied to the online translation classroom. The term **discussion group** refers to a structure in which large groups of learners provide cognitive and emotional support to one another through conversation and dialogue while working simultaneously on the same task and engaged in the creation of individual learning products. The term **cooperative group** refers to a small group of learners engaged in the production of a group artefact where the work is divided into chunks carried out independently by group members, and the term **collaborative group** refers to a small group of learners engaged in the creation of a group product, where group members work synchronously and in parallel on all aspects of the task.

Before concluding this section, we should note that Kiraly expresses doubts as to the ability of computer-mediated communication to support the sharing of multiple perspectives and the joint construction of knowledge central to his approach. He argues that when interaction is ‘virtual’, i.e. mediated by computer, “many-to-many interaction is likely to give way to one-to-one communication, with pairs of students communicating via email or networked chatting functions” (2000:128). For this reason Kiraly cautions against the use of virtual groups and recommends that students be allowed to sit together and share knowledge in face-to-face dialogue. One of the aims of the present article is to put to the test Kiraly’s assertion that social constructivist learning requires physical interaction between group members.

3. Methodology

The rest of this article describes an empirical investigation into online translator training undertaken at Dublin City University during the academic year 2003/4. A case study approach was adopted with an emergent design and a primarily qualitative approach to data analysis.

3.1 Research questions

The main question of interest in the study may be formulated as follows: ‘What is the impact of task structure on the development of student interaction in an online translation exercise classroom?’. The study asked which of the three types of task structure identified in the literature (discussion groups, cooperative groups and collaborative groups) is most effective in promoting the acquisition of translation skills and knowledge by students interacting via text-based asynchronous computer conferencing in a virtual learning environment.

3.2 Research context

The research described here was carried out at Dublin City University (DCU) during the academic year 2003/4 in the context of the University’s Graduate Diploma/MA in Translation Studies. This is a one-year, full-time programme which aims to provide students with

advanced translator training and a postgraduate qualification in Translation Studies. The taught course (the Graduate Diploma) is delivered over 24 weeks, in two equal blocks spread over the first eight months of the year, and eligible students go on to write a Masters dissertation in the remaining four months. Programme objectives include practical training in the translation of a variety of specialized texts in addition to the development of a range of professional and linguistic skills appropriate to the translation profession.

In the first semester of the Graduate Diploma, students undertake a total of five modules. For the purpose of the present study, one of these was identified for conversion to Web-based delivery. This is a translation exercise class in German-English economic translation (module code 'GE502') which focuses on the German-to-English translation of three types of economic text: company reports, economic forecasts and documents relating to labour market policy, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF). As well as providing practical experience in the translation of specialized economics texts, the syllabus covers such issues as text type, source-text analysis, translation evaluation, and translation-related terminological and subject-area research.

The decision to use a translation exercise module for conversion to Web-based delivery was prompted by the belief that such classes constitute the heart of the translation curriculum. In the translation exercise class, the practical exercise of translating a source text into a target language is taken as a point of departure for the discussion of relevant theoretical concepts, research methods, terminology-management skills and translation strategies; see Nord (1996:3 13) for a discussion of the 'Übersetzungsübung', or translation exercise class, as the intersection between translation theory and translation practice. The decision to focus on a module of this kind was also motivated by the conviction that such classes are conducted on the principles of discussion and negotiation, and hence lend themselves to an investigation of online student interaction.

3.3 Research participants

Three groups of people participated in the Web-based translation exercise module: students, instructors and outside experts. Twenty students enrolled and 19 completed the module in its entirety. There was a mixture of English and German native speakers (12 English and 8 German), a predominance of female students (17 out of 20) and a majority in the under-25 age group. There were two instructors – the researcher and the researcher's supervisor – and for one week of the module, an outside expert was invited to join in the online discussions.

3.4 The Virtual Learning Environment at DCU

During the academic year 2003/4, WebCT® was the online learning platform in use at DCU. In common with other virtual learning environments (VLEs), WebCT® combines communication tools (email, conferencing, real-time chat, interactive whiteboard, group work area), with course content tools (interlinked course pages, Web resources) and course management tools (online quizzes and surveys, student tracking software, online grade book). The advantages of a virtual learning platform of this kind include ease of design and use, and the integration of all elements of the online course into a single environment.

Five WebCT® tools were used to construct the student version of the GE502 module website. These were: the *syllabus* tool containing a reading list, contact details for course instructors and information on course aims and outcomes; a *calendar* providing dates and times of course-related events; interlinked *course content* pages containing information about weekly tasks and assignments; two types of *asynchronous communication* tool, WebCT® Mail for one-to-one communication and discussion forums for many-to-many interaction

between course participants; and the *resources* tool in which links to module-relevant websites were provided.

In order to encourage online participation, students were required to make a minimum of two postings per week to the discussion forums, and 10% of the module grade was allocated on the basis of online activity and participation.

3.5 Task design

Participants in module GE502 were required to carry out a total of 22 online tasks excluding pre- and post-course surveys. One of the principles underlying the design of module GE502 was the idea of structured independence, i.e. that while profiting from the time and place independence afforded by the online medium, students should be required to work on the same task at the same time in order to benefit from interacting with one another. Tasks ranged in scope from brief responses to instructor postings to the production of target texts on an individual or group basis. The tasks were classified into one of four types: reflection tasks (e.g. translation diary), translation subtasks (e.g. glossary production), target-text production tasks and translation-related tasks (e.g. translation evaluation). These were implemented using a combination of independent study (5 tasks), whole-class discussion group (15 tasks) and small-group cooperative and collaborative structures (2 tasks).

3.6 Analytical techniques

Transcripts of online discussions generated by group-learning tasks were selected as the main data source, and a combination of numerical and qualitative techniques were used to analyze the transcripts.

NUMERICAL TECHNIQUES

Two numerical techniques derived from Levin *et al.* (1990) were used to identify levels of interaction in the discussion threads from module GE502.3 The first, **Intermessage Reference Analysis**, involves the classification of postings as either ‘referenced’ (i.e. they either refer to or are referenced by one or more other messages) or ‘unreferenced’ (i.e. they are independent of all other messages). Having categorized messages in this way, a calculation can be made of the percentage of intermessage references per conference. The second is the identification of **message clusters**, defined by the Levin *et al.* (ibid.) as groups of two or more intermessage references. The assumption here is that the more clusters a conference contains and the larger the size of these clusters, the more interactive the conference may be considered to be.

CONTENT ANALYSIS: COGNITIVE PRESENCE

According to Pena-Shaff and Nicholls, researchers must analyze “both the content of the messages and the patterns of interaction [if they wish] to learn whether computer conferencing can facilitate critical thinking and encourage the process of knowledge construction” (2004:244). Rourke and Anderson (2004:7) recommend that, where appropriate, a coding scheme used in previous research should be employed in the content analysis of conferencing transcripts. Following a search of the content analysis literature (e.g. Henri 1992, Gunawardena *et al.* 1997, Hara *et al.* 2000, Campos 2004, and PenaShaff and Nicholls 2004), the present researcher selected the ‘Community of Inquiry’ Model, and in particular the cognitive presence dimension of this model (Garrison *et al.* 2000, Garrison and Anderson 2003), as an appropriate tool with which to investigate the quality of student interaction in an educational context.

The most important dimension of the Community of inquiry Model is **cognitive presence**. This is defined by Garrison *et al.* (2001:11) as “the extent to which learners are able to

construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry”. Cognitive presence is regarded by the authors as an essential element of critical thinking, which is “a holistic, multi-phased process associated with a triggering event” (Garrison *et al.* 2000:98). Garrison *et al.* have developed a rubric to enable researchers and teachers to identify and categorize indicators of cognitive presence in computer conferencing transcripts; see Table 1, based on Garrison *et al.* (2001) and Garrison and Anderson (2003). In all, the authors identify four categories, which together comprise the cognitive presence dimension. These are hierarchical in nature, proceeding from lower to higher levels of critical thinking as follows: a **triggering** event or communication; **exploration** in search of information and knowledge; **integration** of information and knowledge; and **resolution** of the issue or problem.

Table 1. Cognitive presence rubric

Category	Descriptor	Indicators
Triggering	Evocative (inductive)	Puzzlement Recognising problem
Exploration	Inquisitive (divergent)	Brainstorming Divergence within online community Divergence within single message Information exchange Suggestions for consideration Leaps to conclusions
Integration	Tentative (convergent)	Convergence within group Convergence within message Connecting ideas, synthesis Creating Solutions
Resolution	Committed (deductive)	Vicarious application to real world Testing / defending solutions

When the researcher started to code transcripts from module GE502 using the cognitive presence rubric, two difficulties arose. The first related to the distinction between ‘integration’ and ‘resolution’. Only two postings matched the definition of ‘resolution’ as “‘vicarious application to real world’ or ‘testing/defending solutions’”. These related to a technical problem, and, according to the definition provided in the next paragraph, cannot be considered truly cognitive in nature. Hence, when the cognitive presence rubric was implemented in the investigation described here, only the first three levels – ‘triggering’, ‘exploration’ and ‘integration’ – were used. Example 1 below presents a short cognitive exchange from module GE502 starting with a triggering event, proceeding through two postings classified as ‘exploration’ and culminating in a message at ‘integration’ level.

A second difficulty related to the absence of any kind of cognitive presence in a considerable number of conference messages. Many contributions dealt rather with ‘non-cognitive’ or organizational matters such as planning and managing the learning task, seeking and providing technical support, engaging in social communication and posting short messages of agreement. Hence, in this study, the researcher found it necessary to draw a distinction between **cognitive postings** in which participants engaged directly with the learning material by questioning, brainstorming and proposing solutions related to the learning task, and ‘organizational’ or **non-cognitive postings**. This made it possible to calculate the extent to which discussions were on-task or off-task and coincidentally gave a reliable indication of the degree to which a true community of inquiry was being created online. Furthermore, analysis

of non-cognitive postings in conferences where such postings predominated helped to shed further light on the effect of task structure on levels and quality of student interaction (see section 4.2 and 4.3 below).

Example 1. Cognitive exchange

Message Content	Cognitive Category
Message no. 587: posted on Tue Nov 25, 2003 11:03 Subject: KMU? Maybe I've missed something, but can anyone tell me what KMU stands for? It's in part 2 a couple of times, I guess it stands for a particular group of people...	Triggering -Puzzlement
Message no. 596: [Branch from no. 587] posted on Tue Nov 25, 2003 12:36 Subject: re: KMU? hi XX, kmu stands for "kleine und mittlere unternehmen". The english abbreviation is SMB (small and medium-sized businesses).	Exploration - Brainstorming
Message no. 598: [Branch from no. 596] posted on Tue Nov 25, 2003 13:45 Subject: re: KMU? Or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?	Exploration - Divergence
Message no. 600: [Branch from no. 598] posted on Tue Nov 25, 2003 14:47 Subject: re: KMU? sorry for that one. i just checked it in google on irish websites, and SME seems too be much more common than SMB.	Integration – Connecting Ideas

3.7 Unit of analysis

Before concluding this section on research methodology, some words about the unit of analysis are appropriate. In content analysis, the process of 'unitizing' refers to the identification of segments of the transcript that will be categorized and coded. In the study, the entire message was used as the unit of analysis. The authors of the Community of Inquiry Model recommend treating the full message as the unit of analysis as message-level units are more clearly identifiable in a computer transcript than submessage thematic units. Where messages display evidence of more than one phase of cognitive presence, Garrison *et al.* (2001:9-10) recommend two heuristics, which were adopted in this study: coding down (i.e. to an earlier phase) if it is unclear which phase is reflected, and coding up (i.e. to a later phase) if evidence of multiple phases is present.

4. Data analysis

For the purpose of this article, four tasks involving whole-class discussion groups were selected for analysis. In addition, one pair task, in which groups adopted a predominantly collaborative structure, and one small-group task, in which the instructor imposed a cooperative structure, were selected for analysis. Taken together, the six tasks generated a total of 384 postings to discussion forums.

4.1 Discussion-Group Tasks

The four discussion-group tasks involved the production of a target text on an individual basis with the ability to discuss the assignment with all course participants in a public (whole-class) discussion forum. These target-text production activities were selected for description here because they proved to be the most successful of the 15 discussion-group tasks in terms of the evaluation instruments used in the study.

FINDINGS. NUMERICAL MEASUREMENTS

The analysis was undertaken in a number of steps. First of all, Levin *et al.*'s (1990) numerical techniques were applied to the 181 postings generated by the four activities. Figure 2 displays levels of intermessage references as a percentage of overall message numbers for each of the four discussion-group tasks, with measurements of between 89% and 100% intermessage references being recorded. (In Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5, and in Table 2, the numbers originally assigned to these tasks, i.e. #3, #12, #19 and #21, are re-used as labels.)

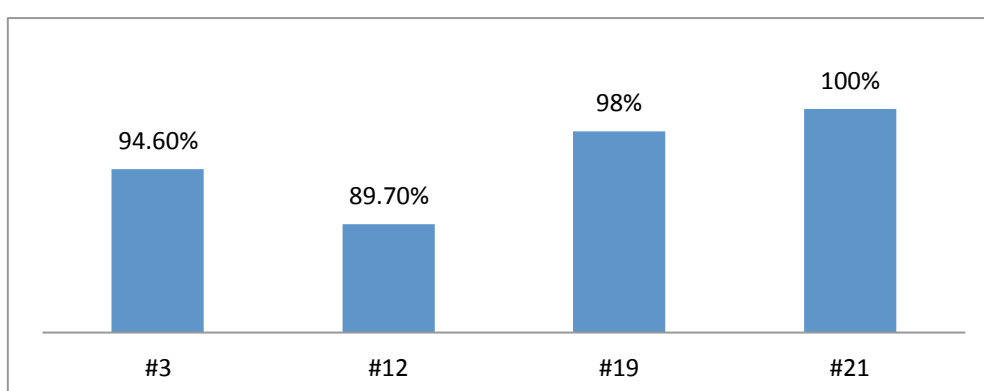


Figure 2. *Percentage of intermessage references per discussion-group task*

Further insight into levels of interaction was gained by examining message clusters, defined previously as groups of two or more intermessage references. Figure 3 shows the number of message clusters per discussion-group task with levels of between 8 and 21 message clusters being recorded.

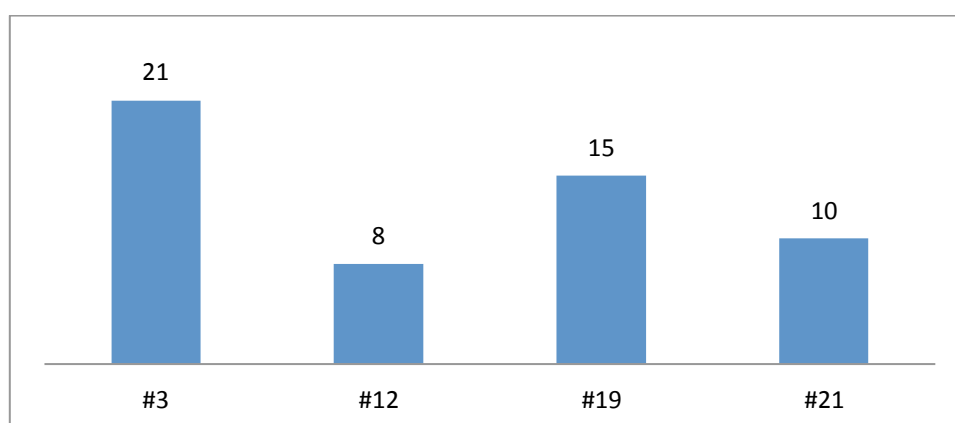


Figure 3. *Number of message clusters per discussion-group task*

As noted in Section 2.6 above, it is important to take the size of the cluster into account when using message clusters as a measurement of interaction levels. A cluster of two messages is usually an indication of an initiation-response sequence (Mercer 1995:38), and it may be assumed that a cluster of two intermessage references is less interactive than a cluster of three, four, five or more messages. Table 2 contains information about the size of message

clusters in the whole-class discussion-group conferences. This shows that the majority of clusters, or 37 out of 54, consist of three or more messages, suggesting high levels of interaction in the discussion-group tasks.

Table 2. Message cluster size. Discussion-group tasks

Task #	Number of clusters	2 msgs.	3 msgs.	4 msgs.	5 msgs.	> 5 msgs.
#3	21	7	5	4	2	3
#12	8	1	3	3	1	0
#19	15	5	5	2	2	1
#21	10	4	4	2	0	0
TOTAL	54	17	17	11	5	4

DISCUSSION-GROUP TASKS: CONTENT ANALYSIS – ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE PRESENCE

In this section, the results of two calculations are presented and discussed: the percentage of cognitive vs. non-cognitive postings per discussion-group task (Figure 4) and the percentage of cognitive postings allocated to each level of cognitive presence (‘triggering’, ‘exploration’ and ‘integration’, see Figure 5).

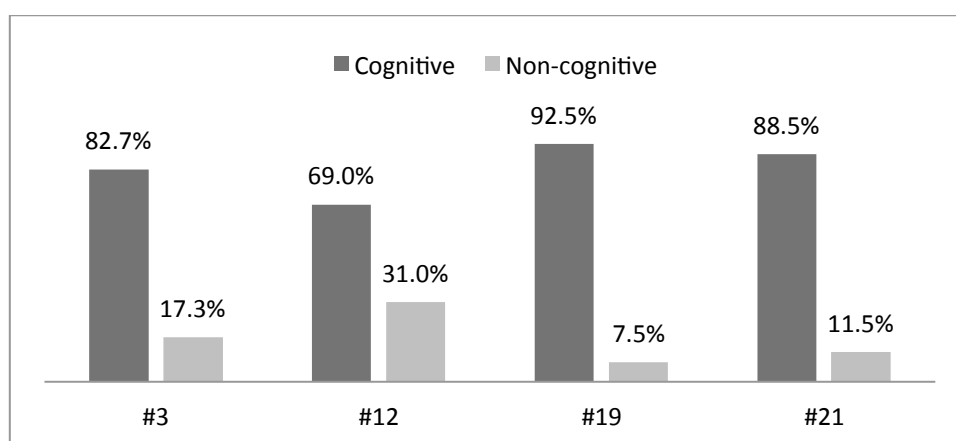


Figure 4. Cognitive/non-cognitive postings per discussion-group task

Figure 4 shows a clear predominance of cognitive messages in all of the discussion-group tasks. The predominance of cognitive postings shows that in their online discussions learners engaged directly with the learning material by questioning, brainstorming, and proposing solutions related to the learning task, rather than focusing on organizational or social matters.

As already indicated, a further step in the analysis of non-cognitive presence involved calculating percentages for the three phases of ‘triggering’, ‘exploration’ and ‘integration’ in those postings classified as ‘cognitive’. The results of this calculation are displayed in Figure 5. Figure 5 shows a predominance of postings at the higher levels of cognitive presence – exploration and integration. A common finding in the research literature is that much of the interaction in online discussions tends to be at the lower levels of cognitive presence, i.e. ‘triggering’ and ‘exploration’, and that “online discussions typically result in a trivialized (e.g. sharing, comparing, and agreeing) group conversation” (Kanuka and Garrison 2004:3). Clearly this was not the case with the discussion-group tasks in module GE502 where levels of ‘integration’ at between 27.4% and 40.5% were measured.

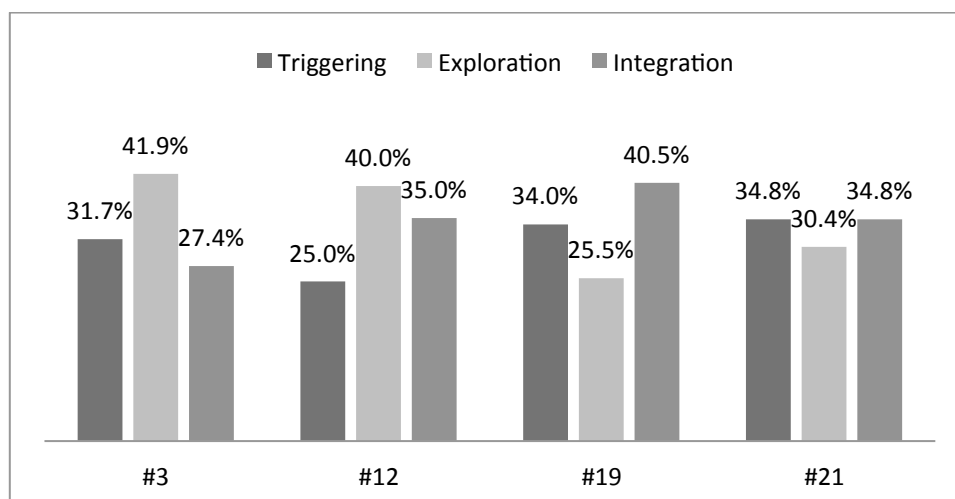


Figure 5. Cognitive presence categories per discussion-group task

4.2 Collaborative-group translation task

During weeks 3 and 4 of the semester, a collaborative-group translation task was implemented, with a certain amount of structure imposed by the module instructors. The group structure in this case was the learning dyad (or triad, see below). Harasim *et al.* recommend using learning dyads as an icebreaker in the early stages of a virtual course: “the teacher assigns each student to a student partner. . . , providing a peer in what is otherwise a new environment” (1996:129). Dyads are particularly valuable as an introduction to online teamwork, since working in pairs is logistically less complex than interacting in larger groups. In module GE502, for logistical reasons, seven groups of two students and two groups of three students were set up for the task. Each dyad or triad (for the sake of simplicity, we refer to both as ‘groups’ below) was provided with a private discussion forum in which to interact. A total of 52 messages were posted to the private discussion forums and these form the focus of analysis in what now follows.

Subtasks, to include the creation of a glossary, search for parallel texts, subject-area research, formulation of English-language text and proofreading, were identified by the instructors in advance, as were clear deadlines for each subtask. It was expected that students would work together in a collaborative structure on all aspects of the assignment and subtasks were thus not allocated by the instructors to individual students.

COLLABORATIVE-GROUP TRANSLATION TASK. NUMERICAL MEASUREMENTS

A calculation was made of the percentage of intermessage references per group conference and the results of this calculation are displayed in Figure 6. This shows a wide variation in levels from 100% (Groups A, C and H) to 0% intermessage references (Groups B, E, G and I). Closer analysis of the conference transcripts shows that Groups A and H, while recording 100% intermessage references, only posted 2 messages in total, a figure that is too low to allow for meaningful analysis. Three groups – B, E and G – made only one posting each which explains the absence of intermessage references in these groups. We may conclude that with the possible exception of Group C levels of interaction were low for the collaborative-group translation task, particularly if we compare these findings with the levels of between 89% and 100% measured across the whole-class discussion-group tasks (see Figure 2).

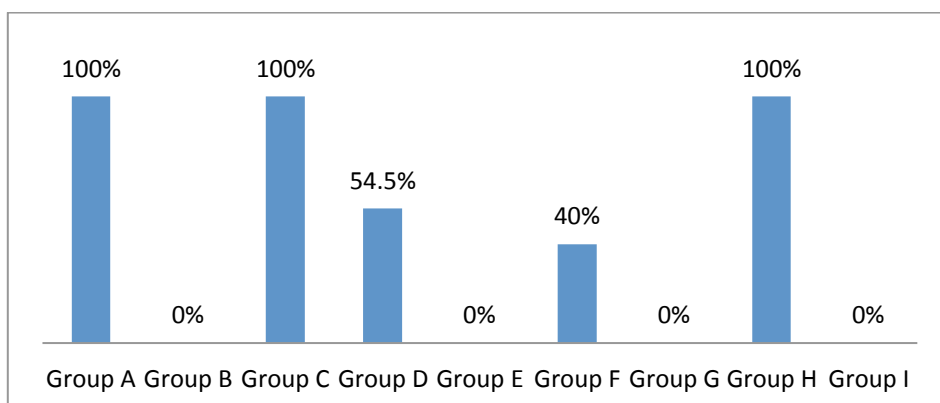


Figure 6. Collaborative translation task Percentage of intermessage references per group

Table 3 displays the number and size of message clusters found in the conference transcripts for the collaborative-group translation task. The overwhelming majority of 2-message clusters also compares negatively to the discussion group tasks where a predominance of clusters with three or more messages was found (see Table 2 above).

	Number of clusters	2 units	3 units	4 units	5 units	> 5 units
Group A	1	1	0	0	0	0
Group C	4	2	1	0	0	1
Group D	3	3	0	0	0	0
Group F	3	3	0	0	0	0
Group H	1	1	10	10	10	0
TOTAL	12	110	11	10	10	

Table 3. Collaborative-group translation task. Cluster size

COLLABORATIVE-GROUP TRANSLATION TASK. CONTENT ANALYSIS: COGNITIVE PRESENCE

When the 52 messages to the small-group conferences were categorized on the basis of the cognitive/non-cognitive distinction, only one was classified as 'cognitive'. This outcome (98% 'non-cognitive' postings) suggests that the collaborative-group translation task did not lead to the creation of a properly functioning online community of inquiry characterized by higher-order learning amongst participants. At 2% cognitive postings, this is also the most important difference to emerge thus far between the collaborative-group translation task and the whole-class discussion-group tasks analyzed in Section 4.1 above.

The 51 'non-cognitive' messages were classified as belonging to one of four categories that emerged in a grounded theory approach to the analysis of these postings: 'file sharing', 'deadlines', 'roles' and 'offline meetings'. The largest category here, at 48%, was 'file sharing', suggesting that groups used their discussion spaces principally to post glossaries, parallel texts and translations to one another, while 'deadlines' accounted for only four postings or 7.8%. The second most prominent category was 'discussion of roles' (27.6%) where students negotiated the division of labour between them. Analysis of these postings shows that seven of the nine small groups adopted the same method of task completion (it is not clear from their conference areas how the remaining two groups allocated tasks). While the instructor had intended this to be a fully collaborative task, the groups took a two-stage approach consisting of a cooperative phase in which members divided the source text in half for terminological research and translation on an individual basis (Group I with three

members divided the source text into three parts), followed by a collaborative stage in which groups pooled their results and compiled the final translation in a joint effort involving all members.

There were nine references to ‘offline meetings’ across the 51 postings. This, as well as the low message count and the absence of cognitive presence in many of the conferences, allows us to conclude that groups chose to meet in person instead of conducting their business online. Analysis of the content of student postings showed that as long as group members were working in a cooperative structure on subsections of the larger task, interaction (albeit mainly of a non-cognitive nature) took place online. However, when it came to finalizing the learning product, groups found it necessary to communicate and meet offline. This replicates research by Bennett (2004) whose study of online project teams found that “towards the end of the production, some teams found they needed to meet and work on the project together” (2004:17). According to Bennett, students found it necessary to meet face-to-face in order to provide “critical support during the production phase” (ibid.).

The fact that only the cooperative stage was conducted online accounts for the overwhelming predominance of non-cognitive postings to the small-group conferences for this task. While cooperative groups are high on interdependence (see Graham and Misanchuk 2004:183 and Section 2.4 above), the fact that each student was working alone on one half of the translation meant that there was little need or capacity to share information arising directly from the learning task, and where group discussion occurred it focused on management aspects of the task at hand (see Section 4.3 below for more on cooperative groups).

We may conclude our evaluation of the collaborative translation task by stating that postings were predominantly of a non-cognitive nature, with discussion threads being used primarily to arrange offline meetings, share files and discuss task division. When it came to cognitive interaction, and in particular to the discussion and negotiation of final translation solutions in the collaborative phase, the groups preferred to meet in person rather than conducting such discussions online.

4.3 Cooperative-group evaluation task

Towards the end of the semester, a group evaluation exercise was implemented with a cooperative structure and allocation of individual roles. For the purpose of the activity, the class was divided into five groups of three and two groups of two students. Each group contained at least one native speaker of English and at least one native speaker of German, and private conferences, to which the two instructors had access, were set up to enable groups to share files and discuss the assignment. At the beginning of the task, three translated texts were posted to each group’s private conference (groups consisting of two members received two texts). These translations had been produced by course participants during the previous week, and translators’ names and other identifying features had been removed. The group task involved the compilation of an evaluation report for each of the three translations according to the following criteria: good translation decisions; poor translation decisions; and the extent to which the translation was an appropriate target-language text.

Groups were asked to discuss in their private conference areas strengths and weaknesses of the translations. Following this, each student was required to compile an evaluation report for one text, ensuring that the comments posted by other members of his or her group were reflected in the report. While this task had a cooperative structure with roles and responsibilities assigned to individual students, the principle of intra-group discussion was also emphasized by requiring students to evaluate the merits and limitations of the translated texts in the private conference areas prior to compiling reports.

COOPERATIVE-GROUP EVALUATION TASK. NUMERICAL MEASUREMENTS

When the 151 messages posted to the seven group conferences were analyzed in order to identify referenced and unreferenced messages, the results displayed in Figure 7 emerged:

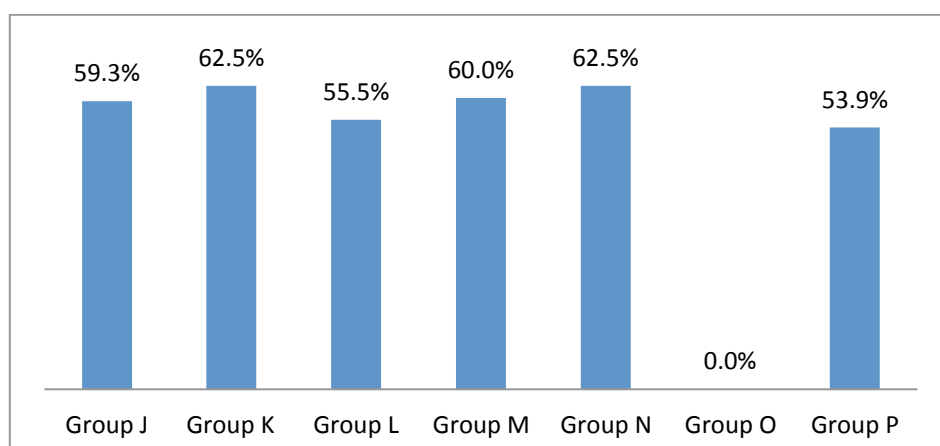


Figure 7. Cooperative group evaluation task. Percentage of intermessage references per group

Figure 7 shows that referenced messages predominated in the small-group conferences, with the exception of Group O. While this compares favourably to the collaborative task analyzed in Section 4.2 above (see Figure 6), the number of referenced messages is relatively low when compared to the whole-class discussion-group tasks discussed in Section 4. 1, where intermessage references of between 89.7% and 100% were recorded (see Figure 2).

Table 4 displays the number of clusters and the size of the clusters per cooperative-group conference. It shows a total of 27 clusters with a majority (17) containing three or more postings. These results suggest that this task was more interactive than the collaborative translation task and that levels of interaction were comparable to those measured for the discussion-group tasks (see Tables 2 and 3, respectively).

Table 4. Cooperative-group evaluation task. Cluster size

Group	Number of clusters	2 units	3 units	4 units	5 units	> 5 units
Group J	4	0	1	2	1	0
Group K	5	2	1	1	1	0
Group L	4	2	2	10	0	0
Group M	5	2	1	2	0	0
Group N	4	2	2	0	0	0
Group O	0	0	0	0	0	0
Group P	5	2	12	1	0	0
TOTAL	27	10	19	16	2	0

COOPERATIVE-GROUP EVALUATION TASK. CONTENT ANALYSIS: COGNITIVE PRESENCE

Of the 151 postings, 54 (35.8%) were coded as ‘cognitive’ and 97 (64.2%) as ‘non-cognitive’. At 35.8%, cognitive presence across the seven group conferences was higher than for the collaborative translation task, but much lower than for the whole-class discussion-group tasks.

A breakdown of cognitive postings to the small-group conferences using Garrison *et al.*'s (2001) hierarchical model of cognitive presence yielded the following results: 11% 'triggering', 46.3% 'exploration' and 42.6% 'integration'. What is striking about these figures is the high values attributed to both 'exploration' and 'integration'. In this respect, this task compares favourably to the discussion-group tasks, while also yielding much more positive results than the collaborative translation task where, it will be recalled, only one posting (a triggering event) was classified as cognitive. However, given that only 35.8% of all messages for the cooperative evaluation task were classified as cognitive (see last paragraph), it seems that by and large groups focused in their discussions on administrative aspects of the task.

The 97 messages classified as non-cognitive were coded using the four categories employed in the evaluation of similar postings in Section 4.2 above: 'file sharing', 'deadlines', 'roles' and 'offline meetings'. As before, the largest category of 'non-cognitive' messages was 'file sharing' – 54 instances out of a total of 97, equating to 55.7%. Likewise, the smallest category was 'deadlines' accounting for only three postings out of 151. In contrast to the collaborative translation task, however, there were only four references to offline meetings – all from the same student who wanted to confirm that the group would not, in fact, meet face-to-face. We may conclude from this and from the content of student postings that in the cooperative structure, all small-group activity took place online. This suggests that, where a joint product is required from a student group communicating via asynchronous text-based discussion conferences, the allocation of responsibility for subdivisions of the task to individual students in a cooperative-learning structure enables all group interaction to occur online without recourse to offline meetings.

The second largest non-cognitive category in the cooperative evaluation task was the 'discussion of roles' (25 instances or 25.7%). Most of the communication in this category related to clarification of roles, i.e. to how exactly the different group members should contribute to the final product. Groups J, K and L decided that the student responsible for compiling a particular evaluation report would also take responsibility for initiating discussion on that topic by posting his or her initial impressions of the text to be evaluated. This procedure meant that students initiated and led discussion of 'their' texts and summarized the group's comments when compiling the evaluation report. Groups adopting this procedure (J, K and L) also recorded the highest levels of cognitive presence with a majority of messages to their conference areas classified as 'integration' (50%, 100% and 55% for groups J, K and L respectively). From this we may conclude that groups which scored highest in terms of cognitive presence in the conference transcripts were those in which students took individual ownership of evaluation reports from an early stage by initiating and steering discussions of that text.

We may conclude our discussion of the cooperative evaluation task by stating that in contrast to the collaborative-group translation task, all small-group activity occurred online. Thus a cooperative structure was more effective in this case than a collaborative structure in enabling a joint project to be created using asynchronous text-based communication. However, while the amount of cognitive interaction was greater in the cooperative evaluation task than in the collaborative translation task, it was considerably lower than in the whole-class discussion groups discussed in Section 4.1. This supports Graham and Misanchuk's contention that "collaboration in cooperative groups tends to occur primarily in the administrative aspects of the group such as deciding how to divide and assign work among group members" (2004:184) and also underlines Damon and Phelps' argument that cooperative groups may be high on interdependence, i.e. the extent to which they depend on each other to complete the task, but they are low on mutuality, i.e. the extent to which they are truly connected with one

another and participating in discourse which is “extensive, intimate, and connected” (1989:10).

5. Conclusions

We have seen in this article that contrary to Kiraly’s contention, social constructivist learning can occur successfully when students are working at a distance from one another and connected via a computer network. However, the type of task structure will have an impact on learners’ ability to complete work using asynchronous conferencing tools and to engage in dialogue that is focused on learning rather than administrative issues. Kiraly’s assertion, that groups of students need to meet physically and “discuss their work in face-to-face dialogue” (2000:128) applied only in the case of collaborative small-group tasks where whole-group consensus on the final product was required. Discussion groups and cooperative groups, on the other hand, have been shown to successfully conduct their business online without the need to meet in person, with the former also displaying high levels of interaction, mutuality and cognitive activity. The following conclusions may be drawn in relation to the three task structures identified Section 1 of the article.

Discussion groups: On the measurements of group interaction used in this study, the discussion groups scored highest: there were considerably higher proportions of cognitive vs. non-cognitive postings, there was a greater percentage of cognitive messages at the integration level and there were more intermessage references. Furthermore, where a discussion-group structure was implemented, learning-focused discussion took place online and there was no need for students to communicate synchronously. The success of the discussion-group structure may be explained in reference to a study of online group learning by Dirkx and Smith (2004), who found that while online students welcome the opportunity to “share their perceptions and experiences, to be listened to and heard by others” (ibid.:140), what they want ultimately is individual responsibility and personal accountability for their own learning.

Collaborative groups: When small groups of students attempted to implement a collaborative structure, with all members discussing and negotiating all aspects of the joint task, online communication failed and groups sought to meet or communicate offline. This appears to be due to the difficulty of reaching consensus online – particularly where asynchronous text-based discussion is the only channel of communication between group members. This points to the need for synchronous communication – be it real-time chat, telephone or face-to-face meetings – where the joint creation of a group project using a collaborative procedure is required.

Cooperative groups: Our analysis has shown that a cooperative structure, with strict imposition of roles by the course instructor, enhances the ability of groups to complete a joint project online using text-based asynchronous communication. However, instructors and designers should be aware that the allocation of individual responsibility for subdivisions of a larger task in a cooperative approach to group interaction, while increasing the efficiency of the group process, may jeopardize mutuality and the joint construction of knowledge, as students will complete their subsections without the need or benefit of peer interaction. In such a scenario, the instructor needs to stress the importance of intragroup discussion and encourage mutual discovery and sharing of perspectives.

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The Social Pillar of Sustainable Development

A literature review and framework for policy analysis

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Abstract

There is a need to develop a clearer understanding of what the social pillar of sustainable development means and how it relates to the environmental pillar. This article contributes to this process by presenting a conceptual framework that identifies four overarching social concepts and links them to environmental imperatives. These concepts are: public awareness, equity, participation, and social cohesion. The framework builds on concepts and policy objectives outlined in research on international sustainable development indicators and the social sustainability literature. The social pillar can be expanded to include environmental, international, and intergenerational dimensions. This framework can then be used to examine how states and organizations understand the social pillar and its environmental links.

Introduction

While the concept of sustainable development (SD) generally refers to achieving a balance among the environmental, economic, and social pillars of sustainability, the meaning and associated objectives of the social pillar remain vague (Dempsey et al. 2011; Casula Vifell & Soneryd, 2012). Indeed, it has been described as the most conceptually elusive pillar in SD discourse (Thin, 2002). Moreover, the social dimensions of sustainability have not received the same treatment as the other two pillars (Cuthill, 2009; Vavik & Keitsch, 2010) and there are various interpretations regarding what issues should be addressed (Dixon & Colantonio, 2008). The selection of social measures in sustainable development indicator sets (SDIs) is often a function of power rather than policy coherence, as influential groups are more likely to have their concerns included (Littig & Griessler, 2005). These indicators reflect different sociocultural priorities (Omann & Spangenberg, 2002) and as such are often picked for political rather than scientific reasons (Fahey, 1995). For example, preferences for neoliberalism or the European social model will result in different social objectives (Colantonio, 2007).

These ambiguities suggest that a greater understanding of the social pillar of SD is desirable. The literature also indicates that it is necessary to develop greater linkage between the social and environmental pillars (Dobson, 2003b; Littig & Griessler, 2005; Gough et al. 2008). This article contributes to establishing such connections by presenting a conceptual framework for understanding the social pillar and outlining its environmental implications. A review of eight bodies of literature related to SD suggests four pre-eminent policy concepts (Figure 1).

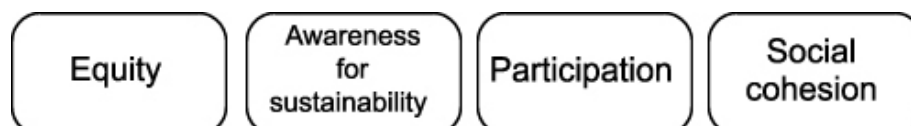


Figure 1: Four Pre-eminent Concepts of the Social Pillar.

While the literature highlights the relatively limited treatment afforded to the social pillar, some work has been done. In particular, SDIs and the social sustainability literature present

us with policy concepts and objectives specifically identified as “social” and represent a significant contribution to how the social pillar is conceived. However, I argue that establishing clearer links with the environmental pillar will further enhance this concept, an argument rooted in an understanding of SD as a concept requiring interpillar linkages. In this respect, the links between the social and environmental pillars are particularly underdeveloped. It is therefore useful to expand the parameters of the social pillar by connecting it empirically to environmental imperatives. Furthermore, while existing approaches tend to present the social pillar in terms of national welfare objectives for current generations, it is useful to broaden the understanding of the social to incorporate international and intergenerational dimensions. In so doing, a policy framework emerges that provides the basis for an alternative set of social indicators to those specified in international SDIs or implied in the social sustainability literature. This approach constitutes a set of policy objectives that have clear social *and* environmental dimensions. The framework may be employed to conduct an empirical analysis of how different states and organizations understand the social pillar and to what extent they develop social/environmental links.

This article is divided into two parts. The first part describes the origins of the proposed framework, explaining the identification of eight key types of SD-related literature that discuss social concepts and policy objectives (Table 1). I then explore how debates to date have presented “the social” in SD. Drawing on key United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU) SD policy documents and environmental policy integration (EPI) literature, the argument then moves to a justification for linking social and environmental imperatives.

The second part of this article presents the four policy concepts at the heart of the framework, which are linked to thirteen policy objectives that address social and environmental concerns simultaneously. These conceptual categories and policy objectives constitute the proposed approach for understanding the social pillar of SD and for providing the basis to develop an alternative set of social indicators. It is important to note that while some of the social policy objectives outlined in the framework may have global application, others are likely only appropriately applied in a global northern context. For example, some objectives refer to a redistribution of resources from North to South, while others refer to reductions in consumption, which is relevant to affluent societies only. Therefore, the framework should be understood primarily in a northern context (with the North/South dichotomy understood in terms of rich and relatively poor countries).

Constructing a Social Pillar

The proposed framework is built from social concepts and policy objectives derived from the literature described in Table 1. This literature was reviewed to explore how the “social” in SD debates is variously understood and, as such, it provides the basis upon which a social pillar of SD is constructed. While this is not an exhaustive record of all documents reviewed, it identifies primary texts in each branch of literature.

Table 1: Literature that provides the building blocks of a social pillar of sustainable development.

1. Key United Nations Sustainable Development Policy Documents	United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) (1972)	<i>Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment</i>
	International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (1980)	<i>World Conservation Strategy</i>
	World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987)	<i>Our Common Future</i>
	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (1992)	<i>Documents from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development</i>
	World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (2002)	<i>Documents from the World Summit on Sustainable Development</i>
	United Nations Economic, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2004)	<i>United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) Framework for the International Implementation Scheme</i>
2. Key European Sustainable Development Policy Documents	European Sustainable Cities and Towns Charter (ESCTC) (1994)	<i>Aalborg Charter</i>
	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (1998)	<i>Aarhus Convention</i>
	Commission of European Communities (CEC) (2001)	<i>A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development</i>
	Office of the [UK] Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2005)	<i>Bristol Accord</i>
	Council of the European Union (CEU) (2006)	<i>Renewed European Union Sustainable Development Strategy</i>
	Commission of European Communities (CEC) (2009)	<i>Mainstreaming Sustainable Development in EU Policies: 2009 Review of the European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development</i>
3. Key Multilateral Sustainable Development Indicators Documents	United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD) (1998)	<i>Indicators of Sustainable Development, Framework and Methodology</i>
	United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA) (2001)	<i>Indicators of Sustainable Development: Framework and Methodologies</i>
	Commission of European Communities (CEC) (2004)	<i>EU Member State Experiences with Sustainable Development Indicators</i>
	United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA) (2007)	<i>Indicators of Sustainable Development: Guidelines and Methodologies</i>
	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2008b)	<i>Measuring Sustainable Development: Report on the Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development</i>
	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2009)	<i>Society at a Glance 2009–OECD Social Indicators</i>
	Eurostat (2005)	<i>Measuring Progress Towards a More Sustainable Europe: Sustainable Development Indicators in the European Union</i>
	Eurostat (2007)	<i>Measuring Progress Towards a More Sustainable Europe: 2007 Monitoring Report of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy</i>
4. Social Sustainability Literature	George & Wilding (1999); Barton (2000); Barron & Guantlet (2002); Goodland (2002); Omman & Spangenberg (2002); Thin (2002); Thin et al. (2002); Littig & Griessler (2005); Bramley et al. (2006); Turkington & Sangster (2006); Colantonio (2007); Munasinghe (2007); Spangenberg (2007); Chan & Lee (2008); Dixon & Colantonio (2008); Bramley & Power (2009); Cuthill (2009); Vavik & Keitsch (2010); Dempsey et al. (2011); Casula Vifell & Soneryd (2012)	
5. Green Social Policy Literature	Irvine & Ponton (1988); Cahill (1991); Ferris (1993); George & Wilding (1994); Barry (1998); Fitzpatrick (1998); Huby (1998); Trainer (1998); Cahill (2001); Fitzpatrick & Cahill (2002); Humphrey (2002); Dean (2001); Dryzek (2005; 2008); Dobson (2003b); Meadowcroft (2005; 2008); Gough et al. (2008); Carnegie UK (2009); Davies (2009)	
6. Environmental Justice Literature	Barry (1993; 1999); Hofrichter (1993); Beckerman (1995; 1999); Bryant (1995); Harvey (1996); Faber (1998); Bullard (1999; 2000); Miller (1999); Norton (1999); Wissenburg (1999); Fitzpatrick (2001); Dobson (2003a; 2007); Faber & McCarthy (2003); Agyeman & Evans (2004); Davies (2006); Gardiner (2006); Karlsson (2009); Singer (2006); Tremmel (2006); Rees (2008)	
7. Ecological Modernization Literature	Hajer (1995); Christoff (1996); Mol (1999; 2000); Frijns et al. (2000); Mol & Spaargaren (2002; 2004); Spaargaren (2000; 2003; 2006); Spaargaren & van Vliet (2000); Spaargaren & Mol (2008)	
8. Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) Literature	Collier (1997); Lenschow (1997; 2002); Liberatore (1997); Lafferty (2002); Lafferty & Hovden (2003); Jordan et al. (2003); Persson (2004); Baker (2007); Jordan (2008); Jordan & Lenschow (2008); Nilsson et al. (2009)	

Section 1 of Table 1 refers to key UN policy statements regarding the meaning of SD and its associated policy objectives. These documents enjoy a particularly authoritative status within SD discourse. Section 2 summarizes key European policy statements on SD. These are particularly useful as they give a global northern perspective on the social goals of SD, which may be contrasted with the global view taken by the UN.¹ Section 3 identifies important multilateral SDI sets that specifically allude to social concerns and how progress in these policy areas might be measured. Section 4 highlights literature that specifically focuses on the

social aspects of SD. Section 5 draws on texts from the social policy literature that specifically seek to establish relationships between welfare issues and environmental concerns. Section 6 underscores significant work from the environmental justice literature, which highlights the disproportionate burden faced by low income or vulnerable groups regarding the distribution of environmental risks (or “bads”). Both intergenerational and intragenerational equity perspectives are subsumed under this category. Section 7 refers to central texts in the ecological modernization literature. While some commentators argue that ecological modernization theory (EMT) should not be considered part of SD discourse (e.g., Langhelle, 2000), the more prevalent view is that it is an expression of “weak” sustainability, as Baker et al. (1997) describe.² The EMT work has become an extremely influential conceptual approach in environmental sociology, and while some scholars (e.g., Dean, 2001) argue that it does not address social issues, a careful and systematic review of the relevant literature reveals that authors writing from an EMT perspective have actually considered important social concepts such as equity, awareness for sustainability, and participation. Section 8 refers to salient research in the EPI literature, which is focused on enhancing the compatibility of sectoral policy objectives with environmental objectives.

These eight bodies of literature provide the foundations of the conception of the “social pillar” outlined in this article. They were selected on the basis that they fulfill one or more of the following criteria: they are influential texts in SD discourse; they discuss the social objectives of SD; and they examine the relationships between social and environmental policy.

What is Social?

Identifying a social pillar presents certain challenges. A myriad of different meanings are attached to the term “social.” The *Oxford Concise English Dictionary* presents seven definitions referring to both nouns and adjectives. Littig & Greissler (2005) note that the term has both “analytical” and “normative” meanings. There are also difficulties regarding the identification of “purely” social issues, as considerable overlaps exist across SD’s three pillars. This overlap is particularly pronounced with respect to the economic and social pillars (Thin, 2002), with many issues, most notably employment and unemployment, deemed relevant to both dimensions (OECD, 2009). Despite these circumstances, the literature points to certain policy concerns that have been identified as “social” within the overall SD framework. These have been variously described as social categories (UNCSD, 1996); social themes (UNDESA, 2001); social dimensions (OECD, 2009; Dempsey et al. 2011; Casula Vifell & Soneryd 2012); social indicators (UNCSD, 1996; UNDESA, 2001); and the social realm (Chan & Lee, 2008). Furthermore, the concepts of social sustainability (Goodland, 2002; Turkington & Sangster, 2006; Chan & Lee, 2008) and social SD (Vavik & Keitsch, 2010) have been discussed.

The policy objectives emanating from this literature are broadly similar and form the basis of what might be understood by the notion of “social” in the context of SD. These classifications are primarily derived from SDI sets and the social sustainability literature.³ Various “social pillars” emerging from these literatures are outlined in Tables 2 and 3 and discussed in tandem below.⁴

Table 2: Social classifications and objectives in social indicator sets.

Author	Social Classification
UN Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD, 1996)	Social "Categories"
	Combating poverty
	Sustainable demographic dynamics
	Protecting human health
	Promoting human settlement
UN Commission for Sustainable Development (UNDESA, 2001)	Promoting education, public awareness, and training
	Social "Themes"
	Equity
	Health
	Education
UN Commission for Sustainable Development (UNDESA, 2007)	Housing
	Security (combating crime)
	Population
	"Themes"²
	Poverty
EU Sustainable Development Indicators (Eurostat, 2007)	Governance
	Health
	Education
	Demographics
	"Themes"²
OECD Social Indicators (OECD, 2009)	Social inclusion
	Public health
	Demography
	Good governance
	Social "Organizing Dimension"
	Economic self-sufficiency
	Equity
	Health
	Social cohesion

Table 3: Social policy concepts and objectives from the social sustainability literature.

Author	Social Classification	Description of Policy Objective
Littig & Griessler (2005) "Social dimensions of sustainability"	<i>Basic Needs and Quality of Life</i>	Satisfaction of basic material needs and self-fulfillment
	<i>Social Justice</i>	Equality of opportunity
	<i>Social Coherence</i>	Harmony among different social groups
Chan & Lee (2008) "Factors of social sustainability"	<i>Social Infrastructure</i>	Physical infrastructure which delivers locally based services and opportunities for social interaction
	<i>Availability of Job Opportunities</i>	Employment
	<i>Accessibility</i>	Engaging in essential work and leisure activities should not entail too much travel
	<i>Townscape Design</i>	Townscape design that is aesthetically pleasing, functional, and promotes social interaction
	<i>Preservation of Local Characteristics</i>	Conserving physical and social/community characteristics particular to the locality
Cuthill (2009) "Key factors of social sustainability"	<i>Ability to Fulfill Psychological Needs</i>	Fulfilling the need to feel secure and participate in neighborhood design
	<i>Social Capital</i>	Promoting social networks and a sense of social responsibility
	<i>Social Infrastructure</i>	Providing facilities which address need and capacity for participation
	<i>Social Justice + Equity</i>	Providing equitable access to essential welfare services and employment, especially for vulnerable groups
Dempsey et al. (2011) "Dimensions of social sustainability"	<i>Engaged Governance</i>	Promoting bottom-up, participatory democracy
	<i>Social Equity</i>	Reducing inequality in life chances by ensuring local access to key services
	<i>Sustainability of Community</i>	Encouraging social interaction/social networks in the community
		Encouraging participation in collective groups in the community
		Engendering a sense of pride in the local place
Vavik & Keitsch (2010) "Three goals of social sustainable development"		Ensuring safety and security
	<i>Poverty</i>	Promoting "inclusion" by providing basic needs
	<i>Illiteracy</i>	Promoting access to education
	<i>Access</i>	Promoting access to participation in decision making

Table 2 identifies social classifications in SDIs and Table 3 includes both classifications and examples of social policy objectives. Similar policy concerns feature in UN and EU SD literatures. They are also prominent in the other literatures outlined in Table 1, albeit to varying degrees. The purpose of Tables 2 and 3 is to give a general flavor of the kinds of social concepts and policy objectives included in various discussions of the social pillar. These tables do not set up a detailed discussion on classifications or policy objectives. The authors already provide a fully comprehensive and detailed exposition of the conceptual and policy contours of these social dimensions and there is little need to revisit this work. On one hand, this literature, and the level of consensus regarding policy objectives that it suggests, implies that there is less mystery surrounding the social policy objectives of SD than is generally acknowledged. On the other hand, considerable ambiguity remains with respect to the relationship between the social and environmental pillars and it is to this uncertainty that attention turns. The literature outlined in Tables 2 and 3 assists this task by fulfilling two important functions. First, it serves to identify what is generally understood as the "social" in SD discourse. Second, it provides classifications, or umbrella groupings, under which the policy objectives of the social pillar may be usefully subsumed. For example, Chan & Lee

(2008) employ six classifications while Dempsey et al. (2011) prefer to include all policy concerns under the two master classifications of “equity” and “sustainability of community.” Building on such approaches, and based on a review of the literature outlined in Table 1, I argue that four pre-eminent social policy concepts, with attendant policy objectives, emerge from this literature. These are equity, awareness for sustainability, participation, and social cohesion.

This framework employs these four conceptual classifications as “organizing dimensions” (OECD, 2009), generalized policy concepts from which more specific policy objectives may be derived. Such classifications allow a large number of policy objectives to be synthesized into a smaller number, which facilitates easier communication and comparison (OECD, 2009). While the selection of these policy concepts borrows from SDIs and the social sustainability literature, the framework seeks to expand the scope of such “social pillars” by linking these four social concepts to environmental imperatives. The scope of the social pillar may also be expanded to include international dimensions. While international SDI sets and the social sustainability literatures have addressed a significant gap by fleshing out social policy objectives at a national level, the international dimensions of SD suggest that the “social” be extended to encapsulate global challenges. For example, while the social concepts of equity and social cohesion refer to key national welfare concerns, they also have significant international implications for SD policy. As such, it is appropriate that the international dimensions of these social concepts feed into SDIs.

Developing Links between the Social and Environmental Pillars

The novelty and essential contribution of SD as a concept and policy approach resides in its requirement to develop interpillar links. The Brundtland Report states that the “deepening interconnections” among the pillars is “the central justification for the establishment of the Commission” (WCED, 1987). Jordan & Lenschow (2008) claim that the report’s greatest contribution was to highlight the need for mutual compatibility among the pillars. The Aalborg Charter states that policy must seek to “integrate people’s basic social needs as well as healthcare, employment and housing programmes with environmental protection” (ESCTC, 1994). Similarly, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy calls for the “integration of economic, social and environmental considerations so that they are coherent and mutually reinforce each other” (Council of European Union, 2006). In fact, the European Commission argues that the presentation of SD issues without reference to their interpillar relationships may be described as “bundling,” “artificial,” and “false” (CEC, 2004). Jordan & Lenschow’s (2008) review of EU documents points to a clear requirement that environmental and social imperatives be integrated. Developing these interconnections via policy may be linked to the concept of EPI and in particular horizontal environmental policy integration (HEPI), which refers to incorporating environmental concerns into all sectors of policy, including social policy (Liberatore, 1997; Lafferty, 2002; Lafferty & Hovden, 2003; Jordan & Lenschow, 2008). In an influential EPI text, Liberatore (1997) argues:

The relevance of integration for moving towards sustainable development is straightforward: if environmental factors are not taken into consideration in the formulation and implementation of the policies that regulate economic activities and other forms of social organization, a new model of development that can be environmentally and socially sustainable in the long term cannot be achieved.

While disciplines such as environmental economics do link environmental and economic

imperatives, SD is unique in that it adds social aspects into the interdimensional mix (Dryzek, 2005). However, much of the work done on the social pillar discussed above does not place much focus on environmental links. For example, environmental factors are not addressed in George & Wilding's (1999) conception of social sustainability. More recently, while the work of Littig & Griessler (2005), Chan & Lee (2008), Cuthill (2009), and Dempsey et al. (2011) provide excellent discussions regarding SD's social aspects, the links between social and environmental goals do not receive much treatment. That said, both Cuthill (2009) and Littig & Griessler (2005) mention that developing such links would enhance our understanding of the social pillar. Key EU SDI documents often cite the importance of developing "interdimensional" relevance among pillars (CEC, 2004; Eurostat, 2007), yet a review of key international SDIs (e.g., UNCSD, 1996; UNDESA, 2001; 2007; Eurostat, 2005; 2007) reveals that while some linkages are made, these are very weakly developed. In light of these observations, a strong case exists for presenting a social pillar with clear social/environmental links, an approach central to the framework proposed here.

A Social/Environmental Framework

The proposed framework consists of thirteen policy objectives with both social and environmental dimensions, grouped under the four conceptual classifications of equity, awareness for sustainability, participation, and social cohesion. The following discussion explains the meaning of each objective in policy terms, examines the social-environmental policy implications, and outlines the justification for the selection of each objective. What emerges from this treatment is a set of social objectives, linked to environmental imperatives, which may function as a tool of analysis with which to examine how different states and organizations understand social policy concepts within the broader SD framework. States and organizations may be analyzed for their relative commitment to the social pillar with respect to the other pillars and their commitment to develop interpillar relationships. While this framework does not include a detailed set of indicators, it provides the foundation upon which such a set may be developed. It should be noted that this discussion does not view this framework as a replacement for the social pillars outlined in Tables 2 and 3, but seeks instead to augment existing approaches. Table 4 outlines the framework for expanding the social pillar in terms of social/environmental policy objectives.

Table 4: A social pillar of sustainable development.

Organizing Dimension	Policy Area	Policy May Be Analyzed For:
Equity	<i>The “export of pollution”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to curb the “export of pollution”
	<i>Climate change and the development needs of global southern countries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to economic transfers to global southern countries rather than relying solely on carbon-trading mechanisms
	<i>Vulnerable groups and the effects of climate change</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to assist vulnerable groups in adapting to the effects of climate change
	<i>Vulnerable groups and fiscal measures</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to protect vulnerable groups from fiscal measures designed to mitigate climate change
	<i>Welfare provision to current generations and carbon emissions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to decarbonize current welfare provision
	<i>Protecting future generations by reducing consumption levels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to protect future generations by reducing consumption rather than relying solely on market/technological solutions
Awareness for sustainability	<i>ESD and environmental awareness programs and campaigns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to designing and implementing educational programs for SD through the formal and informal education sectors
	<i>Content of ESD Programs and campaigns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level to which these programs embrace a challenge to the traditional growth paradigm including nonmaterial conceptions of happiness
Participation	<i>Broadening the participative base of environmental planning processes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level to which the views and preferences of weaker groups including future generations are reflected in environmental planning processes
Social Cohesion	<i>Promoting social cohesion and environmental objectives simultaneously</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to infrastructural planning which promotes social integration and environmental sustainability simultaneously • Commitment to promoting social activities aimed at environmental goals • Commitment to developing “transition towns” or initiatives of that type • Commitment to combating the kinds of environmental conditions which cause civil strife

Equity

Equity is a key social concept in SD discourse. In policy terms, it refers to the distribution of welfare goods and life chances on the basis of fairness and it applies to national, international, and intergenerational contexts. Equitable redistribution means that all citizens, regardless of gender, should have an equal opportunity to both survive and fulfill their development potentials. This very broad conception of equity refers to a wide spectrum of policy areas ranging from the provision of clean water, nutrition, employment, education,

shelter, essential medicines, and an unpolluted environment to access to social networks. It also includes the promotion of freedom from discrimination on the grounds of gender, religion, or race. Policy objectives related to equity are articulated in all of the publications identified in Table 1 and in almost all cases equity is understood as a central component of sustainability.⁵

Presenting the concept of equity in such broad terms masks myriad conceptual and ideological debates that a rigorous examination of the concept would expose. However, as previously noted, such arguments are well-rehearsed elsewhere. The purpose here is to examine how the concept of equity has been linked to environmental imperatives and what policy implications emerge from these synergies. The relationship between equity and environmental objectives is steeped in complexity and a simple correlation between increased equity and environmentally benign outcomes cannot be assumed (Ferris, 1993; Humphrey, 2002; Dobson, 2003b).

To develop this relationship theoretically, Dobson (2003b) calls for empirical examples that highlight how both objectives may be simultaneously promoted. To this end, I outline five ways in which equity has been empirically linked to environmental issues and articulate these in terms of policy objectives. In some cases, these goals refer primarily to the national level while others are relevant to the international sphere. I assess states and organizations with regard to their commitment to these objectives. These policy objectives are considered here in a relatively cursory manner, addressing only the basic contours of the pertinent arguments. Despite such limitations, these objectives provide a broad base for discussion regarding how the environmental dimensions of equity may be understood and developed into indicators.

First, evidence suggests that pollution in general, and the effects of climate change in particular, are and will be disproportionately felt by the poor, whether they reside in the global North or South. For example, Gough et al. (2008) argue that the risks associated with climate change are likely to exacerbate inequalities, as lower income groups are more likely to live in higher risk areas and marginal lands, have fewer resources to cope with harmful environmental events, and have much less insurance coverage. In this context, the fallout from Hurricane Katrina indicates that those on low incomes are least able to protect themselves from extreme weather (Singer, 2006; Dryzek, 2008). Furthermore, fiscal measures such as carbon taxes, designed to combat climate change, can place a higher burden on lower income households as energy prices increase (Scott, 2007; CPA, 2008). Low-income households spend a higher proportion of their income on domestic energy, live in less energy-efficient houses, and are more likely to consume certain fuels such as peat, coal, and oil that have higher carbon content. Fiscal measures may therefore exacerbate the effects of poverty and increase fuel poverty. Gough et al. (2008) also argue that budgets aimed at welfare provision may be diverted to address the negative consequences of climate change, placing greater strains on low-income groups (Gough et al. 2008). In this context, policy approaches based on a commitment to equity may be understood in terms of 1) commitment to assist vulnerable groups adapting to the effects of climate change, and 2) commitment to protect vulnerable groups from fiscal measures designed to mitigate climate change.

Second, Stern (2006), among others, argues that future generations will face serious environmental risks as a result of climate change that has been linked to economic growth (OECD, 2008b). This issue raises the question of intergenerational equity. While some commentators claim that market mechanisms and technological developments may be harnessed to combat climate change,⁶ others argue that such approaches will be insufficient (Andersen & Massa, 2000; Backstrand & Lovbrand, 2006; Grist, 2008). Continuing increases

in global greenhouse gas-emission levels provide empirical support for such skepticism (Hansen, 2006; CEC, 2009; WMO, 2009). Furthermore, evidence suggests that since the 1990s most affluent countries have not decoupled their carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse-gas emissions from growth in gross domestic product (GDP) (OECD, 2008b). Alternative approaches to the question of intergenerational equity embrace the idea that it entails reductions in consumption by current generations (Barry, 1993; Dobson, 2003a; Rees, 2008). In this context, pursuing intergenerational equity may be viewed in terms of strength of commitment to reduce consumption rather than relying solely on market/technological solutions.

Third, economically developing countries will disproportionately feel the effects of climate change, partly for geographical reasons and partly because they have limited resources to engage in mitigation or adaption strategies (Baker, 2006; Stern, 2006). This situation reflects the fact that relatively poor countries have contributed least to the problem, yet will suffer most from it, which raises the question of equity. While some scholars and policy makers advocate for international carbon trading, others have suggested that wealthy countries continue to unfairly dominate negotiations around these mechanisms in ways favorable to their own interests (Backstrand & Lovbrand, 2006; Liverman, 2009). Alternative or stronger approaches tend to focus on the idea of considerable wealth transfers from North to South to assist mitigation and adaptation policies in southern countries. In this context, a commitment to equity may be assessed in terms of resolve for economic and technological transfers to southern countries rather than relying solely on carbon-trading mechanisms.

Fourth, policy should seek to ensure that intergenerational and intragenerational equity are made compatible (Pearce et al. 1989; Redclift, 1993; Fitzpatrick & Cahill, 2002). This means that in protecting future generations via environmental policies, attention and funds must not be diverted away from addressing the needs of today's poor. At the same time, policy must ensure that the provision of welfare for the presently disadvantaged is carried out without diverting attention or funds away from addressing the needs of future generations. The HEPI attempts to overcome this dilemma by requiring all policy goals, including social policy, to be compatible with environmental objectives. Certain policies exist that appear to reflect this ethos, for example, green social economy initiatives (Davies, 2009) or the energy retrofitting of social housing (Gough et al. 2008). On a broader level, the application of HEPI would require agencies responsible for the provision of essential welfare services (e.g., health, housing, education, social security) to develop and implement plans to substantially reduce the carbon emissions associated with the delivery of these services. In this way, policy seeks to simultaneously meet the needs of today's poor and future generations. Gough et al. (2008) provide a good overview of policy debates related to such issues. In this context, policy imbued with the spirit of equity may be viewed in terms of commitment to decouple welfare provision from carbon emissions.

Finally, it has been noted by writers such as Rowley & Holmberg (1995), Moffat (1996), and Purvis & Grainger (2004) that pollution is inequitably distributed on a global level. A combination of demand for certain goods in the North and poverty in the South forces economically developing countries to eschew strict environmental legislation for economic survival. This asymmetry effectively leads to the "export of pollution" to poorer countries, a dynamic that is manifest in different ways around the world. There is an abundance of evidence that industries in rich countries relocate to poorer nations where cheaper and dirtier production processes are tolerated (Faber, 1993; Faber & McCarthy, 2003). Greenpeace (2002) notes that export credit agencies (ECAs) in developed countries have, in recent years,

substantially increased their financing of fossil-fuel power in developing countries. The organization goes on to note that, while the UK continues to fund the export of dirty coal technologies to poorer nations, the last coal-powered station built in the UK was in 1972. The increased export of electrical and electronic equipment waste from Western countries to Asia due to “cheaper labor” and “lack of environmental standards” has also been documented (Puckett et al. 2002). Furthermore, Webber et al. (2008) found that while Chinese CO₂ emissions have increased dramatically in recent years, approximately one third of these releases are due to the production of exports, primarily targeted at the developed world.⁷ In this context, policy imbued with the spirit of equity may be viewed in terms of commitment to curb the “export of pollution.”

Awareness for Sustainability

Awareness for sustainability is a key social concept in SD discourse. The associated policy objectives refer to raising public awareness of sustainability issues with a view to encouraging alternative, sustainable consumption patterns. Policies typically include “green” advertising campaigns, ecolabelling, awareness-raising events, environmental education programs, and education for sustainable development (ESD) programs. These initiatives and campaigns encourage consumers to engage in more environmentally benign behavior and to accept the legitimacy of coercive environmental legislation. This objective is clearly articulated in key UN documents (WCED, 1987; UNCED, 1992; WSSD, 2002; UNESCO, 2004), EU communications (CEC, 2001; 2004; Council of European Union, 2006), green social policy materials (Gough et al. 2008; Meadowcroft, 2008), and ecological modernization literature (Spaargaren, 2000; 2003; 2006; Spaargaren & van Vliet, 2000; Spaargaren & Mol, 2008). Awareness for sustainability receives relatively less treatment in the social sustainability literature, though education as an end in itself is often seen as a key objective. For example, Vavik & Keitsch (2010) cite “access to education” as one of three important policy goals for social sustainability. Similarly, while education for its own sake is presented as a key social indicator in international SDIs, these sets do not include gauges to measure commitment to ESD or environmental awareness. This focus represents a significant weakness, as all contributors to SD debates articulate the need for awareness. Including indicators related to ESD in SDI sets would more effectively embrace the spirit of linking social-environmental objectives.

An important distinction between UN documents and the ecological modernization literature warrants attention. While UN materials embrace a more radical position on awareness, the ecological modernization position does not move too far from traditional Western development norms. For example, the Brundtland Report argues that western consumption levels are ecologically unsustainable and that attitudes must be changed to arrest such trends (WCED, 1987). In addition, Agenda 21 states that awareness programs should stimulate ethical consciousness, address socioeconomic issues, and encourage spiritual development (UNCED, 1992). These programs should be “integrated into all disciplines” and a “thorough review of curricula” is called for. UNESCO (2004) furthermore argues that ESD must be informed by a “sensitivity to the limits and potential of economic growth and their impact on society and the environment” and by a concern for social justice. To promote these objectives, the UN launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005–2014. In contrast, the ecological modernization approach is more politically modest. Most comprehensively and coherently expressed in Spaargaren’s theory of consumption (Spaargaren, 2000; 2003; 2006; Spaargaren & van Vliet, 2000; Spaargaren & Mol, 2008), this understanding places great faith in a combination of environmental awareness and market

mechanisms to deliver sustainability. As a result of greater environmental awareness and a sense of ethical responsibility, consumers will seek opportunities to “green” their lifestyles and domestic routines. In particular, proponents of ecological modernization claim that environmental innovations introduced during the 1990s, such as organic food products, green electricity schemes, or greywater-management systems were a direct result of environmentally aware consumer demand (see, e.g., Spaargaren & van Vliet, 2000). In short, “green” consumption backed up by awareness campaigns, rather than reductions in absolute consumption levels, is viewed as central to thwarting environmental threats.⁸

Ecological modernization does not challenge the traditional growth model in the same way as the UN documents. The latter includes calls for significant reductions in consumption, encouragement of spiritual development, critique of socioeconomic norms, concern for social justice, and engagement with the idea of “limits to growth.” Furthermore, while a key UN document, the Aalborg Charter, suggests that quality of life should be decoupled from “maximizing consumption,” the literature on ecological modernization does not generally embrace the promotion of nonmaterial conceptions of happiness. Therefore, the ecomodernist approach is far less radical. In this context, policy approaches may be examined to assess 1) a commitment to designing and implementing programs of ESD through the formal and informal education sectors, and 2) the extent to which ESD programs challenge the traditional growth paradigm, including the promotion of nonmaterial conceptions of happiness.

Participation

Participation is a critical concept in SD discourse. In terms of policy, it refers to the goal of including as many social groups as possible in decision-making processes. This approach is justified on the basis that benefits accrue to both citizen and state. By joining in participatory processes, individuals and groups can enhance their social inclusion. In addition, the participation of more social groups increases the likelihood that civil society will deem government policy legitimate. By including a range of voices, increased public engagement promotes social cohesion and social sustainability (Goodland, 2002; Chan & Lee, 2008; Cuthill, 2009; Dempsey et al. 2011). Numerous observers also view participation as important for promoting environmental goals; furthermore, policy objectives in international documents point to the need for governments to engage with civil society to achieve environmental sustainability (WCED, 1987; UNCED, 1992; ESCTC, 1994; WSSD, 2002; ODP, 2005; CEU, 2006). The ecological modernization literature also widely articulates the need for broadening the participatory base (Mol, 2000; Mol & Spaargaren, 2002), although some proponents of this approach are viewed as “stronger” than others (Hajer, 1995; Christoff, 1996; Dryzek, 2005; Howes et al. 2009).

The underlying premise here is that if people are involved in decision making, they are more likely to support environmental reform. Therefore, increasing participation is often presented in terms of creating legitimacy. Such forms of engagement are said to allow societies to build consensus about the legitimacy of collective political choices such as reducing consumption and accepting ecotaxes (Baker, 2006) and allow a wide range of groups to resolve potential developmental conflicts (Toke et al. 2008). However, the link between increased participation and environmentally benign outcomes can be problematic (Jordan, 2008). Certain participating groups have more power than others and may dominate policy-making processes to promote their own ends in ways that undermine environmental goals (Meadowcroft & Lafferty, 1996; Baker, 2006). Countless examples from the literature illustrate how business groups, frequently supported by the state, often use their considerable

resources to thwart environmental goals (Keohane, 1998; Benton, 2002). Furthermore, correlations between diffusing power to the local level and achieving environmental goals are also problematic. For example, Toke et al. (2008) point to evidence that regional/local planning systems that allow for citizen participation have in some cases hindered the development of wind power in the UK. On the basis of such outcomes, some observers contend that “equally strong arguments can be made against widespread public involvement” in environmental planning decisions (see, e.g., Connelly, 2007).

In light of such qualifications, contemporary perspectives tend to advocate for a “smart mix” of a strong state and stakeholder participation (Baker, 2009). For stakeholders to operate on a level playing field, funding must be made available to less powerful groups to ensure they have a genuine capacity to participate fully, not merely in a “token” way (Connaughton et al. 2008; Amajirionwu & Barlett, 2009). Environmental decision-making processes need to incorporate mechanisms that require planning to meaningfully reflect the needs of future generations. Accordingly, policy approaches should be examined to assess the extent to which views and preferences of weaker groups, including future generations, are reflected in ultimate decisions.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a salient concept in social policy discourse and debates; that the OECD (2009) lists it as one of four key themes in its social indicator set of 2009 indicates its centrality. Within SD discourse, the promotion of social cohesion as a policy objective appears to occupy a particularly important place in the social sustainability literature and EU SD policy. It receives less treatment in UN documents and is ignored in ecological modernization literature. The meaning of social cohesion is variously defined. It has been linked to such policy objectives as promoting happiness/well-being; minimizing social strife; reducing crime; promoting interpersonal trust; and combating suicide, bullying, and antisocial behavior (OECD, 2009). The concept of social cohesion has become central to EU policy in general and EU SD policy in particular (Eurostat, 2005; 2007; ODPM, 2005; CEU, 2006). In fact, the term “social cohesion” in EU SD documents appears to be a surrogate for the social pillar. That is, these reports tend to refer to the three pillars of SD in terms of economic growth, environmental protection, and social cohesion (see, e.g., Eurostat, 2007). However, none of the EU SD documents reviewed for this article provide a definition of social cohesion and no EU SD indicators are directly linked to it. In general, EU SD documents establish few clear policy objectives related to social cohesion. An exception is the Bristol Accord which links social cohesion to policy by urging local authorities “to promote a mix of populations, non-segregated areas, accessibility and safety, and the development of opportunity, and facilitate the integration of distressed urban areas” (ODPM, 2005).⁹

According to several commentators, social cohesion is central to the concept of social sustainability (Jörissen et al. 1999; Goodland, 2002; Omann & Spangenberg, 2002; Munasinghe, 2007; Chan & Lee, 2008; Cuthill, 2009; Dempsey et al. 2011). This literature represents a welcome improvement on EU SD documents in that it suggests clearer policy objectives and links social cohesion to the need to foster civic participation in public affairs (Omann & Spangenberg, 2002); to strengthen community networks and reduce conflicts (Munasinghe, 2007); to promote tolerance, solidarity, and integration (Jörissen et al. 1999); to foster a shared sense of social purpose (Baker, 2006); and to combat cultural intolerance (Cuthill, 2009). Dempsey et al. (2011) link social cohesion to the concept of “sustainability of community” and outline five interrelated and measurable dimensions: social

interaction/social networks in the community, participation in collective groups and networks in the community, community stability, pride/sense of place, and safety and security. Policy objectives related to social cohesion therefore appear to be focused on creating opportunities that promote harmonious coexistence or, at least, combat the potential for civic strife.

Of the four concepts in this framework, social cohesion is most weakly connected to environmental imperatives. The links that do exist fall into two categories. First, policies and initiatives exist which simultaneously promote social cohesion and environmental objectives (win-win). For example, infrastructure may be designed to place essential welfare and leisure services in local areas (Dempsey et al. 2011). The reduction of commuting distances to work reduces CO2 emissions and frees up time for more community participation (Putnam, 2000; Schor, 2010). Initiatives such as “Tidy Towns” competitions and “community cleanups” increase opportunities for social interaction while simultaneously promoting environmental integrity (Department of Environment, Heritage, and Local Government, 2007). In addition, “transition towns” initiatives involve local communities coming together to design programs that seek to protect them from the ill effects of climate change and peak oil, thus promoting social interaction and environmental objectives simultaneously (Brangwyn & Hopkins, 2008). Community groups have a major role to play in locally based climate change adaptation strategies, such as responses to flooding and the formulation and implementation of heat plans (Murphy et al. 2012).

Second, environmental factors pose threats to social cohesion. For example, considerable scope exists for conflict over access to food, water, and fuel as a result of climate change and fossil-fuel depletion (see, e.g., Sanchez, 2000; Brown et al. 2007). UNEP (2007) cites the conflict in Darfur as empirical evidence in support of this link. The predicted influx of climate refugees into Europe from Africa (Brown et al. 2007; Carnegie UK, 2009) or from Central and South America (Schwartz & Randall, 2003) also presents challenges to social cohesion. The diversion of resources away from welfare provision to combat the effects of climate change may also cause considerable social tensions (Gough et al. 2008). Policy objectives therefore refer to initiatives that combat the kinds of environmental conditions that promote social disharmony or upheaval. As such, policy approaches may be assessed on the basis of four commitments: 1) to infrastructure planning that concurrently promotes social integration and environmental sustainability, 2) to the promotion of social activities that have an environmental focus, 3) to the development of “transition towns” or initiatives of a similar nature, and 4) to combating the kinds of environmental conditions that cause civic strife.

Conclusion

While the social pillar of SD is relatively unexplored territory, some of the work highlighted above suggests that a broad understanding is emerging regarding key concepts and policy objectives. This awareness is rooted in social policy discourse and has been transposed onto the social sustainability discourse, work that represents a major contribution to our appreciation of the social pillar.

This article argues that these social pillars may be expanded to incorporate a stronger emphasis on environmental, international, and intergenerational dimensions and that this enlargement would also extend to SDIs. This contention is based on an understanding of SD as a holistic concept requiring simultaneous recognition of these dimensions. Existing social pillars focus on promoting welfare at national levels and the environmental implications of such provision need to be clearly articulated.

While the social sustainability literature appears to have broadly answered the question of “what is the social pillar of SD,” a host of supplementary questions emerge under the remittance of the social pillar. These questions form the basis of the social pillar framework proposed in this article. For example, how can the environmental impact of current welfare provision be minimized? How might the goal of global equity be made compatible with environmental objectives? How might education systems be altered to resocialize citizens for sustainability? How might participative mechanisms incorporate the aspirations of vulnerable groups, current and future? The answers to these questions can form the basis of an alternative set of social indicators that could serve to supplement existing “social pillars” in ways that embrace environmental, international, and intergenerational dimensions. This framework could be used to analyze how different states and organizations conceive of the social pillar and the extent to which social and environmental dynamics have been linked.

Notes

¹ UN policy documents tend to focus on need satisfaction of a more fundamental nature than is evident in EU documents. The latter are inclined to reflect the concerns of more affluent groups. For example, while the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (Council of European Union, 2006) refers to the need to promote animal health welfare and tackle obesity, tobacco use, and harmful drinking, the 1996 UN indicator set highlights indicators of a more fundamental nature, such as “adequate excreta disposal facilities,” “access to safe drinking water,” and “the nutritional status of children” (UNCSD, 1996).

² Some scholars compare ecological modernization and SD strategies as a basis to distinguish policy approaches (see, e.g., Baker, 2007; Wright & Kurian, 2009).

³ After the early 2000s it became less fashionable to use explicit “pillar” distinctions. However, other SDIs and the social sustainability literature refer to the themes highlighted here as “social.”

⁴ The policy objectives discussed in SDIs are broadly similar to those raised in the social sustainability literature.

⁵ It is noted that in the main, ecological modernization theorists see little connection between the equitable distribution of resources and environmental ends (see, e.g., Mol & Spaargaren, 2000; 2002). Furthermore, in terms of debates around intergenerational equity, Beckerman (1995; 1999) represents a deviation from the general consensus in this literature suggesting that current generations have obligations to future generations in terms of ecological sustainability. He argues instead that “[i]ntergenerational egalitarianism has nothing to recommend it.”

⁶ Market mechanisms include emissions trading, carbon offsetting, and forest sequestration, while technological interventions include carbon storage/sequestration, deflection of heat away from the earth’s surface with solar shields or satellites with movable reflectors, and ocean fertilization using iron or similar inputs to increase plankton production (and CO₂ absorption).

⁷ According to Weber et al. (2008), Chinese emission levels doubled from 2002 to 2007.

⁸ While Mol & Spaargaren (2004) dispute this point, it is generally held that ecological modernization is hostile to strategies that entail reductions in consumption.

⁹ The Bristol Accord is an EU document that outlines what member states deem to be the chief characteristics of sustainable communities.

Virtual Interaction: A Real Alternative

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Abstract

Social care students on block placement have reported a feeling of disconnection from both the broader student group and the natural supports available in the college environment. Students experience a variety of challenges and opportunities on placement, and when combined with practical and geographical limitations on support this can provide a key obstacle for successful progression through placement. Appropriate navigation of practice placement challenges offer the opportunity for key personal and professional development. This article is intended to outline the implementation and use of a specific moderated online interactive support space designed for social care students on final practice placements. Prior to the adoption of this particular approach there was an absence of scope for informal group based, student led reflection on the competencies and knowledge developed whilst on placement and the overall impact of the experience.

Keywords: Social Care Practice, On-line Support, Moodle, Community of Practice.

Introduction

The project was designed to respond to identified difficulties that students encountered while on placement in social care settings. These students are in their final year of a three year BA in Applied Social Studies, and as such are reaching a stage in their learning that requires them to be innovative and take personal responsibility for professional development, whilst simultaneously receiving direction and support from college tutors and practice supervisors.

This offers a unique opportunity and challenge for academics (in terms of supporting independent learning skills whilst exposing the student to an appropriate level of risk in the learning environment), and it is argued that an online support strategy may be a key for providing this type of support. The student engagement requirement for this project involved students posting a minimum of three posts and replying to a minimum of three posts on a range of practice related topics. This requirement was integrated into the continuous assessment component of a core professional skills module. The researchers acted as the moderators of the forum and also provided some initial topics/threads for discussions. The project ran for 16 weeks and yielded 485 discussions across a total of six forums with postings by 107 contributors (including the moderators). The project was evaluated by exploring the topics discussed and the processes of discussing these and through focus groups and surveys completed at the mid-way and end of the project.

Building the community

The process of building the community of social care students was facilitated through the use of a virtual leaning environment, a blackboard type setting, entitled “Moodle”. “*Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a Course Management System (CMS), or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It is a free web application that educators can use to create effective online learning sites*” (www.Moodle.org). The virtual setting can be an effective tool in providing key opportunities for responsibility and active learning for students as they initiate and contribute to online discussions (Hopperton, 1998). Students were required to engage with this process as part of a module, marks were allocated to students on the basis of their active participation in polls, debates, scenarios and various

discussion forums. Table one provides an example of some of the material focussed on by participants in the student directed section of the site. Four primary themes were evident across student postings;

- i) adapting to the realities of the professional environment
- ii) dealing with stress and pressure
- iii) understanding and connecting with service users and
- iv) meeting academic requirements in terms of college work.

Table 1: Initiating Discussion

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
Differences in you	Gary Coleman	1	Pamela Hurley Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 03:44 PM
Structure	Nicola Cronin	6	Pamela Hurley Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 03:26 PM
Building a bridge	Pamela Hurley	0	Pamela Hurley Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 02:29 PM
Lunacy!	Pamela Hurley	0	Pamela Hurley Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 01:58 PM
TCI Training	Emma Spaine	1	Gary Coleman Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 01:30 PM
Financial climate	Mary Nkeze	2	Pamela Hurley Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 12:57 PM
Loss of control	Pamela Hurley	0	Pamela Hurley Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 12:44 PM
Helping to switch off after a long day	Anne-Marie Doyle	7	Anne-Marie Doyle Fri, 24 Feb 2012, 12:02 AM
Social networking dangers!..... After Placement	Danielle Larkin	1	Anne-Marie Doyle Thu, 23 Feb 2012, 11:52 PM
Male victims of Domestic violence	Anne-Marie Doyle	0	Anne-Marie Doyle Thu, 23 Feb 2012, 11:21 PM
Is it worth it???	Danielle Larkin	1	Loma Fay Thu, 23 Feb 2012, 11:08 PM
Positive Labels?	Danielle Larkin	0	Danielle Larkin Thu, 23 Feb 2012, 09:46 PM
Stereotyping	Kieran Blunt	1	Danielle Larkin Thu, 23 Feb 2012, 09:19 PM
Repetition.....Repetition.....Repetition	Aoife Delaney	5	Danielle Larkin Thu, 23 Feb 2012, 08:59 PM
Ending new relationships	Jessica Gallagher	1	Emma Dennis Wed, 22 Feb 2012, 10:24 PM
If you had to pick one positive experience or highlight and one negative experience "if any" whilst on placement, what would they be and why?	Emma Dennis	2	Emma Dennis Wed, 22 Feb 2012, 08:54 PM
Any time for Moodle-time?	Thomas Maher	4	Emma Dennis Wed, 22 Feb 2012, 08:47 PM
First day back after Placement	Bernard Lindsay	2	Emma Dennis Wed, 22 Feb 2012, 08:41 PM

In terms of the content of the discussion board there were 271 threads posted (this figure excludes the debates section), with each thread averaging 5 posts. A key component of this particular approach was that it was student led, with a relatively small amount of input from forum moderators. This space also offers a continuous opportunity to interact with peers in a safe, moderated, practice-oriented environment.

There was clear progression in the development of the content over the course of the placement as students posted and responded to more complex issues. In terms of the variety of topics, there were very few topics that appeared to be off-limits for discussions with topics ranging from those related to service users, to the self, to critical discussions of services. The topics progressed in a range of different directions organically, with less input required from the two key moderators as the placement progressed. Initially students stayed within the relatively safe realms of introducing their placement settings and outlining the basics of environment and service user group, over time students progressed to looking at more complex issues related to boundary maintenance, self reflection and challenges to their competence and practice. In the early stages of engagement students were predominantly focussed on looking at how effectively the setting would meet their learning needs as a student before moving on to looking at how effectively they could meet the care needs of the

service user group. This is evident A number of other discussion threads (generally chosen by students) which received reasonably high response levels are detailed below.

Table 2: Progression and development in student driven content.

<i>Topic/Thread</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>
First day/week- Any thoughts?	46
Where do you see yourself (post-training)?	19
First Impressions & Judgements based on limited information	17
Is social care for you?	16
Cooking (Role and relevance to social care and relationship building)	15
Wilderness Therapy (Using and understanding it)	14
Boundaries (Establishing and clarifying them)	12

Surveys and a focus group were completed with student's midway through the placement, and at the end of the placement experience to assess their feelings and experience regarding the use of Moodle as a support and a learning tool while on placement. The feedback from students was very positive, with key comments on the merits of this approach as a placement support. Students emphasised the connections they were able to make with others whilst in different services and placement settings. This suggests that the online support addressed some of the isolation that students have felt while on placement in the past. The students also found that the interactive discussions illustrated the fact that many students are experiencing similar challenges and this can be a source of comfort for students, as the experiences are normalised within the group. Students also reported satisfaction with the ease of access of the discussions online and highlighted the use of the forums as an information bank of knowledge that they could use while on placement. Thematic analysis indicates key personal and professional development for students who engaged effectively with this space.

Evaluation

- i) The Process: The development of a specific student directed supportive on-line space to encourage the growth of key social care practice skills was influenced by the theoretical models put forward by Wenger (1998) which focus on the concept of community of practice, as a key way for students to extend their learning.

Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) proposes three core components of a community of practice:

- Domain - "a defined identity, membership implies a commitment to the domain, and a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people".
- Community – "In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other".
- Practice – "Members of a community of practice are practitioners, developing a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems".

On these three measures the current project clearly met key conditions in order to be considered a community of practice. There was a significant level of 'buy-in' to the community as overall student engagement exceeded the academic requirements as set out in the continuous assessment brief. This particular community of practice

focussed on student related issues as participants disclosed early challenges in practice placement, emphasised the application of theoretical material to the practice environment and used this space primarily to attend to their own needs (as students) rather than those of the service or service users. Relationship building and support was very evident from the early stages of development in the community. Students posting emotionally loaded discussion material received high levels of engagement in response; there was significant indication that the students developed empathy and indicated an understanding towards each other. There was however limited evidence of moving beyond supportive messages and basic problem-solving into 'true community' (Peck, 1987) where there is a willingness to provide critical appraisal and engage in conflict resolution. This may be partly explained by the relatively short-time frame over which the current project ran (primarily four months). Sharing of resources and knowledge developed quite quickly in the community as participants directed each other towards material of use and detailed how they themselves had attained and used practice knowledge.

- ii) Thematic Analysis of Content: According to Wenger (2002) there are 8 core activities of a community of practice, reusing of assets, mapping knowledge, problem solving, development of synergy, seeking experiences, discussing developments and documenting of projects. Exploration of the discussions that students made on Moodle has indicated key themes that can be linked to five of the key elements of a community of practice as argued by Wenger (2002).
- iii) Reusing of assets. This is believed to be evident when people are sharing assets which they have developed. *"Here's a good book I found on Icebreakers, might be handy for peoples interventions". (Student 1).* This was clear in student's postings as they developed their skills on placement, with students discussing training that was available and other key assets they had encountered within their placement setting. *"I have found these approaches to be effective, hope this is of some help" (Student 2).*
- iv) Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps. Students are expected to develop their knowledge of theories and extend their learning from academic modules, whilst on placement. *"Last year we studied the topic of aggression and disinhibition; can we say that every single person becomes dehumanised and angry?"(Student 3).* It can be argued that by sharing this knowledge and discussing the learning online with their peers, the students were able to develop a deeper learning and to identify gaps in practice and in theoretical perspectives. *"Today I took part in training in the low arousal approach, we were looking at different things that can trigger challenging behaviour.... did you know 80% of challenging behaviour is caused by staff????"(Student 4).*
- v) Problem solving. Student's discussions were seen to peak during the second half of placements as students involved themselves in a more active way in their placement setting. *"I was just wondering is anyone else having trouble with their service users wanting to help with their intervention? Any ideas on how I can motivate them?" (Student 4).* As students were involving themselves in key pieces of work they appeared to use the discussion forum as a venue for asking for direction and support from other students. *"Unfortunately I am not receiving any enthusiasm from the students (service users) what so ever, even getting them to participate it so hard and some just point blank refuse to have anything got to do with it (Student 5).*

- vi) Seeking Experience. Students spent a large amount of time sharing their experiences and discussing the differences in services, as they discussed common findings and observations. *“What will you do if you encounter this type of choiceless practice in your placement as well?” (Student 7).* As the students were on placement in different organisations and often with different service user groups this was felt to be a key way for students to learn about a variety of different agencies and to share their experiences and practice observations within the field. *“As we all know, Christmas in Ireland is mostly about the family. While this is a good thing for most people it can be a horrendous time for those, in our care, who haven't had such a good or positive experience with their own family. Has anyone else noticed anything like this in their own placement?” (Student 6).*
- vii) Discussing developments. As third year students in Applied Social Studies, the students are developing professional practice skills that will allow them to work effectively in the field of social care *“The problem of funding is seriously affecting this sector and as a result young dependant people are paying the price” (Student 9).* . The students are expected to extend their knowledge and skills whilst on placement and to build on learning from three years of academic modules, and to extend the skills they developed whilst on a Year 2 placement the previous year. In this sense, it is the last scheduled placement that students will complete as part of BA in Applied Social Studies. Students are expected to recognise and analyse key developments in the field of social care. There were elements of this apparent in the online discussions that students had with on the Moodle website. *“However, if there are no male staff in a house aren't they going to be lacking male influence in their development”?* (Student 8)

Extending the Community

This specific project focussed on students in their specific role as student practitioners (in the latter stages of social care education), engagement and participation levels suggest significant potential to extend and develop the community. The most natural direction for expansion of this particular community is to other sections of the student body initially. Expansion of the focus to include a significant component of pre-practice placement preparation and post placement reflection would facilitate the inclusion of students across all four years of the honours degree training programme. Collaboration and alliances also present a potential area for expansion as the Moodle forum allows for cross institutional links. The potential for cross institutional partnership is currently being assessed in a follow-up project which will run in 2012-13 and involves student groups across two institutions collaborating in relation to practice learning. In relation to development of the community Brannigan (2009) highlights a movement of participants to the centre of the community as being reflective of maturity within the community.

In the current project there was little evidence of any substantial move to the centre (or a move to attempt to control/influence) of the community by individual participants and/or groups of participants. The current project worked with all community members in an equal fashion and academic requirements and support for participants were both equally distributed, the creation of sub-groups/pilot groups with a specific focus may have brought about a more dynamic community and triggered a more central position for particular participants. Although the overall community required little in the way of moderation (beyond

observation) and processes were primarily student directed rather than lecturer directed, the introduction of a rotating student moderator role could again assist in locating the power of the community in the hands of participants. There was some evidence of an appetite for this role among the student group,

“I would also like to say that be super careful about confidentiality in this topic (I know you guys already know that but just as a reminder because things can happen but I know you know)” Student 9.

There may also be further potential for development through the addition of community members with specific roles – experts in domains as community visitors, the inclusion of a service user and /or service user views as part of the community and further integration of practitioners/student supervisors in order to present a broader range of perspectives on the issues discussed within the community.

Conclusion

The value of the social care practice placement in allowing students to transfer theoretical knowledge from the classroom setting to direct work with service users is clearly established in research (Lawlor & Doyle, 2005). Traditional approaches to practice placement support have focussed on effectively preparing the student within the college environment and offering on-site visits which are intended to fulfil both support and assessment functions. The current project offers the opportunity to continue to develop the supportive engagement which starts in the classroom and allows students to address and explore issues as they arise rather than ‘holding’ these experiences until post placement for reflection as has traditionally been the case where block placements are utilised. Morrison (2005) identifies a range of opportunities related to reflection which occur in practice learning, the current project allows the student to engage in reflection with the support of their peer group and academic staff on an on-going basis throughout the course of the practice placement.

One of the overall objectives of this project was to create what Wenger (2000) refers to as a ‘*living curriculum*’ dictated by students, identifying and responding to issues as they arose. Although there was some further scope for development of the community, and by extension the curriculum, the *live* element was strongly evident through high levels of in-depth participation, swift responses to issues raised, the creation of a practice knowledge bank and student utilisation of the space generally.

Community democracy was clearly evident as participants changed the direction and focus of material by choosing to engage in certain discussions/forums whilst disregarding others. Topics which appeared to present with significant potential for engagement were sometimes ignored in favour of other discussion threads. One example of this dynamic was engagement in the debates forum, which was consistently at a relatively low level even though students were simply required to hit an agree or disagree button in response to a specific practice related question/statement - “Legalisation of cannabis use would be a logical step forward by Irish policy makers”. It appears participants wanted to engage in a debate, contextualise their position and establish the reasons others had for putting the particular perspective forward rather than being required to simply agree or disagree with a particular statement. A number of topics which, at a surface level appeared to be very ‘safe’ developed into effective, challenging discussions of the nature of social care practice. In this context a discussion thread which initially focussed on the need to have basic cooking skills in particular care settings quickly identified a range of related opportunities for relationship building, education

and on-the-floor counselling which presented whilst involving service users in the basic task of preparing a meal.

Northover (2002) argues that with larger amounts of mature students engaged in full time education, the need to offer flexible and accessible means of learning and communicating in the form of online discussion forums should be at the forefront of educator's minds. This is of particular relevance to the current group of students as the numbers of mature students participating in social care education increases in Ireland, and the need to engage with these students offers an opportunity for academics to build on previous resources of both the academic and the student. In this sense the present research can be seen as a challenge and an opportunity for professional social care education. Online engagement also offers the opportunity for individual students who may not be central to the group dynamic in a classroom setting to be influential in this virtual space as they create a new professional online persona. The current project illustrated a pattern of engagement amongst the student group which did not always reflect the pattern of engagement amongst this group during their experience of traditional teaching methodologies (lectures and tutorials or workshops).

Wenger (2002) argues "the term community of practice was coined to refer to the community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice". In this sense the use of Moodle's interactive environment should continue to grow within the student community as it addresses a number of practical and academic challenges in relation to the delivery of academic and practical material to large student groups. Prior research (Watson, 2010) identified the potential of on-line forums in the development of communities of practice. It is envisaged that the adoption of this approach by students will have further long-term benefits in terms of their willingness to engage with and contribute to social care communities of practice post qualification. This will result in ancillary benefits for the social care profession as a whole.

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Violent video games and attitudes towards victims of crime: An empirical study among youth

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Abstract

Previous research has indicated that playing violent video games may be associated with an increase in acceptance of violence and positive attitudes towards perpetrators of crime. This study is the first to investigate the relationship between playing violent video games and attitudes towards victims of crime. A total of 206 young people (aged 12-24 years) completed measures of attitudes towards victims and violent video game exposure. The results suggest that exposure to violent video games is associated with less concern being reported for victims of crime. Young people who play more violent video games reported less concern for general victims and for culpable victims, and these effects cannot be explained by gender or age differences. The results are discussed in relation to relevant research in the area, along with recommendations for future research.

Introduction

Azjen (2005) argues that attitudes can be described as “dispositions to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution or event” (2005, p.3). Social psychologists are interested in the impact of attitudes on behaviour and in particular the impact of attitudes of different strengths on behaviour. The MODE model of attitudes (Fazio, 1986; 1990; Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999) argues that attitudes are learned associations in memory and that the strength of attitudes has a bearing on their influence on our perceptions and our judgments regarding the information we process. It can be argued that the impact of video games on a person’s attitudes according to this theory could increase the accessibility of attitudes where a person’s attitude could be easier to access due to long-term exposure to similar attitudes in video game scenes.

Attitudes Towards Victims

Attributions are made about people who are victims, and regarding the level of responsibility of the victim for the crime of which they have been a victim. Research on attitudes towards victims has explored the types of victims that appear to elicit higher levels of blame or a lack of empathy and understanding from others. Victim blaming can be described as a devaluing act that occurs when the victim of a crime or an accident is held responsible for the crimes that have been committed against them (Andrew, Brewin & Rose, 2003).

The research on attitudes towards victims of sexual violence has focused on two main explanations which have been proposed to explain this tendency to attribute higher levels of attribution of blame to victims. These explanations relate to the use of defensive processes people will use to protect themselves, while explaining the action that has occurred to victims of rape. The Just World Theory (Lerner & Matthews, 1967) and the Defensive Attribution Hypothesis (Shaver, 1970) explain how people can distance themselves from the plight of the victim, and through this process elicits higher levels of victim blame, than expected, while simultaneously comforting themselves that they are safe/exempt from this type of occurrence. The Just World Theory (Lerner 1965, 1981), argues that people can find it difficult to

understand a world that is chaotic and where people get hurt who do not deserve it. The theory states that to overcome this difficulty people can argue that victims may have somehow deserved the fate that occurred to them. The Defensive Attribution Hypothesis (Shaver, 1970; Thornton, Ryckman & Robbins, 1982; Muller, Caldwell & Hunter, 1994) argues that individuals attribute positive attributions to people who are similar to us, which can have an additional benefit of protecting us from negative attributions if we were in a similar situation in the future (Anderson, 2004).

Research with children has focused on the perceptions that young people have on victims of bullying and explored positive or negative attitudes towards this form of peer aggressive behaviour. Rigby and Slee (1993) found that a positive attitude towards victims correlated negatively with bullying behaviour in an Australian sample of children aged 6- to 16-years of age, while Boulton and Hawker (2000) argue that attitudes towards bullying were found to significantly predict involvement in bullying with a group of 13- to 15-year olds. Similar research has found that one of the main predictors of readiness to support victims of bullying was having a positive attitude towards victims (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). In relation to gender differences primary school students have been found to be more accepting of girls use of violence and the boys were more accepting of violence overall than the girls in the study (Price et al, 1999).

Positive attitudes towards aggression and violence have been found among aggressive children and adolescents, as compared to their non-aggressive counterparts (e.g. Perry, Perry, & Rasmussen, 1986; Slaby & Guerra, 1988). More recently, results of several studies have shown that children who bully others also express more positive attitudes regarding the use of violence and aggression in response to social difficulties (e.g., Bentley & Li, 1995; Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999; Olweus, 1997). Hymel, Rocke-Henderson and Bonanno (2005) set out to examine the processes by which student attitudes and beliefs contribute to their involvement in bullying behaviour within the framework of moral disengagement. The researchers argue that young people often justify their behaviour through social cognitive strategies that permit moral disengagement during the school years as a means of justifying and rationalising bullying behaviour. Researchers have argued that in order to explain and protect ourselves, people can attribute blame to victims and this can then leads to a less positive view of victims. In research with children, Fox, Elder, Gater and Johnson (2010) found that a strong belief in a just world in children was associated not only with high self-esteem but also with increased sympathy for victims of bullying.

Video Game Research

The research on long-term and short-term violent video game playing has suggested a link between this game play and the loss of aversive responses to violence and aggression, and a decrease in empathy. (Fanti, Vanman, Henrich & Avraamides, 2009; Bartholow et al 2005, Funk et al, 2004). Physiological desensitisation has also emerged in recent research following violent video game play (Staude Muller, Bliesener & Luthman, 2008; Carnegey et al, 2007; Bartholow, Bushman & Sestir 2006). Recent research has argued for a neural marker that accounts for the desensitisation that follows exposure to violent video games and an increase in aggression (Engelhardt, Bartholow, Kerr & Bushman, 2011).

Ladas (2002), suggested that violent gamers often view the opponents that they harm and/or kill in video games as objects or obstacles, and as such are not viewed as real crimes and/or harm being done to another person. Desensitisation to killing and violence following

exposure to virtual violence may explain these findings. An alternative explanation may be that this view of a virtual opponent may provide a necessary framework to allow the gamers to continue to justify the behaviour to themselves as they play. In this sense, the level of disengagement players experience can be as a result of playing or as a strategy to allow the continued playing of such games (Klimmt, Schmid, Nosper, Hartmann, & Vorderer, 2008).

Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) reject the view that gamers do not see their opponents in these games as social beings. They argue that in order to do this the gamer would be decreasing their ability to immerse themselves in the game, and thus reducing some of the potential enjoyment of the game playing experience. The researchers also argue that the process of recognising computer-generated figures as a social being may be an implicit process that has previously been found as humans have the tendency to anthropomorphise game characters (Mar & Macrae, 2006). In addition, the researchers point to key research conducted on video game engagement, that indicates humans can develop empathy towards animated characters (Morrison & Ziemke, 2005), will report feeling that they are in a social setting when such characters are presented (Hartmann, 2008), and generally will generally behave towards these characters as if they were human (Yee, Bailenson, Urbanek, Chang & Merget, 2007).

Klimmit, Schmid, Nosper, Hartmann and Vorderer (2006) have reported that gamers will describe feelings of moral concern during their game playing, while being aware that the game was fantasy. It can be argued that if participants are feeling moral concern for their actions in a game, yet they are still conducting this type of action (i.e., hurting people), then a social dilemma exists for the person. Hartmann and Vorderer (2009) again argue that this may reduce the level of pleasure that the person is getting from the games they are playing. Festinger's (1954) theory of Cognitive Dissonance argues that a level of anxiety results from a person acting in a way that is inconsistent with their beliefs and attitudes about an attitude object. In this sense, the gamer may be motivated to change their attitude and/or their behaviour in order to justify the actions that they are involved in during their violent video game play, in order to reduce this level of discomfort.

Bandura (1999; 2002) offers a similar theory of moral disengagement with four major categories of psychological mechanisms by which 'good people do bad things', including the cognitive destructuring of harmful behaviour, obscuring or minimising one's role in causing harm, disregarding or distorting the impact of harmful behaviour, and blaming and dehumanising the victim. According to Bandura, moral disengagement serves to disinhibit individuals, making negative and inhumane acts more likely, as the individual is freed from self-censure and potential guilt (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al, 2001). In this sense, it can be hypothesised that gamers who play violent video games may alter their view of victims in order to reduce their perception of harm that they can cause to virtual victims. Research with children who self-rated as involving themselves in bullying were significantly more likely to emphasise morally disengaging emotional explanations for their behaviour, than those that were not involved in bullying (Hymel, Rocke-Henderson & Bonanno, 2005).

Klimmit et al (2010) have argued that players try to avoid moral concern when playing violent video games as this can reduce their enjoyment of the game they are playing. The authors argue that players will dehumanise the characters in the video games that they are playing, in order to morally disengage from the apparent harm that they are causing as they play these games. Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) argue that there are two key mechanisms that allow players of violent video games to morally disengage as they play. One of the mechanisms is an inner reflection or rationalisation technique that the players will use to

remind themselves that they are just participating in a game, or are fighting for justice, if they experience any unpleasant internal emotions as they are acting in a violent way in the game towards another character (Klimmit et al, 2006).

Further support for the argument of dehumanising effects of video games can be seen in recent research that has found evidence of dehumanisation of people who provoked people, following the playing of violent video games (Bastia & Haslam, 2010; Greitemeyer, 2011). Bastian, Jetten and Radke (2011) argued that a link exists between engaging in video game violence and dehumanised perceptions of the self and of a person's opponent in the game. In their experimental research, Bastian and colleagues (2011) had undergraduate students play two different types of violent video games that allowed for consideration of a game where the players were aggressive against non-human characters, and one where the player is responsible for all aggression against other more human like characters. The researchers argued that in both types of games the players diminished their perception of their own human qualities, thus dehumanising themselves. They also argued that their findings suggest that players do not dehumanise co-players if their aggressive actions help the player to reach their own goals.

It has been argued that the structure of violent video game may play a key role in framing the violence in these games as acceptable (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). This may occur through portrayal of violence as acceptable through particular cues in the games such as the requirement to save the world or partake in other general justified violence. Recent research conducted by Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) explored four key cues they argue are implemented in video games to facilitate gamers to morally disengage from concern about virtual violence they are involved in (i.e., justification of violence, neglect of consequences, dehumanisation of opponents, and condemning opponents actions). The researchers argued that their results indicate that less negative affect was reported by participants when the game contained condemnable action of opponents or justification of violence. The researchers acknowledged that their research was conducted with people who had little interest in video games and thus can be seen as less frequent players of video games. The structure of video games may therefore be a key element in the reduction of gamer's feelings of conflict or anxiety as they engage in behaviour that they feel is contrary to their attitudes regarding appropriate behaviour and towards victims of crime. Viera and Krcmar (2011) argue that the structure of violent video games limit children's abilities to develop perspectives of victims and does not encourage affective sympathy in children, as any negative effects of being harmed or killed in the games are minimised ignored, or even rewarded. The graphics and realism in games have increased substantially in the past twenty years and Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) argue that research has shown that game designers will use key cues in the development of characters in games that are shown to increase our perception of the virtual characters as real, such as the displays of emotions, natural facial expressions and breathing and the use of natural sounding vocal tones. However, it can be argued that in violent games (such as war games), the opponents often have (for instance) parts of their faces hidden by masks, and may not speak. Therefore the person playing the game may not be aware of these key elements of the enemy characters that they are facing. Consequently, they may be less affected by these factors in these types of games.

Previous researchers have argued that children are less able to draw appropriate distinctions between aggression in fantasies and in reality, and that this may affect their ability to comprehend the appropriateness of the use of aggressive solutions portrayed in violent video games (Huesmann 1998; Smith & Donnerstein, 1988). Viera and Krcmar (2011) argue that

violent video game playing in children (aged 7- to 15-years) is negatively related to the ability to take others' perspectives and to sympathise with others. In their study, 166 children completed questionnaires related to perspective taking and sympathy. The children then read four scenarios where the character used violence to solve a problem and answered questions regarding if they felt the violence was right or not, as a measure of moral reasoning about violence. The stories used on the study were short and described cases where adults used either unjustified or justified violence. It could be argued that the ability to perceive the justification of the violence in these cases would be difficult for the younger children in the study.

While most of the research on video games has explored the impact of playing games and being responsible for the aggression in the games, recent research has explored the impact of also being a victim of such virtual aggression. The research reported that the impact of experiencing violence as a victim in a video game can affect player's subsequent social cooperation and player's judgments of trust in others (Rothmund, Gollwitzer & Klimmit, 2011). The researchers have argued that the impact of experiencing virtual aggression in a video game as a victim, can lead to people developing a more suspicious mind-set (as measured by lack of trust in a partner), and this is increased for people who have what they term higher levels of victim sensitivity. The sensitivity to mean intentions (SeMI) model argues that a particular personality trait (e.g., victim sensitivity) indicates a readiness of people to respond to cues that suggest to them that others may be attempting to exploit them and this leads them to engage in behaviours to reduce the opportunity of people to do this. This results in a reduction in cooperative behaviour and trust for others. In their research, Rothmund, Gollwitzer and Klimmit (2011) argue that experience of virtual aggression against participants' own characters in video games led to a decrease in trust in partners' actions and in co-operation, after playing these games (for an undisclosed amount of time in a laboratory setting). People with high victim sensitivity were more affected by the experience of virtual aggression.

The research used only male participants and explored short-term effects of video game play only, and it is unclear from the research if the male participants were long-term players of these games (as the girls were excluded due to lack of familiarity with the controls). As Weber, Behr, Tamborini, Ritterfeld and Mathiak (2009) note, there is a significant difference to be found in the research, in the amount of time that researchers have required participants to play violent video games for their research, and as their research argues each player's individual experience of playing a similar game can be very different as their choices create their own specific game content. Related research has also suggested a link between violent video game playing and decreased prosocial behaviour (Bushman & Anderson, 2009) and co-operation with others (Sheese & Graziano, 2005). The present study was designed to explore the potential impact of playing violent video games on young people's attitudes towards victim of crime. It was hypothesised that long-term playing of this genre of video games would lead to a decrease in young people's attitudes towards victims of crime.

Moderator Variables Explored in the Present Research

Exposure Level

The previous research on the effects of video games has used different levels of video game play, with some research using participants who were long-term players and others who were irregular or novice players of violent video games. The current research was designed to

explore the impact of long-term exposure to violent video games, with participant's level of violent video game exposure reported and explored in relation to their attitudes towards victims. It was hypothesised that there would be a negative relationship between exposure to violent video games and concern for victims (Hypothesis 1).

Different Victim Types

The present research was interested in exploring the attitudes people may have regarding different types of victims. The research on attitudes has mainly focused on victims of particular crimes (e.g., victims of rape, bullying, and domestic violence). The present study was designed to explore the level of concern that gamers may have towards four different types of victims: (i) general victims, (ii) culpable victims, (iii) vulnerable victims, and (iv) victims of property crimes. It was hypothesised that gamers who play violent video games would exhibit less concern for the four types of victims than gamers who play non-violent video games (Hypothesis 2).

Gender

Previous research has focused on the possible differences in effects of video games on males and female gamers. Bartholow and Anderson (2002) found significant gender effects of playing violent video games on aggression for male and female undergraduate students who were light users of video games. The researchers argued that young men may be more affected by the playing of these games than the young women who participated, although the choice of game in the research and the measure of aggression may have a confounding influence on the effects found. Recent research on the effects of violent video game playing with girls has reported that co-playing video games with a parent can lead to a positive outcome for girls, but suggested no apparent effect for boys (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Stockdale & Day, 2011).

In relation to gender differences in video game research on Viera and Krcmar (2011) found that girls aged 7- to 15-years were more likely to report higher levels of perspective taking and ability to sympathise, than boys of a similar age. The researchers argued this may be related to social conditioning, family environment and general societal reinforcing of stereotypical views of girls (Viera & Krcmar, 2011). In the present study it was hypothesised that there would be a significant gender differences in attitude towards victims' scores, with boys reporting less concern for victims (Hypothesis 3).

Developmental Aspects

Research reveals that victim-liking decreases as children get older, and the current research was interested in exploring the impact of age on attitudes towards victims, with age as a possible moderator of the effect of violent video games on young people and adults. Viera and Krcmar (2011) found that age is negatively related to perceptions of unjustified violence, and as children develop their ability to understand others' perspectives increase, although younger children seemed to sympathise more, as measured by children's responses on a four-item scale developed for the research. The researchers argued that their findings in relation to age differences suggest that that older children play more video games and are more likely to see violence as a retaliation and self-protection as justified, "much like the view of violence presented in video games" (2011, p.127). The literature on bullying suggests that victim-liking decreases with age (Menesin et al, 1997; Rigby & Slee, 1991; 1993) and pre-pubescent

students in particular report more favourable attitudes towards victims, than younger pupils (Gini et al, 2007). It was hypothesised that as children get older they would report less concern for victims of crime (Hypothesis 4).

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 206 participants (129 males and 76 females) from four different second level schools and one third level education institution, in Dublin. Ten schools in Dublin were contacted by email and telephone and four schools agreed to participate. The participants were aged between 12 and 24 years (mean = 16.85 years; SD = 2.57 years).

Materials

All materials were in the form of self-report questions and scales. The following measures were used in this research to explore attitudes towards victims and video game playing habits.

Victim Concern Scale

The Victim Concern Scale (VCS) was designed to assess levels of concern for diverse types of crime victims (Clemments et al, 2006). The researchers argued that few studies have explored attitudes towards different types of victims of crime, and (as previously discussed) the only relevant research has focused on particular types of victims. Clemments et al (2006) use of the VSC scale found that participants expressed the greatest concern for vulnerable victims and victims of violent crime. However, across all victim clusters, female respondents reported higher mean levels of concern than did men. Furthermore, there was also no relation between victimisation status (self or family member) and VCS scores. This therefore suggests that the experience of being a victim did not lead to an increase in victim concern. The Victim Concern Scale (VCS) is a 21-item scale asking participants to rate their concern for different types of victims. Clemments et al (2006) have reported a reliability score for the scale of .978. The items in the scale can be seen to be related to four main factors, or four main types of victims: (i) Factor 1: General Concern (Items 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 19, 20); (ii) Factor 2: Vulnerable or Violent Crime Victims (Items 1, 2, 7, 13, 18, 22); (iii) Factor 3: Property Theft Victims (Items 5, 11, 14, 21); and (iv) Factor 4: "Culpable" Victims (Items 4, 6, 12, 16).

The initial questionnaire was designed for use with young adults. The questionnaire was adapted in the present study for use with younger adolescents, following a pilot administration of the original questionnaire to a small sample of young people (n=10) and adults (n=8). Earlier versions of the questionnaires were piloted in a secondary school (not part of the sample for this study), and feedback on their construction was sought from the pupils, teachers and support staff who completed them. As a result of the feedback received from this pilot phase, the questionnaires were revised to form the versions described in this study.

Revision of the Victim Concern Scale for the present study

Four items were deleted from the scale due to lack of understanding for some of the younger children in the pilot study. Three items were from the General Concern Victim Items and the remaining one was deleted from the Vulnerable/Violent Crime Victims. The item 'Caucasian victim' was changed to adult victim. The word 'billfold' in item 21 was changed to wallet.

The final revised scale contained 18 items comprising: (i) Factor 1: General Concern (Items 3, 8, 9, 15, 19); (ii) Factor 2: Vulnerable or Violent Crime Victims (Items 1, 2, 7, 13, 18); (iii) Factor 3: Property Theft Victims (Items 5, 11, 14, 21); and (iv) Factor 4: “Culpable” Victims (Items 4, 6, 12, 16)

The layout of the questionnaire was also changed to use a Likert scale to indicate level of concern felt for the victims, rather than putting a number in a box to indicate level of concern. The questionnaire also contained a definition of the term concern, stating “*This questionnaire is interested in your **concern** for different people. Concerned: means to be worried about, disturbed or troubled by something.*” A demographic survey was administered asking participants age and gender.

Video Game Questionnaire

The video game questionnaire was based on one devised by Anderson and Dill (2000) to determine the participants’ video gaming habits and to assess violent video gaming exposure. The questionnaire comprised an initial page that asked students to indicate if they played any of the following games consoles: *Playstation, Xbox, Wii*, mobile phone games, and/or computer games. The questionnaire then asked participants to name their five favourite games. For each of these five games, students were then asked to indicate how often they played these games during the past week, on a Likert scale from ‘1’ (indicating ‘rarely’) to ‘7’ (indicating ‘often’). Students were then asked to rate how bloody and gory the content of the game was on a similar Likert scale and then to classify the game as either sports fantasy, educational, skills, fighting, or other. On the initial page, participants were asked to tick a box if they never played video games and to place their questionnaires in an envelope provided.

Participants’ scores for exposure to violent games were calculated by summing the participants’ ratings of how violent each video game was with how bloody/gory the game was and multiplying this by the score of how often they had played the game in the last week. These five scores were then (mean) averaged to give an overall violent video game exposure score for each participant. A higher score on this scale indicated a higher exposure to violent video games. Anderson and Dill (2000) have reported a reliability alpha of .86 for this measure.

Long-term exposure to violent video games was calculated for each participant to ensure that participants had played these games for at least one month previous to the research, and thus could be seen as long-term video game players. Participants’ scores were summed for each of the video games and then divided by five to give a mean average overall long-term exposure score for each participant.

Procedure

The first author provided initial details of the study by letter and then met with principals and teachers in the four schools to provide additional information on the study. The students who were under 16 years of age were then given consent forms to ask their parents for permission to participate in the study. One week later, a researcher returned to the school and conducted the research within a classroom setting with the teacher present in the classroom. The students from the third level institution were enrolled on a variety of first year Business and Humanities courses, and were approached within lecture and class time to ask if they wished to participate in the research.

Participants were initially asked if they wished to participate by their class teacher and the research team gave them a brief summary of the requirements (e.g., how long the questionnaire would take and how many questions they would be expected to answer). Each of the classes participating were in a mandatory class (i.e., not elective) at the time of research taking place to reduce the likelihood of self-selecting bias. All participants were informed that participation was completely anonymous and on a voluntary basis. Each student was given unique identification number and told that they could contact the research team with this identification number if they wished to withdraw from the study, following their participation. Each group were then given information sheets and consent forms to sign. The participants were informed that names and identifying information were not required and asked to complete the questionnaire as honestly as possible. They were informed that there were three questionnaires to be completed.

The students were given a large A4 envelope to place their completed form into. Each envelope contained a participant's number and all participants were asked to place this number on the top of their questionnaires. A questionnaire including the Victim Concern Scale was then administered to the students. A member of the research team explained the procedure to each group of students and explained how to complete each questionnaire, including reading aloud the printed instructions for each of the questionnaires. Participants were asked if they had any questions regarding the questionnaires and these were addressed prior to starting the questionnaires. Participants were encouraged to ask for assistance with any difficulties they had while completing the questionnaires. Once participants had completed this questionnaire they were asked to place this in their envelope and given the video game questionnaire to complete. Participants were also informed that video games referred to any games played on computers, game consoles, and handheld devices.

Once all questionnaires were completed and participants had returned their envelope, a short 'question and answer' session took place regarding video games and the resources and supports available to participants if they wanted to discuss any issues that had arisen from taking part in the research. This information was individual to each of the school settings. The participants were reminded that they could contact the research team to withdraw from the research in the future by quoting their unique participation number. All participants were given an information sheet and thanked for their time.

Results

Exposure to Violent Video Games

It was hypothesised that there would be a correlation between exposure to violent video games and concern for victims (Hypothesis 1), and that gamers would exhibit less concern for the four types of victims (Hypothesis 2). All correlations relating to violent video game exposure were carried out using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. Results showed there was a significant negative correlation between increased exposure to violent video game play and: (i) overall concern for victims (as measured by the Victim Concern Scale) ($r = -.167, p < 0.05$), indicating that high levels of violent game play were associated with lower levels of overall victim concern; (ii) concern for general victims ($r = -.302, p < 0.05$), indicating young people who played more violent video games reported less concern for general victims; (iii) concern for vulnerable victims (Factor 2) ($r = -.154, p < 0.05$), indicating young people who played violent video games

reported less concern for vulnerable victims; and (iv) a reduced concern for culpable victims ($r = -.238, p < .05$). Young people who played violent video games reported less concern for culpable victims.

Gender Differences

It was hypothesised that there would be a significant gender differences in attitude towards victims' scores, with boys reporting less concern for victims (Hypothesis 3). An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the attitudes of the male and female participants towards the victims of crime. There was a significant difference in the scores for males ($M = 60.51, SD = 11.17$) and females ($M = 63.97, SD = 12.17$) in relation to overall concern for victims ($t(205) = 2.07, p = .039$). The scores were split and the male and female scores were compared. A Pearson's correlation was conducted to explore the relationship between exposure to violent video games and concern for different types of victims. When the male scores were considered only, there was a significant negative relationship between exposure to violent video games and concern for general victims ($r = -.285, p < .001$), and for culpable victims ($r = .03, p < .05$). There was a significant positive relationship between female participants exposure to violent video games and their concern scores for vulnerable victims ($r = .279, p < .05$). There was also a negative relationship between girl's exposure and concern for general victims, although this was not significant ($r = .062, p = .59$).

As there was a significant relationship found between violent video game exposure and concern for victims, it was decided to explore this further while controlling for gender. A partial correlation was used to explore the relationship between concern for victims and violent video game exposure while controlling for gender of participants. The results showed there was a significant negative correlation between violent video game exposure and: (i) general victim concern, controlling for the effect of gender of participants in the study ($r = .238, p < .05$); and (ii) culpable victim concern, controlling for the effect of gender of participants in the study ($r = .151, p < .05$).

Age

It was hypothesised that as children get older they would report less concern for victims of crime (Hypothesis 4). One-way between groups ANOVAs were conducted to explore the impact of age on scores of concern for victims. Results showed there were significant differences between groups in relation to: (i) overall victim concern ($F(8, 197) = 2.67, p = .008$). The highest level of concern was reported by 20-year old students (mean = 67.23; $SD = 11.08$) and the lowest level of concern was reported by 12-year olds (mean = 56.4; $SD = 21.6$); (ii) overall victim concern ($F(8, 197) = 2.65, p = .009$). The highest level of concern was reported by 20-year old students (mean = 21.53; $SD = 4.08$), while the lowest level of concern was reported by 16-year olds (mean = 17.61; $SD = 4.28$); and (iii) overall victim concern ($F(8, 197) = 9.12, p = .000$). The highest level of concern reported by 14-year old students (mean = 21.09; $SD = 3.36$) whilst the lowest level of concern reported by 20-year olds (mean = 17.46; $SD = 3.03$).

As there was a significant differences found between groups in relation to the effects of age, it was decided to explore this further. The relationship between attitudes towards victims (as measured by Victim Concern Scale) and violent video game exposure (as measured by Violent Video Game scale) was investigated using Pearson's partial correlation while controlling for the age of participants. Results showed there were significant negative correlations between violent video game exposure and: (i) overall victim concern, controlling for the effect of age of participants in the study ($r = -.138, p < .05$); (ii) general victim

concern, controlling for the effect of age of participants in the study ($r = .250, p < 0.001$); and (iii) culpable victim concern, controlling for the effect of age of participants in the study ($r = .171, p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The present study examined the impact of violent video game playing on young people's attitudes towards victims of crime. The results suggest that young people who play more violent video games have less concern for general victims and for culpable victims, and these effects cannot be explained by gender or age differences in the participant sample. Young people who play violent video games also reported less concern for victims overall and for vulnerable victims and this effect was not due to age differences. However, the effect may be due to gender differences, as when gender was controlled for, the relationship between these attitudes and violent video game play was diminished. When further exploring the gender specific results, there was a significant relationship found between males and exposure to violent video games and their reported victim concern with those who played more violent video games indicating significantly less concern for culpable and general victims than other male participants who did not play such games.

With regards to age, the oldest participants in the study reported the most concern for overall victims, culpable victims, and general victims, while the younger participants reported the greatest concern for the vulnerable victims and the victims of property crimes. The literature on bullying shows that victim-liking decreases with age (Menesin et al, 1997; Rigby & Slee, 1991;1993) and pre-pubescent students in particular like victims less than younger pupils (Gini et al, 2007). The number of students who dislike victims for being weak has also been found to increase over time (Rigby & Slee, 1991). It should be noted that in the present study, an increase in age may also be associated with an increase in exposure to violent video games as children will be playing these games for a longer amount of time.

This study is the first to directly explore young people's exposure to violent video games and their concern for victims of crime, which it can be argued, they are exposed to in the scenes that they are playing in the video games. The general victims in the current study were described as adult victims, grandparents who were victims, female victims, and male victims. When taken together with the research on desensitisation effects of violent video games on gamers, it appears that although the gamers attitudes towards all types of victims of crimes were not significantly different, they do appear to have less concern for what could be considered the less serious crimes or those who they may believe may be less affected by these crimes. It is interesting to consider the role of cognitive processes in explaining the perception of young people towards victims of crime. It could be argued that following video game exposure young people are more likely to engage in defensive attributions or to attribute higher levels of blame to victims as a means of reducing cognitive dissonance. Further research is needed to explore this further.

Previous research has explored the impact of this genre of video games on young people's attitudes towards criminals (Lee et al, 2010) and towards crime. Interestingly, the present study suggests that increased exposure to violent video games is associated with a reduced attitude towards culpable victims, and this it can be argued is in contrast to previous research. The research by Lee et al (2010) suggests that violent gamers would be more sympathetic towards perpetrators and thus it could be argued towards culpable victims. But this was not

the case in the present study. This, it can be argued can be seen to be related to the fact that the perpetrators in the current study were also victims, rather than perpetrators only.

The nature of the current study does not allow for determination of causation, however, it is would be interesting to consider the impact of playing violent video games on young people's attitudes towards culpable victims as it may offer an insight into attributions made about victims generally and the attribution of blame. In this sense, long-term exposure to violent video games may be believed to lead to people developing particular views of culpability and levels of blame, with higher levels of culpability (and therefore less concern) evident as young people played more violent video games.

In a similar vein, gender differences found in the current study could be seen to be related to an increase in the magnitude of attitudes amongst the male violent gamer sample. Clemments et al (2006) found that women reported more concern for all victims described in the scale. In this sense, one would expect all of the participants to report the least concern for the general victims and culpable victims than the property and vulnerable victims, and it can be argued that the playing of violent video games enhanced attitudes that were there already. It is interesting that recent research (Coyne, et al., 2011) has indicated a positive outcome of playing video games, along with a parent, for female players while this effect was not found with male players. In the present study when only the girls were considered, there was a significant relationship found between exposure to violent video games and attitudes towards vulnerable victim groups. This may be linked to levels of empathy, as the literature indicates gender differences in levels of empathy (see for example Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Davis, 1996).

Rigby and Johnson (2006) argued that students are likely to be motivated to help individuals that they feel a level of sympathy or compassion towards. In the current study the participants may not have felt real sympathy towards the victims as they were perceived as adult victims. Future research should explore the impact of video game play on attitudes towards peers. Recent research (Rotmund et al., 2010; Weber et al., 2011) suggests that individual experiences of aggression in violent video games may be experienced differently and may affect people differently, based on their personality characteristics. Further research should consider the individual interpretation of gamers as they are playing different scenes in video games, and the impact of this on their attitudes towards victims.

There is much debate over the impact of violent video games on young people, and researchers have pointed to the validity of measures used to measure aggression in young people following game playing (Bartholow & Anderson, 2002). The present study is the first to explore attitudes towards victims of crime and to explore attitudes towards different types of victims, similar to types of victims that can be observed in video games. Recent research (Viera & Krcmar, 2011) argue that the structure of violent video games may limit children's abilities to develop perspectives of victims and thus do not encourage affective sympathy in children. The structure of games, according to the researchers, may result in the development of particular attitudes towards victims, as any negative effects of being harmed or killed in the games are minimised ignored, or even rewarded. In this sense, the impact of video games can be seen to result in the development of a less positive response to victims and to link in directly to the findings from the current study.

The main limitations of the present study can be related to the scales used. The Victim Concern Scale used in the present study was modified for use with young people, and as such

this could impact the results obtained. Future research could explore the concept of attitudes towards victims in more detail and with specific scales designed for use with adolescents. In addition, the scale used related to concern those participants stated that they had for victims. It may be argued that the questionnaire relates to one element of attitudes only, further research is needed in the area to explore attitudes of gamers in more detail. The video game survey used has been used in previous studies of video game usage but the calculation of exposure to video game violence is based on self report measures of violence and their classification of how bloody/gory the game is. It may be argued that participants may intentionally reduce their rating of these games, or that desensitisation to the material through long term exposure may reduce their perception of these games as being bloody/gory.

The use of self-report in the current study can result in reduced confidence in the responses made, due to the possible influence of systematic response distortions. However, the questionnaires were administered to adolescents and young people individually in an attempt to overcome some of these difficulties. Olsen et al (2007) argue that the use of correlation studies in the area of video game research does not develop confidence in terms of causality of an effect, and as such the present study does not allow for a consideration of the other factors in a person's life that may impact on their attitudes towards and concern for specific victims.

The findings from the current study can be seen to add key elements to the research on the effects of violent video game play on desensitisation research finding. Future research should explore the different elements of attitudes, exploring more than just concern for attitudes. It would be interesting to explore levels of attitudes towards victims in relation to beliefs about victims and levels of victim blaming with young people who are playing violent games to explore the impact on a wider element of attitudes. The impact of these games on female gamers would also be an interesting perspective to explore and the levels of identification and immersion that girls experience while playing these games.

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From Grand dad's to Grand daughter's binge drinking – A recent evolution of heavy episodic alcoholic consumption in Ireland.

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Abstract

This article is aimed at understanding how female students perceive and explain the feminisation of binge drinking among their age group in Ireland. It focuses on the responsibility of older generations as well as female students' gender and ethnic identity quests as possible explanatory factors for their increasing level of episodic heavy alcohol consumption. This empirical research was of a qualitative nature. 50 female students at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, were interviewed individually in 2011 and 2012. The findings might be of significance in order to improve the effectiveness prevention strategies implemented in Ireland to reduce heavy episodic consumption among female students.

Key-words: binge-drinking; episodic heavy alcohol consumption; female students; gender identity; ethnic identity

1. Introduction

In Ireland, heavy alcohol consumption within groups is a traditional social fact for men (Stivers, 2000). Regarding women, it is a much more recent phenomenon since it apparently started as a cultural trend around the mid-nineties and has continued to increase since. Even if binge drinking has also increased among youths throughout Europe, it is only in Ireland and in the UK that the level of alcohol use through this means of consumption are the highest (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2014).

This paper includes the expression 'binge drinking' because it is constantly used in the European media to describe youth's drinking habits. However, young people themselves barely use it and the scientific literature contains a very significant diversity of definitions for it. Therefore, the term "binge drinking" might constitute a counter-productive semantic catch-all. The definition I would suggest for it is *episodic heavy alcohol consumption performed in groups*.

How could we explain the evolution of Grand-dad Johnny's binge drinking to the heavy episodic alcohol consumption of his grand-daughter Aoife? In order to answer this question, many keys could be found in the following works by some of the greatest sociologists of the last half-century: *The Consumption Society* by Jean Baudrillard (1970); *The Risk Society* by Ulrich Beck (1986) and *The Malaise Society* by Alain Ehrenberg (2010). These might represent also a good reflection of the evolution of the Irish society in the last 20 years and a relevant overview of exogenous social explanations for the dramatic increase of female binge drinking.

This evolution is going to be considered by using the variable of the identity crisis, both from gender and ethnic perspectives. In the Irish society has experienced an absolute "cultural revolution" within the last quarter of a century. One of the main sources of suffering for many young women, would be caused by the ambivalence they feel at times in front of this double identity quest: 'What is it to be a woman?' and 'What is it to be Irish?'. I argue that

since the beginning of the new millennium, young Irish women and teenagers look for answers to these questions with alcohol or, at least, with their heavy episodic consumption.

2. Methodology (data gathering, method and structure of the paper)

This paper is based on a qualitative research conducted in 2011 and 2012 using 50 participants who were interviewed individually. They were all female students at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, and aged between 18 and 25 year old. They studied a diversity of degrees: General Business, International Business, Social Care or Social and Community Development. They were approached through different means: ITB Student Union, lecturers who accepted to act as relays and passed on messages and ‘snow balling’. I also made sure that half of my sample did not know me while the other would have had me as a lecturer. Having received about 70 positive answers, a final selection was made based on different variables: their age, level of studies, place of their main residence and if they were born or not in Ireland. From this selection process, resulted a balanced proportion of participants in terms of age, levels of study and place of residence (urban, periurban or rural, with a further repartition between socially disadvantaged areas and more affluent ones). 36 participants were born in Ireland and 14 abroad (seven in Eastern Europe and seven in sub-Saharan Africa). Recorded interviews were conducted in a meeting room in ITB over a period of seven months and all were transcribed. The interviews aimed at gathering female students’ perceptions about the following topics: the prevalence and contexts of their alcohol consumption (types of alcohol, quantity, frequency, contexts and concomitant drug use); their motivations; social, cultural and economic factors which might have influenced their binge drinking; risks associated to it; their well-being; their identity as a woman and their understanding of what being Irish meant.

This paper will present firstly a brief summary of available data in the literature regarding the prevalence of alcohol consumption in Ireland as well as findings following the analysis of what participants declared in relation to their own alcohol consumption. A brief discussion, based on both my primary and secondary researches, will then follow on the responsibility of their parents’ generation in the increase of Irish young female binge drinking. Finally, the questions of gender and ethnic identities, both at individual and collective levels, will be considered.

3. Prevalence of alcohol consumption in Ireland

The very significant growth of female binge drinking in the years 2000 must be considered within a more general perspective which is the 50% increase of alcohol consumption among the general population between 1986 and 2006. Therefore, it is not really surprising to notice that the number of alcohol related deaths have more than doubled between 1995 and 2004 (Mongan *et al.*, *Health research Board*, 2007).

Despite the increase of alcohol consumption in the nineties and the years 2000, it must be noted however that traditional pubs experience today economic difficulties. From now on, alcohol consumption tends to take place more and more outside this traditional setting that the local pub used to be. However, gigantic bars – I would like to call them ‘drinking factories’ where everything is done for ‘line drinking’ – have grown like venomous mushrooms in Irish urban centres. They don’t seem to notice the economic recession. They aim at attracting the strongest possible diversity of clients, of different age-groups, social classes and genders. In fact, public drinking places in general re-invented themselves to suit a female clientele by working for example on decors, sitting areas and musical backgrounds.

Another type of harmful competition for traditional pubs and off-licenses consists in the multiplication of alcohol selling outlets, for example petrol stations and supermarkets. The latter sell alcohol at very low prices, without making significant profit on them, in order to attract customers to shop with them. This type of competition is obviously perceived as unfair by publicans and off-license owners. For prevention specialists, this is also felt as a very worrying phenomenon, which has certainly contributed to the excessive and uncontrolled alcohol consumption by young people and the lowering of the age of binge drinking initiation. For once, prevention specialists and publicans tend to agree with the necessity of bringing back young people to local pubs.

The huge increase of female binge drinking in the years 2000 resides also in the fact that a wider diversity of alcohol is now available. The alcohol industry has perfectly understood the financial windfall that young women represent and, as for cigarettes after the 2nd World War, it uses advertising strategies where alcohol play a supposedly essential role in the construction of modern female identity, a woman now free from male domination and standing now on an equal footing, including in relation to drinking.

4. Alcohol consumption of young Irish female students

Even if across Europe young women have increased their level of alcohol consumption, only Ireland and the UK have, within the EU, a higher proportion of female rather than male students who binge drink (EMCDDA, 2011). Female students tend also to drink stronger alcohol than their male counterparts. Girls consume mainly spirits and white wine making them, beyond their greater biological vulnerability in front of alcohol, further exposed during these sessions or afterwards to a wider diversity of physical, psychological and social risks.

The modalities of the sessions are similar for most of the female students who binge drink. Therefore it seems that this means of alcohol consumption has become for them a real cultural “*habitus*” to use Bourdieu’s expression (Bourdieu, 2000). However, this cultural pattern is common mainly to the “native Irish” girls and is not shared by the girls, Irish or not, of foreign origins. These non-native Irish female students even the ones from Eastern Europe where binge drinking is culturally engrained, tend to be very critical and shocked with the levels of alcohol consumption and drunkenness of their native Irish female counterparts. One could therefore conclude that, at least for the time being, the fact of being from a foreign origin constitutes a protective factor against heavy episodic drinking, even for female Eastern European students.

Most of the female binge drinking students interviewed stated they would have on average between one and two binge drinking sessions per week during the academic year. Regarding their frequency, belonging to a certain age group seems to represent a significant variable. Most of the 18-21 students would be drunk twice a week, while those aged between 21 and 25 would tend to binge drink only once a week. However, the vast majority of the 50 participants highlighted the fact that the frequency of their weekly binge drinking sessions increased in December and during the summer.

During these sessions, the first phase of alcohol consumption that they call “pre-drinking” takes place usually between 9 and 11pm in a friend’s house (“a free-house”) where parents are absent for the night. Many of them would have had one or two drinks beforehand while getting ready. During the “pre-drinking” phase, the majority of the female students who consume alcohol declared drinking either one bottle of white wine on their own or vodka (usually between 33cl and 75cl) that they mix with sweet non-alcoholic drinks. Leaving the “pre-party” for a night-club, they tend to bring with them in their handbags a “naggin” of

vodka (a defined measure the majority of them were not really aware of and described as being between 20 centilitres and half-a-litre). They tend to drink it once in the night club in order not to have to buy too many drinks there. Furthermore, in the night-club, many of these young women will also consume on average between two and five “shots”. After the night club, a minority of them declared going sometimes to an “after” where they will continue to drink whatever they will find.

Considering that the World Health Organisation recommends a limit for women of an average weekly consumption of 14 units of alcohol spread evenly during the week, one can easily understand that the level of alcohol intake of the participants are of a serious concern in terms of public health. In fact, when the majority of the fifty female students were told of the quantity most commonly used in the literature to describe female binge drinking (four units during a session), they found it unrealistic and laughable as such an underestimation could not reflect accurately the reality of their drinking habits. What makes the matter even more concerning is that the majority of them stated that they drink less now than they used to drink when they were 15 or 16. Most of them also declared being “very drunk” for the first time when they were between 13 and 15. Such an early age for alcohol consumption constitutes a significant public health issue (Eliassen, 2009)

They tend to look for cost effectiveness, which means trying to be as drunk as possible, as quickly as possible with as little money as possible (especially for the 18-20 year olds). Along other criteria such as tastes or their desire not to gain too much weight with their drinking, the need to limit their expenditure justifies also their predilection for spirits. According to them, it is also the main reason why the “*pre-drinking*” in “*free-houses*” has become a necessary first step of the binge drinking sessions. Comparing their expenditure with their male counterparts during these sessions, they consider spending far less than the boys because the latter drink a lot of beer, pay far more rounds and consume much more drugs than they do.

The feminisation of binge drinking needs also to be related to the high increase in the poly-consumption of psychoactive substances among the 15-25 age group (NACD, 2012). It seems that Irish teenagers have a higher rate of drug use than the European average (EMCCDA, 2011). A significant minority of female students declared also using drugs regularly, particularly cocaine, ecstasy, speed and marijuana. Therefore, within the female student population, there seems to be a “sub-culture” of drugs consumption for which alcohol often played an initiating role.

Concerning the links between tobacco and alcohol consumption, many participants stated that they only smoke when they drink. Others said that they became regular and daily smokers following their habits of smoking when they binge drank. Despite the very positive and unquestionable effects of the 2004 smoking ban in pubs in terms of public health, it seems that it has become counterproductive for this female age-group. According to them, the most interesting and intimate conversations tend to take place in the cozy smoking areas of the pubs and, in order to justify being there without “*looking like an idiot*”, they started to smoke themselves.

As far as their motivations to drink are concerned, most participants declared aiming at being drunk but not “*hammered*”. They consider that it was when they were teenagers that they were deliberately looking to be “*locked*”. The reasons for getting drunk they mentioned the most frequently are “*looking for fun*” and “*making the most of their youth*”. They also feel that their drunkenness is less accepted by their parents than their brothers’ but stated they did

not really mind. Furthermore, a majority of them emphasised that girls try to get drunk more often than boys.

As for the quantities and frequencies of their alcohol consumption, their motivations seem to evolve between 18 and 25. To summarise a bit abruptly, between 18 and 20, which coincide for them with being in first and second years, they seem to experience a kind of post-adolescence phase when mainly socialization, entertainment and search for pleasure matter. Following a process of maturation, these tendencies progressively fade between 21 and 25 as the young women of that age-group interviewed seem to be much more concerned with obtaining their academic qualifications with the best possible grades and declare investing themselves much more in their studies and in a steady love relationship than a few years previously. Thus both their binge drinking and hedonistic search are being conducted now on a smaller scale compared to what it used to be.

However, some of them declare having female friends who are always looking to “*get hammered*” in order to forget their problems. If getting very drunk corresponds to an intention instead of being accidental, this desire is very different than the simple search for pleasure and coincides more with an attempt to regulate a mental suffering. On that note, several participants mentioned also that they were getting drunk in order to be “*somebody else*” and be able to do “*things they would not do normally*”. They also highlight the usefulness of being drunk in order to raise their level of self-confidence and avoid any possible guilt afterwards, in case they would have had a one night stand, argued with a friend or even got into a fight. Concerning their motivations for drinking heavily, many young women insisted on the fact that their binge drinking facilitates the socialization with their female friends. As a matter of fact, some of them assimilated these drinking sessions as a type of perilous adventure in an urban jungle in which female solidarity and friendship can be tested. The girls help each other in order to avoid falling on “moving” stairs and pavements, protect their very drunk friends, against male predators and bring them home safely.

Binge drinking seems also to be used to facilitate sexuality. The participants often emphasised the differences between the drinking motivations of girls who are in steady relationships and those who are not. Several interviewees declared that binge drinking as a sexual strategy would be particularly frequent among female teenagers between 15 and 17. It is a fact that the average age for first sexual encounters has significantly decreased in Ireland in the last fifteen years (Layte *et al.*, 2006). One could therefore wonder to what extent heavy alcohol consumption would not be used by teenagers to have sexual intercourse while they would not yet be ready psychologically (Layte *et al.*, 2006). What seems obvious is that concerns of a sexual nature and the need to perform sexually as a rite of passage exist more among younger female teenagers nowadays compared to the 1990s. Some of the students interviewed declared that, while adolescents, they felt they had to have sex in order to conform to the female peer group. They also considered that regarding their first binge drinking occasions and sexual intercourse, peer pressure, the media and their dependence to social networks were more significant causes than vertical influences such as their parents’ behaviours and viewpoints. However, parents are far from being exempted of any kind of responsibility.

5. Parents’ bad example and influence

Within the Irish media, one often hears adults being alarmed and criticizing the youth for their drinking habits, while forgetting their level of responsibility in this matter, in terms of

their lack of involvement in the prevention of youth binge drinking but also because of their own drinking habits.

Of course, the strong increase of alcohol consumption of the Irish population up to 2006 was linked to the phenomenal but short-lived economic boom of the late 1990s and early 2000. One of the most obvious social causes to the severe increase of the level of alcohol consumption among the general population was the introduction of a Mediterranean type of drinking, which was added to the traditional heavy episodic drinking. Adults started to drink wine while sitting at a dinner table. However, they also continued drinking standing in pubs.

Regarding adult women in the 1990's, the fact that they could drink at a dinner table, within their homes or in restaurants, with and like their husbands, certainly reinforced the acceptability of public female alcohol consumption. Up to the late 1980's, female public alcohol consumption was limited and not very frequent. It was often perceived as socially unacceptable for women to drink more than one or two glasses publicly. For this too, the new association between alcohol and food in Ireland played a significant role.

I argue that, except for the most underprivileged groups, the purchasing power of the Irish during the "Celtic Tiger" improved dramatically thanks to a very low unemployment rate, salary increases, financial and property speculations and a very high level of debts per capita, due to unscrupulous banks. Like expensive cars that one was going to change every two years and the supposedly exotic holidays or the purchase of unbelievably expensive houses, many Irish people who, for the first time, had access to the over-consumption of luxury goods started to use alcohol while eating as another external sign of wealth or at least as a sign of a big climb on a social ladder. These ten "glorious" years became a golden age for restaurant owners, property developers and estate agents. While for so long the pub, besides the church, had been the only "neutral" public place where people, whatever the size of their wallets, could socialize, restaurants with their expensive menus became other common meeting points for this new and self-perceived "middle-class" (perhaps more than in France, the concept of social class seems to depend a lot nowadays in Ireland on the level of purchasing power). The economic boom also generated a frantic property craze, a real "collective hysteria" as Freud might have said. This relatively recent nation-state, for so long deprived of the ability of ownership because of past colonisation and misery, became addicted to property purchasing when the opportunity rose. Once they owned a house they were proud of, many Irish people started to invite one another for dinner in their homes. These new hosts, which tended to define their new social status through what they could financially afford but also what they knew about continental European lifestyles, used wine both as an essential social and self-defining tool. Based on observation, it seemed that many people from this emerging middle-class suddenly became the 'know-it-all' of oenology. Furthermore, many started to appreciate wine, not based on its taste but on its price. A good wine had to be expensive. And considering the importance of VAT on wine, all wines sold in Ireland had to be good because all of them were expensive.

To conclude on this section in a less sarcastic and more academic way, I would say that, at many levels, during these Celtic Tiger years, Irish people attempted to act more like Europeans from the continent than Irish on an island, which up to then, had its cultural gates mainly open towards the USA and the UK. Their desire to become more European was not only due to individual aspirations to embrace the perceived cultural identity ("*habitus*") of a social class they thought having reached or because of their country's EU membership. It was also due to the fact that dozens of thousands of Irish, after having migrated in the 1980s to

societies, which were already experiencing hyper-consumption, came back home with tastes and needs acquired during their overseas years.

In this “*End-of-century*” period, this “*Belle époque*”, Ireland, feeling wealthy and desiring to enjoy it to the full, became a big party place and started to live like a singing cricket in a culture of instant gratification. Ireland suddenly became a very addictive society. However, these supposedly “great years” also became the golden age for psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts and ... psychotics. “Psycho” became a very fashionable prefix. The suicide rate among young men increased significantly, so did female self-harm, depression, anxiety and food disorders, as well as chemical and behavioural addictions. In 2008, when the economic wind turned and Ireland woke up with a big hangover, the adult population stopped singing and dancing but the youth, who grew up with their parents’ hyper-consumerism continued. The level of alcohol consumption of the adult population has been on the decrease since but it keeps increasing among the under 25, especially among the female teenagers and young women.

The feminisation of binge drinking must also be considered within the context of a strong increase of the poly-consumption of psychoactive substances, not only among the youth but also the general population. This drug consumption, whether it is legal or illegal, used for recreational or medicinal purposes, could be seen as a symptom of a society generating more and more anxiety and which requires a growing use of psychoactive crutches for its population. Once again, while drinking excessively or buying their drugs in the controversial “headshops” opened until May 2010, young Irish people might have only expressed the same need for ingesting solutions and quick fix as their parents were doing while taking alcohol in order to have a good time or their prescribed “benzos” in order to sleep and cope with a more and more stressful daily life.

Ireland, like Spain to a certain extent, has experienced in this last quarter of a century a “cultural revolution” with multiple variables. Because of the role of alcohol as a perceived and stereotyped cultural inheritance, it is logical that this product has acted as one of the catalysts of this sudden societal change. This revolution has also been a lay one, weakening the power of the Church as both a social and political institution in Ireland. The numerous scandals involving the Irish clergy significantly speeded up the decline of the religious belief among the population. Half of the Irish young women I interviewed declared that they had no religious faith or were agnostic whereas a vast majority of them declared they were not practicing.

While religious belief is dormant, the belief in consumption is alive and well. A correlation certainly exists between the loss of a religious faith and a new type of “spiritual” quest among these young women through consumption of goods to surround or to fill themselves with. This new “search for meaning” might have reinforced the prevalence of female binge drinking. Drink and drugs are not the only products they abusively consume. So is food for some of them. The level of obesity has increased lately among young Irish people but it is their drunkenness, not the fact that they might be overweight, which makes them unable to walk straight at night from Thursday to Sunday nights. In fact, one could wonder, at times, if binge drinking has not become for many young women an addiction to a behaviour - consumption - rather than a dependence to alcohol.

It seems that a relative insecurity in terms of individual and collective identity prevails among many young Irish women who are currently trying to find a way to belong. They look for entertainment. But through this compulsion to entertain themselves, they might look for

themselves or try to forget about themselves. Without leaning too much on Freud's psychoanalytical theories, the feminisation of binge drinking could perhaps be envisaged as one of the symptoms of a malaise within Irish society. Ireland might have undergone a too abrupt transition from a society regulated by a "collective neurosis" – religion – used, amongst other aims, to alleviate psychic suffering to an era of overconsumption where religious faith has been replaced by a myriad of individual neurosis and symptoms, such as excessive consumptions and addictions, also used to regulate a lack and a psychic suffering. For these young women, one cause of their possible suffering could be related to their gender identity.

6. A gender identity crisis?

Like men who used for so long their ability to drink as a way to affirm their masculinity, would the young women of this new millennium not do the same in order to redefine female roles and identity? Firstly, we could approach this gender question by considering the importance that the female students I interviewed seem to give to the perception young men have of them. If one abides to the theories of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan on neurosis – according to him, a symptom of normality – the gender question could be linked to the one the hysteric would seek to answer: "*What does he want from me?*" (Fink, 1999). These young women, who acknowledge sometimes having some difficulties to situate themselves in relation to men of their age-group, might often ask themselves this question.

Therefore, binge drinking could constitute for them a strategy aiming at facilitating the relations with the opposite sex, particularly in terms of seduction. Listening to the participants, especially those aged between 18 and 21, to be a woman at their age is still first and foremost through the young men's eyes. As the New-Zealander sociologist Antonia Lyons states: "*Girls who drink don't try to be like men; they try to be liked by men*" (2008). In fact, it would be difficult to persuade oneself of the opposite while looking at the type of clothes they wear when they get drunk. From the age of 12 and 13, their going-out outfits are ultra-sexual. In fact, they often shock the non-native female students, including the Erasmus ones.

Embracing some traditional male habits, such as an increased risk-taking, would constitute a paradox as it might express in fact an attempt to look more "feminine" and correspond to a search for a new form of female identity at this gender recomposing time. If young Irish men tend to consume much more drugs, it might be due to the fact that they are trying to drink and smoke less today compared to 15 years ago. Besides the reality of a greater availability and diversity of drugs, it could also be because drinking beer gives a belly, which is not "*cool*" to have while pumping biceps in a gym. You could also get quickly out of breath with tobacco which would make you look ridiculous on a football pitch. Men are becoming more and more concerned with their physical appearance and dressing codes. At that level, their concerns tend to be more and more what used to be attributed to women in the past. Cosmetic companies are developing male beauty products, such as eyeliners and moisturizers. Marketing campaigns have highlighted for a while now the image of the young "motherly" father playing with his toddler; the fashion industry is also designing more feminine lines and colors for male clothes. It is also perceived as more acceptable and even encouraged for men to show their feelings and sensitivity, an attitude which traditionally was perceived as feminine (Bourdieu, 2000). The macho and tough attitude is not attractive anymore as it is not really perceived as an expression of strength but rather as an expression of insecurity and psychological weakness.

Confronted by this gender “redesigning”, young women might be trying unconsciously to masculinise their behaviours as new forms of seduction strategies. The feminisation of binge drinking might correspond to one of these attempts. Drinking sessions in mixed groups might play the role of a neutral and possibly transitory ground, which would facilitate this progressive gender osmosis. Already, in Ireland, girls under 20 are drinking more than boys.

The gender ‘redesigning’ expresses itself too in relation to gender adult roles. In a society, at last, much more egalitarian than in the past – even if a lot still has to be done – young women do not feel as much subjected to male domination. Once again one could use Lacan’s nomenclature to illustrate this aspect (Lacan, 1979). From now on, the question “*What does he want from me?*” tends to be progressively replaced by the question which obsessive neurotics, traditionally mainly male, spend their lives trying to answer: “*Who am I?*” (Fink, 1999)

It is interesting to note that the vast majority of the female students do not reject traditional gender roles but try to delay them as long as possible. However, all of them give priority to their desire for a fulfilling professional career. They all want a “*good job*”. However, most of them would also like a family, consisting of a husband and children, but only while they are well into their thirties and settled professionally. Furthermore, most of them would prefer to be married to the father of their children than not. So nothing very different compared to how their mothers felt when they were their age. It is interesting to note however that the young Irish women I interviewed are very critical of the women over thirty who binge drink, especially when they have young children.

Considering that some of them have part-time jobs, they consider it is the period of life up to thirty rather than their student’s years which constitutes a type of playful and carefree parenthesis in their lives, a kind of “*social offside*” to use Bourdieu’s expression (Bourdieu, 2000). It is about delaying as much as possible adult life by developing a post-adolescence phase, which will allow them to “*live life to the full*”. They want to experience a “*total freedom*” that they feel they will lose once settled in both a professional and family life. For many of them, female adult life starts with motherhood. At this stage of their life and in terms of gender roles, it seems that they currently define themselves more as “*youth*” than as “*women*”.

Globally, their binge drinking does not seem to express a feminist political struggle, at least of the type carried by the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Their behaviours would relate more to the ones of the “*phallic girls*”, as Angela Mc Robbie described the young English women of the years 2000 (McRobbie, 2009). They are career-driven; they demand a professional, social and sexual equality but at the same time, they would seek to have a family life while experiencing also romantic love, sensuality and seduction. They want it all but wonder how they can manage it all. In a way, they are confronted by contradictions and ambivalences that they have difficulties to resolve and that force them to adopt masculine behaviours in some aspects of their lives while expressing a hyper feminine identity in others. Risk taking and heavy episodic alcohol consumption in groups would represent an attempt for these young women to resolve this ambivalence as it would allow them to prove to their male counterparts that they are their equals while trying at the same time to please and seduce them.

The feminisation of binge drinking would therefore symbolise an attempt to redefine a female identity beyond social classes. In a more and more individualised post-modern society providing a freedom of choice and where everybody is from now on obliged to construct their

own biography as it is no more imposed on them, the gender identity quest is becoming far more arduous than it used to be. Of course, this phenomenon is not specific to Ireland but it is possibly more radical than in other Western societies, such as in France, for example, which had a full 20th century - mainly the 1920's, 60's and 70's - to allow feminine condition to evolve, while Ireland would only have had a quarter of a century. However, the heavy episodic drinking of these young Irish women might also represent a means to fulfill another quest which is the one of ethnic and national identity.

7. Ethnic and national identity crisis

Once again, the ethnic and national identity crisis experienced by some Irish students of both sexes, who are not protected anymore by their insularity, could be summarized with the question: "*Who are we?*" As for gender identity, young women might also look to alcohol consumption for an answer to this question. In a globalised Western world and in a growing multiethnic and multicultural Ireland, feeling that, through binge drinking, they belong to an ethnic community might represent an easy and simple way to resolve their individual identity quest. Within this caricature of what an Irish person is or should be, alcohol, once again, is going to play a crucial role.

The links between female and Irish identities have significantly evolved in two generations. From the second half of the 19th century to the 1980s, for a significant proportion of Irish people, "being Irish" meant first and foremost being a "good Catholic". Being catholic was not only the expression of a sincere faith but also a political statement for this young nation-state in opposition to the British former coloniser and neighbour. From a social perspective, this religious affiliation was particularly vivid among women. During this period, and with a slight evolution mainly from the 1960s and 1970s, women played to a certain extent the role of representative of the priest and the church within their households. According to the vast majority of the young women I interviewed, religion has no place in the construction of both their gender and national identities. For them, it would rather be heavy and regular drinking, rather than Gaelic language or Catholic faith, which would stand up as a symbol of Irish identity.

Historically, of course Irish men were drinkers but they were not the only ones. In fact, up to recently, the Irish were far from being the people who drank the most in Europe. Grand-dad Johnny, because of a radically different purchasing power, tended to display levels of alcohol consumption which were lower than the one of his grand-daughter today. Furthermore, with 23% of the adult population who have not drunk alcohol in the last year, Ireland still has one of the highest rates of abstinence in Europe (Slàn, 2009)

Because of the enormous presence of both American and British culture in the Irish media and the communication revolution led by new technologies, this nation has lost what it had left of cultural insularity. Young Irish women might now embrace the cliché of the drinking Irish, present within the American psyche. At this level, they would react like one of Jean Genet's characters in his play *Les Nègres* (1958) who states: "*We are what they want us to be; we will behave this way until the end, absurdly*" (p.19).

Today, young Irish people, women included, would identify themselves collectively, as did generations of Irish migrants in the USA, by transforming positively a stereotype originally negative and racist in order to be accepted and survive socially in their host country. Many of these young women seem happy now to perform the role of the "female funny and drunken Paddy". For them, alcohol is no more a symbol of masculinity but a symbol of ethnicity.

In a country which is increasingly becoming multicultural and multiethnic, binge drinking seems now to create a cleavage within Irish youth by highlighting two types of subcultures: the one of the '*native Irish*', who drink alcohol heavily, and the one of the '*new Irish*', who immigrated to Ireland and who do not drink or drink a little. To a certain extent, heavy alcohol consumption would therefore express a political statement. The majority of the young women I interviewed make a big difference between the concept of '*Irishness*' and Irish citizenship. '*Irishness*' would correspond to the ethnic identity of the '*native Irish*'. They would be able to identify collectively through their ability to drink heavily, having a good time, '*live life to the full*', and joke continuously. For them, having an Irish passport does not mean being a '*real Irish*'. Therefore, it seems that they feel one is Irish in terms of ethnicity rather than in terms of nationality and it implies being able to drink. They are prisoners of simplistic clichés, which could also mean politically that they would reject more or less consciously the increasing multicultural and multiethnic face of Ireland.

However, one has to be very careful with this theory, which would make these young Irish women embracing the political theories of European extreme right wing parties. I argue that this search for a supposedly ethnic identity would rather exist as a means to finding a very simple and easily understandable way of self-identification in front the complexity of individual and female roles of today's Ireland. By using the concept of '*Irishness*', these young women I interviewed might also attempt to provide a hypothetical explanation for a drinking habit that they perceive themselves as self-harming and problematic. Despite being aware of the significant risks associated with it, this strategy would act as a form of "denial" in order to help them to avoid any form of guilt and being able to continue drinking. "*Being Irish*" might therefore act as an excuse to justify a heavy alcohol consumption they have difficulties to live without and to contain, due to the purpose it serves in their individual lives. For them, belonging to drinking groups might be more meaningful than belonging to the Irish community.

8. Conclusion

The increase of young female heavy episodic consumption is not specific to Ireland and it is a trend which is being noted throughout the Western world. However, in Ireland and in the UK this social fact has taken incomparable and unprecedented scales. While adult alcohol consumption has continuously decreased since 2006, binge drinking has significantly increased among the 15-25 year-old, particularly for girls and young women. It seems that it has become one of the main "habitus" within Irish young female culture while, according to both the participants and the EMCDDA (2011), the consumption of other types of psychoactive substances tends to progressively become as attractive as alcohol for young men.

Parents' changing attitudes towards consumption during the Celtic Tiger years, a short-lived economic boom, which also reinforced the acceptability of public female heavy episodic alcohol drinking, constituted undoubtedly one of the most significant factors in the increase of Irish young female binge drinking.

As for the general adult population, there seems to be a growing need for and dependence to psychoactive crutches among the youth to achieve a certain well-being. This might highlight a decrease of the general mental health in Ireland. Conscious motivations and types of drugs consumed might differ between the under and over 30 but this social trend seems to reveal an underlying and growing need for self-medication common to all age groups. However, this need seems particularly vivid among young women for whom the questions of both gender

and ethnic identities appear to be significant and could represent an underlying reason for the increase of their binge drinking.

This potential growing link between heavy episodic alcohol consumption and mental suffering among female students might constitute in fact one of the symptoms of an “Europeanisation” of this nation-state. A recent study.....From a modern society where the concept of community still had a real meaning, Ireland has experienced in the last quarter of a century a very abrupt transition to an over-consuming society where the individual is both a king without a kingdom and a lost subject, characteristics of what sociologists referred to as ‘post-modern’.

For a significant proportion of the participants, binge drinking is used more or less consciously as a form of self-medication and might be strongly correlated with an identity crisis, both at a gender and ethnic levels. It might be used as a tool for their search for meaning and their attempt to ‘belong’. For many young Irish women, binge drinking has become also a means of prolonging adolescence before the big jump into adult life, perceived as heavy, fun free and dutiful. In their daily lives, where communication seems to take place more and more through the means of new technologies, drinking sessions might represent for the youth one of the last face-to-face social bounds.

These findings might be of significance in terms of prevention, whether in educational settings or for media campaigns. Prevention programmes tend to aim at reinforcing protective factors more for individuals within groups than for groups as entities: reinforcing young people’s ability to resist peer pressure, helping them building a higher self-esteem and self-confidence or reconstructing their perceptions of role models (Peretti-Watel, 2009). To a certain extent, it is hoped that by influencing individuals’ perceptions, one might change youth culture. These prevention strategies adopt mainly a psychological perspective. Without denying the relevance of such an approach, this paper’s findings would suggest that a combined sociological approach would also have its merits in the prevention of alcohol and drug use, abuse and misuse. It would help children to reflect from an early age on questions such as “*What does it mean to be a woman or a man?*” and “*What does it be to be Irish?*”. Gender studies and political sociology have also their role to play in the prevention of heavy episodic alcohol consumption among young Irish people.

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Equality of access to higher education: discussion of emerging issues regarding the performance of migrants at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

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Introduction²

This paper presents the findings of a small scale study of the impact of English language competency on the performance of migrants in higher education in Ireland. It is based on a case study of a group of first year Social Studies students at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB). First, relevant terminology will be outlined before focusing on the promotion of equality in higher education by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) – the framework within which the data will subsequently be critiqued. Next, the presence of migrants in the Institutes of Technology (IOTs) will be discussed, before presenting the findings of the quantitative analysis of the ITB students' end of year results, in addition to the qualitative analysis of data from the lecturers' surveys and interviews with students. The emerging issues will be discussed before finally drawing conclusions in the context of equality of access to higher education.

Terminology

This case study considers the performance of migrants, a catch-all term that encompasses internal diversity. Migrants are hugely diverse in linguistic terms: they are not all non-native speakers of English, and amongst those who are, their proficiency varies considerably. The HEA uses the terms 'Irish' and 'non-Irish' students in referring to students at third level. This terminology does not allow for distinguishing between native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English, or between 'international' fee-paying or Erasmus students, and students from migrant backgrounds. Since ITB's number of 'international students', namely students usually resident outside of Ireland who come here on a student visa to study on a fee paying basis (Warner 2006, p.8), remains very low, 'migrants', who constitute the vast majority of ITB's non-Irish student population, are the focus of this study.

The promotion of equality of access in the higher education sector

Education systems tend to reproduce existing inequalities in the wider society and these inequalities are most evident in higher education (Linehan & Hogan 2008). Despite the promotion of equality of opportunity constituting one of the core functions of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) (2008, p.14), inequality pervades in higher education in Ireland. While recognising immigration as a 'key emerging challenge in the context of equality of education' (HEA 2008, p.37), the current *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* does not include specific action points relating to ethnicity, given the dearth of official educational data in this respect at the time of its development. This is since

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being addressed through the Equal Access Data Collection, while the study of progression in higher education considers the impact of nationality (Irish/non-Irish), as one of the student characteristics, on student progression (Mooney *et al* 2010). However, as will be discussed subsequently, the data that is being collected does not enable the identification of non-native speakers of English. The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education's understanding of the concept 'access' includes retention and successful completion, as well as entry to higher education (HEA 2008, p.14), more akin to 'equality of outcomes' than 'equality of opportunities' (Baker *et al* 2004, p.21).

Language a barrier to education

Language has been identified as a barrier to the provision of higher education opportunities to immigrants (Warner 2006, Dunbar 2008, HEA 2008). In their study on *Migrants and Higher Education*, Linehan & Hogan (2008, p.106) note 'the majority of those interviewed identified the lack of spoken and written English language skills as a major barrier to entering higher education and a fundamental barrier against fuller integration'. A lack of any systematic or integrated approach to language support at third level has been identified (Ní Chonaill forthcoming).

Migrants in the IOTs?

According to the HEA Equal Access survey of 2011/2012, the proportion of new entrants, at undergraduate level, from non-Irish ethnic backgrounds tends to be higher in the IOTs than Universities. A considerable proportion of non-Irish nationals studying in Ireland do so in the fields of Social Science, Business and Law (Census 2011). Social science programmes and business programmes are particularly well represented in the IOT sector.

The IOTs may also attract migrant students precisely because of the fact that they are different to the universities. Keogh & Whyte (2003, p.9) report on research in the UK which found that:

Former polytechnic institutions in large urban areas and subjects with a more vocational focus have a greater concentration of ethnic minority students ... this may be because such students positively decide to attend institutions which they perceive to be more 'friendly' as well as being nearer family and other support networks.

Access to IOTs

There are also more educational reasons why IOTs may take in more migrants than the university sector. It is more difficult for students from non-English speaking backgrounds to attain the points required for University programmes. An OECD policy review group noted the 'privilege of fee-paying schools in feeding universities' (2009, p.4) in Ireland and the low level of immigrant students attending these.

The disadvantage of engaging with the examinations process through a second language is also seen to impact on points, with many educationalists agreeing that students whose first language is not English may be under-achieving at Leaving Certificate level. Keogh & Whyte (2003) interviewed teachers at second level and reported a number of issues. Initially, they established a link between language and achievement: 'due to language difficulties, some immigrant students were not able to show their ability or achieve their potential' (p.48). This took on even greater importance in the area of formal assessment: 'teachers mentioned how examinations seem to test students' language skills rather than their ability or their knowledge of subject areas' (p.49). In a study by Lyons & Little (2009, p.62), teachers

identified issues for NNS both in terms of the readability of the examination papers, and issues of structure and format which prevented NNS students performing to the best of their ability.

Entry requirements

While international students may need to provide evidence of a score of 6.0 or more on IELTS - which is equivalent to B2 on the Council of Europe Framework –to enter higher education, students from migrant backgrounds only need ordinary Leaving Certificate English, which one language support teacher estimated to be achievable at a much lower level of A2 (Thompson 2010).

Keogh & Whyte (2003, p.9) note that another reason that the former polytechnic universities attracted more migrant students was that ‘these universities accept greater numbers of students with non-standard entry qualifications, and ethnic minority groups are more likely to fall into this category’. This may also be true for the IOT sector. Access agreements with FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) allow students to gain entry to undergraduate courses on the basis of points attained on Level 5 awards. Entry on to FETAC courses can be secured with minimum Leaving Certificate results or even the Leaving Certificate Applied (CAO 2013). A considerable proportion of students in Social Sciences in IOTs come through the FETAC route.

The ITB context

ITB is located in Dublin 15, home to one of the highest proportions of migrants nationwide. 23.8% of the area’s population were recorded as non-Irish nationals in the 2011 census (Ryan 2012), almost double the national average of 12% (CSO 2012). ITB’s student population reflects the diversity of its immediate catchment area: in 2012/2013 non-Irish nationals, coming from 89 different countries, comprised 19.73% of the student body (ITB 2013).

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used for this case study. A group of first year students on a Social Studies programme were purposively chosen as the sample. The students’ end of year academic results were analysed quantitatively using a two-sample t-test and triangulated with a qualitative analysis of data from lecturers who taught the students (questionnaires) and the students themselves (interviews). Lecturers for this cohort of students were asked to complete a questionnaire which focused on general issues relating to the group, on how NNS engaged with the programme compared to NS and finally on issues with written production for these students. Eight lecturers returned completed questionnaires. The NNS students were subsequently interviewed as regards their experience of the impact of English language competency on their performance.

Findings

Access

Of the 8 NNS participants chosen for this small-scale study out of a class of 77 students, 1 accessed the course following the completion of a Leaving Certificate, 2 entered as mature students and, the largest number, namely 5, entered the course through the FETAC route. In addition to highlighting the various entry routes onto such a programme, this cohort is reflective of the considerable proportion of students in Social Sciences in the IOTs coming through non-standard entry routes, such as FETAC, as alluded to above.

Identification

Lecturers were uncertain about the numbers of NNS in class with estimates from 5% to 10%. A key issue that emerged was how to pinpoint these students who are not currently identifiable through the data collected by the HEA or ITB. Most lecturers reported identifying these NNS students initially during tutorials and when correcting written work. Lecturers found this cohort of students quite diverse, both in terms of general ability and language competence, which is reflected in their end of year results. They also noted a mix of younger and mature students.

Performance: end of year results

At the end of the first year of the programme, taking into consideration both summer and autumn examination results, 4 of the 8 NNS (50%) and 53 of the 69 NS (76.8%) successfully completed first year of the programme³. The results of a two-sample t-test of students' Grade Point Average (GPA) shows a difference between the means, but insufficient evidence of a statistical significance between the two results ($p = 0.267$). However, removing the highest scoring of the NNS from the sample yielded a statistically significant difference in GPA between groups ($p = 0.049$) which suggests this as a high influence data point, and additionally suggests that the issue deserves further investigation with a bigger sample.

Issues impacting performance

As highlighted earlier, migrants are hugely diverse in terms of English language competency. In comparing NNS to NS, some lecturers commented that it was difficult to generalise as there was quite a range of abilities among the cohort. One lecturer noted: 'In spite of English not being their first language - many are mature students with better overall language skills than their NS classmates'. While all lecturers agreed that there was a significant issue with NNS students' understanding materials presented in lectures, written production was the area which caused most concern and was felt would impact most on results.

With regard to written language production lecturers noted few issues around general and specific vocabulary, but reported problems with grammatical endings, and sentence and paragraph construction. One student, aware of such problems, spoke of the impact of answering examination questions in English: 'there wouldn't be enough time for me to make some changes. You just let it be as you don't have time to make such corrections'. The higher order skills such as comparing and contrasting information, and building arguments proved far more challenging for NNS. Another student spoke of 'lack of practice' to master skills such as comparing and contrasting.

While NNS of English may have acquired adequate levels of conversational English, they may find academic work very challenging. Linehan and Hogan (2008, p.75) note evidence that: 'Even where students present with the necessary qualifications and standards, as demonstrated through tests such as IELTS, the demands of academic English were seen to be very challenging for any student for whom English was not his/her mother tongue.' One student spoke of her friends from non-English speaking countries' experience of academic writing: 'they struggle a lot, they find it very hard'. While students were seen to perform well in oral presentations, in written assignments NNS students were seen to have some issues with paraphrasing, commenting on and referencing sources, and avoiding plagiarism.

³ Only new entrants for 2012/13 who were considered in the summer and autumn examination boards were included in the study. A GPA of 2.0 is required to successfully progress from year one to year two, in addition to 60 credits.

Increasingly, we are encountering students who have completed their second level education in Ireland who may sound fluent but have considerable underlying deficits in English. Educational psychologist Jim Cummins (1984) would contend that while Basic Interpersonal Communications Skills (BICS) will be acquired by a migrant child immersed in a school setting with language support in approximately two years, it may take between five and seven years for a child to acquire Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Thus, for migrant students to successfully transfer to upper second level and higher education, they require 'longer support to achieve mastery of academic English' (Taguma *et al.*, 2009, p.9), than the two years traditionally provided at second level in Ireland. This subsequently has implications for third level. The agreement among educationalists regarding the possibility of NNS underachieving at leaving Certificate level, highlighted earlier, is also applicable to higher education. One of the students interviewed spoke of the impact of a language deficit: 'they (NNS) don't fail because they don't know but because they are not expressing themselves in the right way'. Similar to Lyons & Little's (2009) findings, students' results were not always an accurate reflection of their effort or the knowledge they had gained, as one lecturer remarked 'a number of the non-native speakers had put in a lot of work but problems with structuring their essay and an over-emphasis on direct quotations impacted negatively on their marks in their essays'.

Conclusion

While the sample of NNS for this study was very small, a number of issues have emerged from the analysis. The HEA has identified immigrants as a group whose needs merits consideration. While access to higher education does not appear to be an issue, with seven of the eight NNS coming through a non-standard entry route, the inequalities do not emerge until the end of the academic year. While the results of the quantitative analysis were not statistically significant, there was a difference between the means and 50% of the NNS did not successfully progress to second year. In terms of performance, problems regarding written production and mastery of academic English were discussed, factors which impact on examination performance. Migrant students underachieving in higher education due to language issues is a shortfall which can follow them throughout the course of their studies. Hence equality of opportunity is not being realized in terms of certain students progressing to postgraduate studies or indeed accessing the labour market. Indeed, an ESRI study found that language skills are positively linked to earnings: migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds are subjected to an occupational gap, whereas this is not the case for those from English-speaking backgrounds (O'Connell and McGinnity, 2008). While NNS have a diverse range of abilities, there is no current means of identifying those for whom English language competency is seriously impacting performance. With an increase of generation 1.5 (Roberge *et al* 2009) coming through the system this is an issue that is set to have an increased impact on the IOT sector. One NNS, referring to her four colleagues who did not progress, spoke of the need for 'early intervention' as when the results come out it is too late. Considering equality of access as including successful completion this is an area that deserves further investigation in the Irish context.

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A Minority within a Minority?

Social Justice for Traveller and Roma Children in ECEC

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Abstract

Following years of lobbying by Human Rights NGOs working with Roma and Travellers and despite centuries of oppression, Roma issues have only recently become prominent on the EU policy agenda. Similarly, Children's Rights issues, and in particular Early Childhood Care and Education, have surfaced after years of being the second class citizen to 'formal' education. Why is this happening now? This article discusses the recent policy developments in Europe regarding Roma and Traveller integration and Early Childhood Provision, drawing at the same time on the Irish experience for analysis and insights on policy and practice. We are all aware of initiatives that have been supported through EU or national funding streams which have little impact on the structures or operations of the general education or training systems. International reports highlight this deficit stating that such initiatives are unlikely to bring about the necessary ideological and systemic changes and, for this reason, their added value as well as their sustainability remains questionable. This paper concludes by arguing that that programmes like the 'eist' project demonstrate that it is possible to move on from fragmented initiatives and bring about systemic change.

1. Introduction

Following years of lobbying by Human Rights NGOs working with Roma and Travellers and despite centuries of oppression, Roma issues have only recently become prominent on the EU policy agenda. Similarly, Children's Rights issues, and in particular Early Childhood Care and Education, have surfaced after years of being the second class citizen to 'formal' education. Why is this happening now? This article discusses the recent policy developments in Europe regarding Roma and Traveller integration and Early Childhood Provision, drawing at the same time on the Irish experience for analysis and insights on policy and practice.

In May 2011, the European Commission announced a European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (European Commission, 2011, pp.173–4). The same year, the *EU Agenda for the Right of the Child* (European Commission, 2011c) and *Early Childhood Education and Care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow* (European Commission, 2011b) were published and endorsed at EU level. The focus on a Roma integration strategy is long awaited and very welcome. It is well documented that Roma and Travellers experience marginalisation across Europe. They face prejudice, discrimination and racism and ongoing disrespect is widespread. In his report on Roma and Travellers Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights states that 'efforts to secure the fundamental human rights of Roma in practice can and must be Europe's present and future' (Hammarberg, 2012, p. 224). The term Roma at EU level incorporates many groups with similar lifestyle characteristics, including Travellers. While it is good to see a new focus on *all* marginalised groups, summarising Roma and Travellers under one umbrella term is not entirely without problems, as I will discuss in this article. Questions of hierarchy and inter Roma-Traveller tensions can stifle progress and need to be addressed. The new framework strategy for Member States is complementary to existing EU legislation and policies in areas of non-discrimination, fundamental rights, the free movement of persons and the rights of the child. It is necessary to

make these links explicit in order to progress a multilayered human rights agenda for Roma and Travellers.

Early Childhood has more recently been linked to the future success of a smart, sustainable and inclusive European economy (European Commission, 2010). The framework for Roma and Traveller integration (COM, 2011c: 173/4) links their integration and development in terms of their contribution to the workforce in Europe. The vision is powerful. However, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is still an emerging sector in its own right, a marginalised sector within the education sector, raising questions as to whether these expectations are realistic. ‘High’ quality ECEC constitutes a necessary start for children from all backgrounds, but it is not a panacea for all ills in society. Historically, ECEC training has not made the connection across key human rights commitments or agencies such as the Fundamental Right Agency (FRA)¹. Making these links is crucial to inform an ECEC sector in addressing diversity, equality and inclusion, as I have argued elsewhere (Murray & Urban, 2012, p. 61). The nature of the Roma and Traveller situation requires recognition and respect across the national and local strategies, the will to lead at political level, the appropriate engagement of long standing Roma and Traveller NGOs and Roma and Traveller communities. A fundamental joining of forces at all levels is required to move from sectoral to more systemic solutions both nationally and locally. Travellers, and more recently Roma are intensely marginalised in Irish society. Examples from the Irish sector offer a space of reflection and analysis linked to recent developments in Europe.

2. An Umbrella Term

In the recent Europe policy discourse, ‘Roma’ is being used as an umbrella term to describe a number of groups, including people who identify as Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, Manush, Dom and Lom (FRA, 2012; COM, 2011: 173/4). The term is understood to include Irish Travellers. Recognition of Traveller ethnicity is contested in Ireland; however, Irish Travellers are recognised as an ethnic group in the UK (Murray & Urban, 2012). At EU level, using Roma as an overarching term may provide an efficient or handy term at policy level to describe a group of people of similar characteristics. While it is clear that this is in no way used to marginalise, it can have unintended consequences at national and local levels, e.g. Roma only organisations or Travellers only organisations invited to policy meetings at European or national levels. While Travellers and Roma have similar characteristics and associate concerns, neither are homogeneous. To avoid external and internal marginalisation, the collective voices need to be represented at policy and NGO levels in Member States and at EU level.

Language is important, and identity is of equal importance. At policy level at European and national levels, it may seem petty to raise this issue; however it is the application of the umbrella term which is problematic. If you are not named you can be excluded and marginalised within the very category in which you are identified. For Travellers, Sinti, Manush, etc., it can also assume a hierarchy (i.e. Travellers seen as a sub-group of Roma) and can, in some circumstances, lead to the further non- recognition and exclusion of Travellers or Roma, Manush, Sinti, Ashkali, Dom and Lom at European and national and NGO discussions. Setting groups against each other needs to be avoided and proactively addressed.

3. Oppression and Solidarity

Victims of oppression are not immune to oppressive behaviours, they have as their model the oppressor as outlined by Freire (1993, p.29): ‘the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed

behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor'. With funding streams linked to 'Roma' inclusion, solidarity is what is needed and not exclusion or marginalisation from within. There is already evidence of such behaviour on the ground. At a recent showing of 'A People Uncounted', a film on the Roma during Traveller Pride Week (organised in Ireland by Pavee Point in June 2012), a young Roma man was critical of Travellers and expressed concern about Traveller prejudice to Roma. The acts of individuals cannot be collectively associated with Roma, Travellers or the majority population. Roma and Travellers experience this type of collective negative stereotyping continually. Roma, Sinti, Traveller, Ashkali and Manush, Dom and Lom and their NGO representative organisations need to work in solidarity to maximise their route to appropriate inclusion

4. Roma and Travellers: the Connection

Irish Travellers and Roma are not linked by origin. Roma originate in Northwest India and speak a language called Romani. Travellers originate in Ireland and have their own distinctive languages Shelta and Cant. However, the importance of extended family, beliefs and values associated with family culture and traditions are common. Nomadism has shaped the Traveller and Roma mind-set and can be seen most strongly in their economic relations with the settled community: 'whether travel is still a current reality for any group or individual or whether it has become a deferred dream' (Liégeois, 2008 in Kenny Binchy, 2009, p.128).

Who are the Travellers?

Irish Travellers are a small indigenous ethnic group (30,000) with a nomadic tradition whose presence in Irish society was first officially recorded in the 12th century. Recent genome research has shown that biologically Travellers have been a separate population to the general Irish population for at least a thousand years (Kenny, 2011).

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002.

The legislation makes it a criminal offence to trespass on and occupy public or private property. This offence is punishable by immediate eviction; a month in jail and/or a 3000 euro fine and the confiscation of property.

When the legislation came into operation the state promised it would not be used against Travellers living on the roadside and awaiting accommodation. Instead it was to be used in instances of large scale illegal encampments. This was not the case.
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(See www.irishstatutebook.ie/2002/en/act/pub/0009/index.html)

There are large communities of Travellers globally in England, the US and Australia. The community has a long shared history with common cultural characteristics and traditions evident in the organisation of family, values, language, and social and economic life (Murray, 2002). The extended family is the embodiment of community for Travellers and not a particular geographical location. While family is also considered important to the dominant population, their notion of community is generally associated with a geographical location. In the past decade, Traveller nomadic lifestyle has been constrained through Irish legislation (Housing Miscellaneous Act, 2002 (Trespass Law)). This has resulted in considerable hardship for Traveller families. With their lifestyle undervalued and many families forced into standard housing, their practice of living with extended family has been inhibited. This has led to isolation and loneliness for many Travellers, which, in turn, has had an effect on

their wellbeing and has, in some cases, led to serious mental health concerns (Kelleher *et al.*, 2010). While not the only factor affecting mental health in the Traveller community, forced assimilation by State policy does have its ramifications. The 2010 Traveller all Ireland Health Study shows that suicide rates of young Travellers are 6 times that of the general population and account for approx. 11% of all Traveller deaths.

The criminalisation of nomadic practice means that many Travellers are living in settled type accommodation. This is not necessarily freely chosen (Kenny & Binchy, 2009). This parallels with the Roma history of nomadism and settlement.

5. Age Structure of Traveller Children and Young People

Who are the Roma?

Roma are the largest minority ethnic group in Europe. Their global population internationally is estimated to be 10–12 million and 8 million are domiciled in the EU. Like Travellers, Roma are not a homogeneous group and, similarly, their nomadic traditions have been constrained. Under Communist law in Eastern Europe nomadism was not permitted and as a consequence Roma are largely sedentary. Some operate as peripatetic nomads, which means that they travel in order to practise their trades and skills where they can (Pavee Point, 2009). In common with the Traveller community, *the extended family is central to Roma values and culture*. With the opening up of the EU and an upsurge in anti-Roma violence and discrimination (European Network Against Racism (ENAR, 2012), many Roma are being forced to move and in essence become nomadic. Many Roma families are also migrating to Western Europe, including Ireland, seeking a better life.

- 42% of Travellers are under 15 years of age, compared with 21% of the general population
- 63% of Travellers are under 25 years of age compared with 35% of the general population

Roma do not share a particular homeland, but akin to Travellers, they are a minority ethnic group and share a common ancestry of origin, history, nomadism, culture and language. Similarly, Travellers and Roma share the same experience of collective negative stereotyping and stigmatisation. However, the extermination of Roma during the 2nd World War has left a deep scar in the Roma psyche. Many Roma continue to see the dominant group and authority as a threat. In times of economic crisis, scapegoating has increased and Roma (ENAR, 2012) and Travellers (Pavee Point, 2011) have become easy targets for extremists and the far right.

There are an estimated 5,000–7,000 Roma who are legally resident in Ireland and who have come from EU countries such as Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland and Bulgaria (Pavee Point, 2009).

6. Age Structure of Roma Children and Young People

The Roma population is young: 35.7% are under 15 compared to 15.7% of the EU population overall. The average age is 25 among Roma compared with 40 across the EU (COM, 2010:133: p. 5).

7. Marginalisation, Discrimination and Racism

International organisations including the United Nations, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Amnesty International, United Nations International

Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations International Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNICERD), European Network Against Racism (ENAR), the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA, EU_MIDIS, 2009), Council of Europe (2012) and others are highly critical of the treatment of Roma in Europe, as they are of the treatment of Travellers in Ireland (Hammarberg, 2012). The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) produced the *Data in Focus Report (2009)*: the first comparative EU-wide data on different ethnic minority groups' experience of discrimination: it supplied statistical data showing that a substantial proportion of Roma is affected by high levels of discrimination (FRA & UNDP, 2012)

Historically, Roma have been subject to sterilisation, slavery, genocide (5 million Roma were killed during the Holocaust) and banishment. In the current economic crisis, they continue to be subjected to segregation and assimilationist policies in education in many European countries (Rorke, 2012). Mac Greil (2011, p. 144) in his comprehensive work on prejudice in Ireland raised concerns about the level of negative attitudes towards the 'Romanians' (Roma) in Ireland today and warns of 'the seeds of discrimination against this ethnic category present in his research findings. In a report on his mission to assess the human rights situation in Ireland, Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2007), stated that:

'Travellers have been subjected to discrimination and racism in the fields of education employment, housing, health care, media reporting and participation in decision-making.

and further stated that he

'... considers it essential that Travellers are effectively protected against discrimination and racism under national and international law.' (Council of Europe, 2007)

The European Commission acknowledges that 'Roma in Europe face prejudice, intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion in their daily lives. They are marginalised and live in very poor socio-economic conditions (COM, 2011c: 173/4). The EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2011) has catalogued the multiple discrimination and disadvantage experienced by Roma, including difficulties when they migrate to another EU Member State. Roma experience problems with border/visa officials, including demands for bribes by corrupt officials, when leaving and/or returning to their countries of origin. Traveller marginalisation and oppression have been documented in Ireland by many, including Mac Greil (1997; 2010; 2011) and in Europe by the UNICERD, UNCRC and the Fundamental Rights Agency (Murray & Urban, 2012). The Commissioner considers it essential that Travellers and Roma are effectively protected against discrimination and racism under national and international law. He further recommends that Member States 'take proactive measures so that Roma and Travellers are given a real chance to overcome a long history of exclusion' (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 223).

8. Integration Strategy: an embarrassing response

The findings in the FRA (2011) and Council of Europe (2012) reports raise key questions about the real impact of previous and current social policies concerning Roma in employment, housing, healthcare, social services and education and human rights protection in Member States. The type and high levels of discrimination against Roma and Travellers are incompatible with the founding values of the EU (FRA & UNDP, 2012). Will the European (my change) (Roma) Integration Strategies of Member States change the face of Roma and Travellers in the EU?

Already, the European Commission and the European Roma Policy Coalition have strongly criticised the Member State strategies, revealing that ‘many of them [are] so deeply flawed that they cannot even be regarded as a first step forward. They reflect a complete lack of political will. Such complacency is neither acceptable nor sustainable’ (European Roma Policy Collation (ERPC) Chair, 2012). The Commission has also called on Member States to address discrimination ‘convincingly’ and ‘to ensure that anti-discrimination legislation is effectively enforced in their territories’ (ERPC, 2012).

9. The Local Context

The Irish National Strategy for Travellers and Roma (2011) is an example of a flawed strategy. It simply reiterated and summarised strategies that are already in place. Despite calls for action and in light of the findings, a recent All Ireland Health Study ‘Our Geels’ (Kelleher *et al.*, 2010) funded by the state under the Traveller health strategy has made no progress or impact for Traveller wellbeing to date. All education supports have been cut to Travellers in the past 2 years, despite evidence that they have begun to progress, albeit slowly, in education. Significantly, there is no reference to early childhood education and care.

The strategy also cites examples of initiatives which have already had their funding cut i.e. the mediation service Pavee Point (2010). It gives examples of initiatives such as an internship programme ‘Not like Us’ for young Travellers in State offices, led by the Taoiseach’s Office (Prime Minister’s Office) (2006). The programme was very successful but was never mainstreamed by the State. It also largely ignores Roma in the document and only briefly mentions the community under education linked to gaining proficiency in the language and employment and housing. There is no mention of Roma under Health despite the Health Service Executive (HSE) child protection concerns (Pavee Point & HSE, 2012) emanating from the abject poverty Roma families from Romania and Bulgaria are living in as a consequence of two state policies: The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS, 2007) exemption order and The Habitual Residence Condition Act (HRC, 2009). Habitual residence is a condition, which applicants must satisfy in order to qualify for certain social welfare assistance payments, including Child Benefit. This is provided for in law through the Social Welfare Consolidation Act (2005). Habitual residence essentially means that an applicant must be able to prove a close link to Ireland. Five factors are considered to determine habitual residence:

1. Main centre of interest
2. Length and continuity of presence
3. Length and reason for any absence
4. Nature and pattern of employment
5. Future intention.

Pavee Point have noted that ‘the application of HRC is having a disproportionate and devastating impact on Roma in Ireland and raising serious human rights concerns’ (Pavee Point, 2012). The need for Roma from Romania and Bulgaria to have work permits is a major barrier to gaining employment and participating in employment activation courses and ultimately meeting the HRC. Many Roma are unable to meet the criteria set out to determine habitual residence often because they live with extended family, language challenges on form filling and fear of giving information to the State because of previous experience of discrimination.

10. Begging is not Part of Roma Culture

Roma families and their children find themselves in a very vulnerable position in Ireland. Unfortunately, it has resulted in some Roma from Romania and Bulgaria begging to survive. This subjects the families to verbal abuse and sometimes violence and reinforces negative stereotyping in the minds of the dominant group. It is important to note that many Roma frown on the practice of begging. It is *not* part of their culture (Pavee Point, 2012) and many are forced to do so in difficult circumstances caused by lack of access to employment or social protection services.

In 2008, a young Roma woman Marioara Rostas (17 years) was abducted from the streets in Dublin and murdered. This young woman and her family were living in abject poverty on the outskirts of Dublin. Their only means of survival was to beg on the streets. Professionals working with Roma are concerned about the extent of the deprivation some Roma families are experiencing as a result of not qualifying for social welfare assistance.

The poverty in which families find themselves as a consequence of the HRC is leading to concerns for children by social workers. They have reported feeling very frustrated, as they are obliged to provide services in order to protect children but are not resourced to do so. As part of a consultation with HSE professions working with Roma families, they revealed ‘if it wasn’t for the poverty, there wouldn’t be a child protection issue at all’ (Pavee Point, 2012, p.21). There is no mention of the difficulties faced by Roma regarding the HRC in the Irish strategy for Roma and Travellers.

Pavee Point has called on the State to revise the Irish strategy in close cooperation with Roma and wider civil society and to:

- review existing strategies in relation to Travellers;
- develop new strategies in areas where there are currently gaps; and
- develop new strategies for Roma. (Pavee Point, 2012).

11. Discrimination and False Promises

Roma and Traveller children as a human right require succinct action from EU Member States to address *the negative stereotyping of the Roma and Traveller communities*, their exclusion from appropriate education, including ECEC, and of families from the formal economy. The Irish Integration Strategy does not address stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination or racism in any comprehensive way. Experience from the ground in Ireland from NGOs shows that a minority of Traveller families bought into the promise that education would provide opportunities for work in the formal sector. Their children remained in Second Level education to completion in sometimes very hostile environments (M. Joyce, personal communication, 2012). Many were disappointed. Their experience has shown that discrimination hinders their ability to move forward in the formal economy. Many young people openly applied for work and were rejected. Others hid their identity to gain employment, some successfully. However, their experience when their identity was exposed was exclusion, demotion or loss of employment. Some of their younger siblings, having observed this experience, have chosen to leave formal education at junior certificate level (15) to work in the Traveller economy, working in the markets, with horses, scrap, tarmac, etc.

12. Internalised Oppression

Roma and Traveller stereotyping and prejudice are so deeply rooted in European culture that they are often accepted as fact (ENAR & ERIO, 2011). Unpacking the absolute disdain that Europe and many Member States have regarding Roma and Travellers requires a systematic approach to tackling attitudes, values and respect for diversity in society at all levels (FRA, 2010; COE, 2012; UNICEF, ESO, BFPSSI, 2011; Bennett, 2012; Pavee Point, 2012; Murray & Urban, 2012). Traveller and Roma life chances will not improve significantly if most children grow up with negative stereotypes embedded and Roma Traveller children grow up in a hostile world in which they embody internalised oppression. Internalised oppression is insidious. People who experience it can believe that the negative messages that they are receiving are true. This leads to mixed feelings about who you are and can curtail your ability to form a strong sense of your own identity (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010). It can mean that you believe the stereotypes about yourself or your community or that you adopt the majority culture's standards, or believe that those in the majority are superior. This internalisation can lead to underachievement and low self-esteem. It can also lead to rejection of your own identity and or resistance to your own community. This may mean that you blame your own community and use the language and stereotypes of the majority to undermine or blame it for the position in which it is.

The shadow of the oppressor is cast over you if it is your lived experience and informs your life experience. Whether it is that you desire the role of the oppressor as an individual and as such subsequently undermine your own community or on the other hand you accept your position and are bound to the role of oppressed and believe that you have no power and your status cannot be changed (Freire, 1993). The negative effects of discrimination and oppression begin early in life. Lessons learned early have harsh consequences for life chances and relationships between communities. Freire (1993, p. 29) argued that 'to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognise its causes, so that through transformation they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity'.

This applies to the oppressor and the victims of oppression. Transforming the disease that is racism and oppression is the challenge that affects all members of society and at this moment all EU Member States. It has acute relevance for the Early Childhood profession, and understanding how oppression works, its links to power, culture clashes and negative outcomes is a necessary competence (CoRe, 2011) for working with Traveller and Roma children and families. It also has direct relevance to working with children from the dominant group and their understanding of difference.

Who are the Actors?

The main protagonists searching for a 'fuller humanity' (Freire, 1993) have come from the NGO sector working with Travellers and Roma for decades. More recently, there are new actors entering the field from foundations and organisations with no former brief or experience of working with Roma or Travellers. With the European 2020 strategy focusing on delivering growth that is: *smart*, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation; *sustainable* and *inclusive*, with a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction (European Commission, 2010) the door has opened. There are many who see that there is an opportunity to support the Roma/Traveller issue and this is to be welcomed. However, the emergence of experts on Roma and Traveller issues must be seen through a critical lens. There are many examples of research and initiatives *on* Travellers and Roma that have not supported, empowered or benefited the communities. There is, however, a need for

new actors and persuasive voices. The ECEC sector must address the political and social context in their training and practice and link with Roma and Traveller organisations. Traveller and Roma organisations must be broader in their outlook and focus on ECEC in their lobbying and policy submissions. The general tendency of NGOs is to focus on what is considered formal education and neglect the ECEC sector. How the new merge with the established will be critical in moving forward for Roma and Traveller communities. The recognition of the experience and expertise, particularly from organisations that have worked in partnership with Roma and Travellers, will be vital. In the current environment, it may be seen as an opportunity for funding to work with Roma and Travellers and in particular with Roma.

The question is; how can we ensure real benefits to both Roma and Traveller communities when the European focus shifts? Roma and Traveller representatives, NGOs, regional and local stakeholders need to be part of the drive and discussion. Roma and Traveller voices must be at the centre of the process: *'Nothing about us, without us'* (OSF, UNICEF, REF, 2012, p. 3)

13. Identity and Social Justice

Roma and Traveller children are a minority within a minority and suffer all the ill effects of marginalisation and exclusion in line with their community, (Murray, 1997). This leads to restricted opportunities in society and has a detrimental effect on the self-esteem, physical and mental health, educational attainment and pride in Traveller and Roma culture. Early childhood services have a role to play in building confident identities of children who are marginalised and experience discrimination. How might they do that? The Early Childhood sector has not had a history of looking at diversity and discrimination or indeed addressing the needs of children holistically or systemically (Murray & Urban, 2012). Practitioners lacking appropriate direction or training have approached diversity by celebrating festivals, food and music, taking a multicultural approach. In Ireland, practitioners have tended not to celebrate the 'cultural' aspects of the Traveller community nor address discrimination, but rather have avoided addressing Traveller identity so as not to draw undue attention to the child's perceived negative identity.

A 4-year-old Traveller child came home to his grandmother and asked her 'Am I not a Traveller any more'. When she enquired she discovered that his preschool teacher had suggested that he should not tell the other children he was a Traveller, as they wouldn't play with him (Traveller parent, 2009).

Practitioner's awareness of the negative perception of Travellers in society can put them in a protective position for the child and they deduce that it is best for all to not mention Traveller identity. What are the consequences for the Traveller child when the practitioner chooses to protect? In another example from practice addressing diversity and equality issues openly what do we find when we open space for Traveller children to express their identity.

A Traveller boy came to our service. He was a bit boisterous and the children were talking about how 'bold' (naughty) he was. We had undertaken diversity and equality training and introduced the Family Wall to the service. Everyone brought in photos and in came the Traveller boy's photos. He had a horse in one of his photos. Wow was the response of the children, 'do you have a horse' He retorted: I have loads of them.

We discovered that this little boy had a wealth of information about horses. All of a sudden he moved from a negative position to a positive position in the setting. We realised that we had not tapped into his home knowledge, his background and his identity. We were not recognising the qualities and knowledge this Traveller child had and could bring to our setting. We changed the environment to ensure his interests were evident (i.e. variety of model horses and books on horses, model halting site) and he could express himself (Practitioner, personal communication, 2009).

Children's rights are paramount in ECEC service provision. It is welcome although overdue to see the EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child (European Commission, 2011, p. 60) emerging at EU policy level (see Maria Herczog in this issue, pp. 542–555). Iram Siraj Blatchford in her address at a recent ECEC conference in Dublin (Start Strong, 2012, www.startstrong.ie/) opened with the statement 'Early Childhood is fundamentally about social justice and fundamentally about equality'. It is rare to hear this in the discourse of ECEC. On the other hand, there is no lack of commitment from the sector to equitable practice for children and families. So what is the issue? The discussion in ECEC COM: 66 'Providing all Our Children With the Best Start for the World Tomorrow' and the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (COM, 2011c: 173/4) largely relates to bridging achievement gaps and workforce development for the EU economy.

‘. . . ECEC can close the gap in social development and numeracy and literacy achievement between children from socially advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, and so break the cycle of low achievement and disengagement that often leads to school drop-out and so to the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next (Com, 2011:66: pg. 6) . . . ECCE can also support integration into society, generating well-being, and contributing to employability when . . . adults. (2011, Com: 66: pg. 4).

Is this the understanding of social justice and equality we need to instil in ECCE training and practice. Is it the aim of ECEC to focus on closing the education gap or is our work broader and about addressing something bigger? How do we generate this understanding in ECEC training and practice? The Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (COM 173/4) acknowledges that in *'spite of some progress achieved both in the Member States and at EU level over the past years little has changed in the day-to-day situation of most of the Roma' (p. 4)*. Why is this?

14. Towards Systemic Action

We have discussed the evidence from some key EU Documents and NGOs of endemic discrimination linked to consistent poverty and marginalisation of Roma and Travellers. We know there is a multifaceted challenge to shift the position of Travellers and Roma in Member States. As acknowledged by the Commission (2011, COM: 173/4), there is a need for 'strong and proportionate measures' to be put in place to address the social and economic problems of the Roma and Traveller communities.

How can ECEC contribute to the route to social justice and equality for Roma and Traveller children? In the first place, the deconstruction of these concepts in ECEC must go beyond respecting difference, cultural information, conflict resolution and the perception of the deficit of the 'other' and move to a more critical reflection on the recognition of privilege, oppression and the elimination of injustice. Understanding and working with diversity must

go beyond seeing Travellers and Roma as ‘disadvantaged learners’ who need more literacy and numeracy interventions.

ECEC trainers need to be explicit in their understanding of social justice and equality concepts and in the transference of the same to ECEC learners. This understanding should include awareness of one’s own privileged position, recognition and understanding of the consequences of oppression, enabling practitioners to see the bigger societal picture, supporting the development of empathy for and with Traveller and Roma families, recognising the contribution Traveller and Roma families and children have to offer to ECEC services, recognising injustice and actively address discrimination. Practitioners require the competence (DECET, 2011) to engage with those experiencing oppression and injustice and to have a vision of a world free of injustice (Gorski, 2009). Training and practice must transfer the intention of policy documents to practice and that means critically assessing the concepts (Murray, 2001, 2006) behind the policies and the language used to convey meaning. Learning about and respecting difference are important and should be part of our natural curiosity, but it is not necessary to know in detail about different cultural or background differences to treat people equally (Lane, 2008). Social justice, diversity and equality issues are about and relevant to *all* adults and children. This is why ECEC can play a crucial role in countering hierarchies of culture and backgrounds.

The European Union has influenced ECEC in Ireland. The targets set in Barcelona in 2002 and reinforced in 2009 by Education Ministers setting a benchmark for ‘at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education to participate in ECEC by 2020’ (2011, COM: 66 pg. 2). Most recent is the Universal Free Preschool Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (OMCYA, 2010) for children of 3 to 4 years for 3 hours per day 5 days per week. The sector has also developed 3 comprehensive frameworks: Síolta National Quality Standards Framework (2006, CECDE or Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)), Aistear Curriculum framework (NCCA or National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 2009) and the national Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers OMC: Office of the Minister for Children (2006). Funding for the mainstreaming of these documents is limited and support for professional development, i.e. time for practitioners for in-service training, is not supported through any funding initiative.

One initiative funded under Dormant Accounts² by the Department of Education and Science Education Unit, which is situated in the Offices of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, titled *Preschool Education Initiative for Children from Minority Communities* is making a difference. The initiative is rolling out Diversity and Equality Training ‘*Ar an mBealach*’ (Murray *et al.*, 2004, 2011) developed by the ‘*éist*’ project in Pavee Point and the Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network (EDENN) (www.pavee.ie/edenn). The project focuses on attitudinal change and the competences of the adult in addressing social justice, equality and diversity for both majority and minority children and adults. The ‘*éist*’ project has systematically linked their early childhood training to Irish equality legislation, the work of FRA, UNICERD, UNCRC, the EU Commission and the Council of Europe and the Diversity and Equality in Early Childhood Training and Education (DECET European Network) principles. The national project is working with 32 county child care committees and 450 practitioners. It is currently being evaluated (September 2012). However, preliminary results show that attitudinal change is contributing to ‘high’ quality practice. This programme supports mainstream training and practice to address social justice and equality issues in ECEC. The approach could potentially also be a way forward in other countries.

However, we are all aware of initiatives that have been supported through EU or national funding streams which have little impact on the structures or operations of the general education or training systems? The EUMC report highlights this deficit, concluding that such initiatives ‘are unlikely to bring about the necessary ideological and systemic changes and, for this reason, their added value as well as their sustainability remains questionable (EUMC 2006 in UNICEF, European Social Observatory & Belgian Federal Planning Service (Ministry) for Social Integration, 2011, p. 16).

The key issue here is that programmes like ‘*éist*’ demonstrate that it is possible to move on from fragmented initiatives and take systemic change seriously. ECEC is a complex system involving practitioners, training institutions, research, and policy-making at local, national and European levels. All elements of the system need to be equally qualified. Initiatives at EU level must be transferred into national and local policies, into training and practice, just as practitioners’ experience and local situations should inform national and European policy. The need for systemic change is beginning to be accepted at European level. This is evident in the EU-funded CoRe research project (see Urban, Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2011, and in this issue, pp. 508–526). Based on European research, CoRe outlines the conditions for developing competent systems and has developed recommendations for policy and practice at individual, institutional and governance levels.

15. Afterthought⁴

The Treaties that governed Bulgarian and Romanian accession to the EU in 2007 provided for a 7-year transition period before nationals of those countries could have full access to the labour markets of other Member States. At the time of writing this article, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation lifted the restrictions on work for Romanians and Bulgarians. This means that from now on Roma from these countries will not need a work permit to work in Ireland. It also means that immigrant will be in a position to partake in Community Employment Schemes. This is a welcome development. Monitoring of the benefits to Roma will be necessary (www.djei.ie/press/2012/20120720a.htm).

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⁴ NOTES

1. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is an advisory body of the European Union. It was established in 2007. It helps to ensure that fundamental rights of people living in the EU are protected by collecting evidence about the situation of fundamental rights across the European Union and providing advice, based on evidence, about how to improve the situation (fra.europa.eu/).
2. Dormant Accounts are accounts in financial institutions (banks, building societies and An Post) that have not been used, or insurance policies that have not been used, or insurance policies that have not been reclaimed by their owners for at least 15 years.

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Community Education and the Labour Activation Challenge

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Abstract⁵

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008 and the subsequent recession in Ireland and indeed across Europe, public discourse in politics, society, academia and media has focused on explaining the crisis as well as looking for solutions to the crisis. In the context of the Irish recession now in its fifth year, with unemployment at 13.6% or 435,357 (Central Statistics Office, 2013) there is understandable urgency across all sectors to find ways out of the crisis. It is against this backdrop of Ireland's fall from the dizzying heights of the celtic tiger years to the depths of the celtic crash, that all sectors of the state are being mobilized 'to mending the pieces of a fractured society, (and to fix) a broken economy' (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011). The further education and training sector is at the forefront of efforts to support individuals and communities devastated by the loss of jobs, unemployment, and fear for the future. Further education and training (FET) is one of the options to which people turn following life altering events such as job loss. It has also been the port of call for many who are starting out on job search. Community education located as part of FET includes both formal and informal provision delivered in community centres and education centres predominantly through Education and Training Boards (formerly VECs). If the government are seeking solutions to the crisis, they might consider the approach and positive outcomes happening in community education involving community education facilitators, tutors, facilitators, participant learners, volunteers, community workers and activists. This literature review presents evidence of the contribution community education is making and can continue to make toward employability and labour market activation in Ireland. Community education is considered here within lifelong learning policy and research and considers a number of practice examples from the field. The literature is examined here under three headings; policy, research and practice. The review covers EU, Irish and UK policy, research and academic studies across all three headings. The literature considered here reveals the role and space occupied by community education. It points to the contribution it makes in empowering people to grow in confidence in their own employability and engage with the labour market whilst contributing to politicized and collective active citizenship. The research question which this literature review will seek to address is: In what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008 and the subsequent recession in Ireland and indeed across Europe, public discourse in politics, society, academia and media has focused on explaining the crisis as well as looking for solutions to the crisis. In the context of the Irish recession now in its fifth year, with unemployment at 13.6% or 435,357 (Central Statistics Office, 2013) of which long term unemployment is alarmingly high at 8.4% or 180,500 (Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, 2013), there is understandable urgency across all sectors to find ways out of the crisis.

⁵ This is an edited version of the full article which was published by the Community Education Facilitators Association in 2013 and is available on the CEFA website (www.cefa.ie).

The impact of Ireland's bailout and adjustment programme with the troika (IMF, ECB and EU) is widely documented elsewhere in the print media. Public spending on areas such as health and education have not been spared the cutbacks in public expenditure, however there is a broad commitment to protect programmes which work with unemployed people. Whilst there has been a general commitment by government to protect the most vulnerable in society, at the same time, there is evidence that some programmes have been disproportionately affected by cutbacks (Harvey, 2013, 2012, NESC, 2013).

It is against this backdrop of Ireland's fall from the dizzying heights of the celtic tiger years to the depths of the celtic crash, that all sectors of the state are being mobilized 'to mending the pieces of a fractured society, (and to fix) a broken economy' (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011). The further education and training sector is at the forefront of efforts to support individuals and communities devastated by the loss of jobs, unemployment, and fear for the future.

Further education and training is one of the options to which people turn following life altering events such as job loss. It has also been the port of call for many who are starting out on job search. In the context of achieving savings in the state's public finances, the Irish further education and training sector is currently undergoing a major reconfiguration. As community education is located within the further education and training sector these changes are likely to have some bearing on the work. That said, community education has stayed close to the grassroots communities irrespective of the institutional configuration under which it receives its funding. What is important is that its role be recognised, its contribution valued and maintained in the midst of the crisis. If the government are seeking solutions to the crisis, they might consider the approach and positive outcomes happening in community education involving community education facilitators, tutors, facilitators, participant learners, volunteers, community workers and activists.

This literature review presents evidence of the contribution community education is making and can continue to make toward employability and labour market activation in Ireland. The literature is examined here under three headings; policy, research and practice, reflecting the range and type of literature available. The review covers Irish, UK and European policy, research, reports and academic studies across all three headings. It must be said at the outset, that adult and community educators across the sector from academics to practitioners have railed against a narrow focus on adult and community education which sees its role as meeting the needs of the economy and employers or at the service of the state in providing skills training. Such a narrow focus is rightly rejected by the sector. Several commentators in the UK and Ireland have cautioned against such a narrow instrumentalist view of adult, community and further education in general (Crowther, 2013; Finnegan, 2008; Connolly, 2007; Brady, 2006; Thompson, 1996). Those working in the sector assert the social purpose origins and meaning of adult and community education which is about empowerment of marginalized individuals and communities for collective social and economic transformation. It is political and asserts democratic participation and focuses on social justice outcomes. Commenting on Scottish government policy on further education for over-16 year olds, Crowther exemplifies this broader vision of education:

What is needed is a vision of education which makes a vital contribution to a humane, democratic and socially just society as well as a thriving and sustainable economic life. (Crowther, 2011, p. 15)

Therefore a literature review exploring the connection between community education and employability and the labour market agenda may appear to implicitly accept an economic agenda. However, what is presented here demonstrates that community education is neither rejectionist or disengaged from economic reality, but rather it is fully engaged whilst warning of the dangers of narrow policy making which would discard the social purpose dimensions of community education.

The literature considered here under policy, research and practice headings reveals the role and space occupied by community education. It points to the contribution it makes in empowering people to grow in confidence in their own employability and engage with the labour market whilst contributing to politicized and collective active citizenship. The research question which this literature review will seek to address is:

In what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?

The reader may find it useful to treat this literature review as a repository where they can dip in and out at different sections or places without the need to read the entire document.

2. Policy

Introduction

In general terms, lifelong learning, as a concept and set of actions received an important boost through the focus placed on it by the European Union institutions. In the first part, we consider these policies. From the *Lisbon Strategy 2000* to *Europe 2020*, the EU has produced a number of significant policy platforms in the area of lifelong learning, adult education, vocational education and training, and recognition of informal and non-formal learning, to name a few. In this section, these policies will be considered with a view to locating the space which community education occupies in European policy.

The second part will consider the development of lifelong learning policy in Ireland against the backdrop of the current economic, unemployment and jobs crisis. Education and training is one of the sectors tasked with addressing the crisis. The dimensions of the crisis itself and the key labour activation and jobs policies pursued by government necessarily impact on how programmes such as community education working with those who are unemployed and vulnerable groups respond to the current challenge. These policies; labour activation, action plan for jobs, lifelong learning and active citizenship will be considered in this part.

Europe: Growth, Jobs and Social Cohesion

The place of lifelong learning is well secured in European Union policy making. Whilst there is debate about the orientation of the policy in terms of the balance between an economic purpose orientation and a social purpose orientation, it is clear that lifelong learning is gaining greater recognition as a crucial concept and set of actions with potential to bring about a sustainable economy and cohesive society across Europe. There is a slightly different emphasis between EU and Irish understandings of lifelong learning. In the EU context lifelong learning encompasses all learning, formal, non-formal and informal from the cradle to the grave, whereas the Irish understanding tends to focus on adult learning.

Lisbon Strategy 2000

The goal of the Lisbon Strategy agreed in 2000 was ‘to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world capable of sustaining more and better jobs and with greater social cohesion’ (Council of the European Union, 2000). The strategy was revised in 2005 with a greater focus on growth and jobs (Council of the European Union, 2005). Framed at a time of prosperity with falling unemployment across the EU, the Lisbon Strategy set out to meet the challenges of globalisation, an explosion of information and communication technologies, and the continuing challenges of racism, xenophobia and gender inequality (Europa, 2013a). Yet, when reviewed in 2005, there was still a problem of long term unemployment across the EU and the EU Commission assessed that the strategy was not delivering on its promise. One aspect of the revised strategy was to ‘invest more in human capital by improving education and skills’, and an intention to adopt ‘a community(EU) lifelong learning programme’ committing member states to ‘submit national strategies in this area in 2006’ (Europa, 2013b).

Europe 2020

Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010) setting out a strategy for ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ commenced in 2010 against the backdrop of the collapse of many of the economies of European member states, mass unemployment and negative growth across the EU. From an education and training perspective, the strategy includes three initiatives of relevance; ‘youth on the move’ education focusing on youth preparedness for the labour market, ‘an agenda for new skills and jobs’ to empower people to develop skills throughout the lifecycle, and ‘European platform against poverty’ (EC, 2010, pp. 3-4). Identifying targets for reductions in early school leaving and increasing tertiary participation, Europe 2020 makes generalised headline statements on lifelong learning, for example, ‘80 million people have low or basic skills, but lifelong learning benefits mostly the more educated’ (EC, 2010, p. 16). An increasing demand for high skills will replace the demand for low skills, therefore people in the EU will need to upskill and reskill for a probable longer working life.

ET 2020

Whilst Europe 2020 sets the overall agenda, there is greater detail relevant to community education within the *ET 2020 Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* (Council of the European Union, 2009). The aims of this policy are to promote; lifelong learning and mobility, quality, efficiency, equity, social cohesion, active citizenship and entrepreneurship in education and training. There is an assumed compatibility between these aspects, something critical commentators would question. However, the focus on lifelong learning is welcome and for community educators, this policy is consistent with much of the work happening in this field. The most relevant target for lifelong learning stated is that ‘by 2020 an average of at least 15% of adults (age group 25-64) should participate in lifelong learning’ (Council, 2009, p. 7). The figure for the EU 27 member states in 2011 was 8.9%, with Ireland’s rate at 7.1% (Eurostat, 2011).

Crucially, for community educators, ET 2020 states that the further development of education and training systems across the EU should ensure ‘sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue’ (p. 3). Notice how these are to happen in tandem, an indication that the EU places significant importance on the social Europe as much as the economic Europe. Furthermore, lifelong learning is viewed as a ‘fundamental principle’ and ‘covers learning in all contexts – formal, non-formal and informal’ (Council, 2009, p. 3). In the otherwise crowded space of formal accredited learning in schools, colleges and institutions, community

education provides that haven of non-formal and informal learning in a community-based context. One of the strategic objectives of ET 2020 is to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.

‘(to) enable all citizens irrespective of their personal, social or economic circumstances, to acquire, update and develop over a lifetime both job-specific skills and the key competences needed for their employability and to foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue’

(Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 4)

Community education in Ireland has traditionally occupied this space in providing a first step or re-entry into education for individuals and groups affected by multiple disadvantages. The courses are based on the needs expressed by the group or community and are provided using a ‘personalised learning’ approach (p. 4). These courses all contribute to employability and increased social capital and networking in the community.

European policy on lifelong learning

Adult learning defined as learning which takes place following completion of initial education received a fresh impetus when the European Union agreed the *council resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning* (Council of the European Union, 2011). This policy is entirely consistent with Europe 2020 and ET 2020, therefore it is not intended to repeat this content here. Suffice it to say that the renewed agenda seeks to ‘promote personal and professional development, empowerment, adaptability, employability and active participation in society’ (2011, p. 3). It is worth noting that the council communiqué sounds a word of concern at the gap between the rate of adult learning participation 8.9% in 2011 to the target of 15% in 2020. As a starting point toward further education and vocational training for many adults, community education approaches will contribute to meeting this target.

European policy on non-formal and informal learning

At a time when the currency of educational credentials is very much prized and to a large extent determines future employment, how is non-accredited informal and non-formal learning to be valued? The recognition of informal and non-formal learning is something which the European Union takes seriously. In 2012, the Council of the European Union adopted a ‘*council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning*’ (Council, 2012). Again, this is part of the Europe wide co-operation on education and training under ET2020. As the returns⁶ for community education in Ireland make clear, 5% of the 55,000 participants gain a full accredited award, therefore the majority of programmes are non-accredited informal and non-formal courses.

‘knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low qualified’.

(Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 1)

⁶ Data obtained on request from the Department of Education & Skills (unpublished) and provided to the Community Education Facilitators Association based on the returns provided by CEFs in Ireland (CEFA, July, 2013)

The EU recommendation defines formal learning as that which ‘takes place in an organised and structured environment’, leading to ‘the award of a qualification’ (Council, 2012, p. 5). Non-formal learning is defined as taking place ‘through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives and learning time)’, involving a student teacher support, for example, ‘in-company training’ such as ICT (p. 5). Informal learning refers to ‘learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support’ (p. 5). Examples of the latter offered include. ‘skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work’ (p. 5) or home management.

Backing up the recommendation, ‘*common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning*’ had been agreed already among member states (Council, 2004). Six principles were identified; the purpose of validation, individual entitlement, responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders, confidence and trust, impartiality, and credibility and legitimacy. These common principles have provided a framework for individual countries in the EU to organise their recognition systems. The latest recommendation expands on these common principles and are listed below (Council, 2012, p. 3). Validation systems for non-formal and informal learning must include the following elements; (i) identification of learning outcomes, (ii) documentation of learning outcomes, (iii) assessment of learning outcomes, and (iv) certification of the results of assessment in the form of a qualification and/or credits. Research and practice aspects of non-formal and informal learning will be considered in those sections later in this review.

Ireland: Unemployment, Activation and Education

In Ireland, two key policy drivers, one on the welfare to work side and one on the job creation side of public policy have a significant influence in shaping the response to unemployment and the jobs crisis across all areas including education. *Pathways to Work* (Department of Social Protection, 2012) sets out government policy on labour market activation. The focus here is on returning unemployed people to the workforce as soon as possible. The *Action Plan for Jobs* (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2012) details specific actions to meet the government’s target of ‘100,000 more people in work by 2016’ (p. 7). The requirement that 40% of new jobs be filled by unemployed people on the live register is evidence of a level of joined up thinking between both policies and their respective departments. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is also a key policy shaper in this co-ordinated response to unemployment and the jobs crisis. These policies are outlined below.

Pathways to Work 2012

Pathways to Work (DSP, 2012) commits the employment services of the state to greater ‘engagement with and support to the unemployed’ (p. 5). Making reference to hitherto ‘passive’ engagement between state employment services and people on the live register, resulting in long-term unemployment and deskilling (p. 10), this new strategy is more active. Employment services are responsible to provide supports to the unemployed person and in return the unemployed person is responsible for engaging with the supports on offer. There is a particular focus on the long term unemployed and supporting their return to the labour market through a job, education or training. Three targets are set out to 2015; 75,000 of the currently 180,000 long term unemployed to be employed again by 2015, the average time on the live register to reduce from 21 to 14 months, and, by 2015, 40% of jobs filled through the state employment services to be filled by people on the live register (pp. 8-9).

The key aspect of *Pathways to Work* policy from an education and training perspective is in relation to the second strand ‘greater targeting of activation places and opportunities’ (p. 14). 75,000 FAS/SOLAS training places and 180,000 further education places (delivered by VECs / ETBs) are provided for in 2012 (p. 16). The government is ‘committed to maintaining the resourcing of these programmes’ (p. 16) despite the need to reduce overall public spending. However, the objective for this spending is clearly spelt out:

‘we will target these resources to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes with a view to delivering a greater focus on keeping the unemployed close to the labour market. We are reviewing training and further education options so that employment prospects for participants are improved.’ (DSP, 2012, p. 16)

An integrated approach underpins the call for ‘structured consultation’ between the reconfigured National Employment and Entitlement Service within the Department of Social Protection and SOLAS (the new training body to replace FAS) and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in relation to ‘the development and delivery of education and training programmes to meet the needs of those on the Live Register and national skills needs’ (DSP, 2012, p. 21). More specifically, and directly relevant for further education and community education is the plan to implement protocols between NEES, SOLAS and the VECs (now Education and Training Boards), to ensure unemployed people can be referred to ‘suitable education and training opportunities’ (p. 21).

As indicated above, reconfiguration of employment services features in *Pathways to Work*. Based on an OECD recommendation in its 2009 review of activation policies in Ireland (Grubb, Singh & Tergeist, 2009, p. 137) which highlighted a perceived weakness in the separation of activation and welfare functions between two to three departments, FAS employment services have now been integrated within the NEES in the Department of Social Protection. The changes are also welcomed by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC, 2011, p. 4).

In summary, *Pathways to Work* is a succinct and clear statement of strategy to address unemployment by moving from a passive approach to an activation approach. It sets clear targets and broad approaches to achieving these targets.

Action Plan for Jobs 2013

The National Action Plan for Jobs was first published in 2012 (DJEI, 2012) and will be published annually in the lifetime of the current government. It is a much more expansive document than *Pathways to Work*. For example, a detailed table for the 2013 action plan sets out 333 separate actions, a timeline for each action and a named body responsible for its delivery. However, the document does not give any breakdown of the 100,000 jobs to be created, and how many jobs are expected to be created for each action. Furthermore, there is no apparent monitoring system to either count the jobs or measure progress toward the target, apart from high level quarterly meetings of the relevant ministers. That said, the plan does include some actions which are relevant to the FE sector and fit neatly with the function areas of community education.

Before focusing on these, the plan for 2013 (DJEI, 2013), as was the case in 2012, seeks to create conditions for the generation of jobs through seven themes; competitiveness, indigenous business, entrepreneurship, community and local level employment, attracting foreign direct investment and specific sectors (p. 9). The plan also outlines seven, what are

termed ‘disruptive’ or ‘cross cutting reforms’, namely; data analysis, ICT skills, business licence simplification, trading on-line, Jobs plus incentive to employers to recruit a long-term unemployed person, energy efficiency and life sciences / health innovation.

Returning to community education’s role within this plan, the most relevant section ‘supporting employment at community and local level’ (DJEI, 2013, pp. 102-107) identifies the establishment of ‘socio-economic committees’, the ‘local and community development programme’, ‘rural development programme’, ‘youth unemployment’ and ‘volunteering’ (p. 103) as fields of employment creation. These are all part of the repertoire of community educators. Community Education Facilitators have already built strong links with the Local and Community Development Programme and bring education expertise to support young people and adults along the education pathway in these areas of disadvantage. Specifically, the *2013 Action Plan for Jobs* describes action 227, that ‘through the LCDP, we will continue to work towards increasing access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural activities and resources’ (p. 105). The community education sections of the VECs have a record in delivering such actions and will continue to do so under the new Education and Training Boards.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

The role of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is to advise government on future skills needs and labour market trends in the economy. Based on this, the group also advises government on ‘priority education and training requirements’ (EGFSN, 2012a, p. 5).

Replacement jobs in manufacturing are up to 5,000 annually and the future skills requirements are in the areas of medical devices, bio-pharma, food and beverages, ICT hardware, engineering and consumer products sector. Engineering skills needs are in areas such as validation, polymer, quality, automation and supply chain engineering (p. 6). A more useful analysis provided by EGFSN is their annual vacancy overview. The data is drawn from adverts in the Jobs Ireland (FAS) and irishjobs.ie websites. Most of the vacancies were not new jobs but due to turnover and replacement. The sectors featuring most frequently were industry, IT and financial services, and demand for language proficiency, German and French (p. 7). The national skills database and the national skills bulletin also provide useful data on trends in skills needs. There are skills shortages in ‘sales and related occupations, including marketing (especially digital marketing) and customer services roles, IT professionals, science and engineering professionals, business professionals, administrative occupations, IT associate professionals, and personal care occupations’ (p. 9). The relevance of community education as the first step in supporting participants to develop generic employability skills which may lead to future work will be considered in the research and practice sections of this review. The expert group also provides a profile of the characteristics associated with being at high risk of unemployment, ‘male, non-Irish national, younger than 25, holding at or below lower secondary level qualification, and having formerly worked in construction’ (p. 9).

Participation rates in community education

According to statistics provided by the Department of Education and Skills and compiled from returns submitted by Community Education Facilitators (CEFA, 2013), 55,415 mainly adults participated in community education in 2012 (75% Women, 25% Men). Whilst the majority of community education was non-accredited, non-formal and informal, approximately 2,600 FETAC awards were achieved in the year. 11,529 (20%) of participants declared as unemployed, and a further 27,151 declared as ‘not in the labour market’. The number of participants who were unemployed increased from 11% in 2009 to 20% in 2012.

The CSO special survey on lifelong learning undertaken in 2008 (CSO, 2010) includes data on participation for non-formal and informal learning as well as formal learning. The CSO report on lifelong learning in which people participated the previous year; 5% formal, 20% non-formal, 23% formal and/or non-formal and 55% informal (p. 1). Participation in lifelong learning is highest for the employed (31%) followed by the unemployed (25%). Crucially, the higher the level of educational attainment the higher the participation rates in informal education. The significance of these statistics is that they demonstrate that community education is particularly adept at engaging unemployed people and those outside the labour market in non-accredited, non-formal and informal education.

Irish policy on lifelong learning

Building on the emergence of community education as a distinct sector within Irish education since the late 19th century, the White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (Department of Education and Science, 2000) was the first official policy document which recognized community education within the Irish education system. The White Paper presents two definitions of community education (DES, 2000, p. 110). Community education is defined in two ways in the white paper, firstly, as ‘an extension of the service provided by second and third-level education institutions into the wider community’ (p. 110), and secondly, as ‘a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and collective level’ (p. 110). It is both in and of the community and has a ‘collective social purpose and inherently political agenda – to promote critical reflection, challenge existing structures, and promote empowerment’ (p. 113). Whilst some aspects of the policy outlined in the white paper were delivered, namely the appointment of community education facilitators, allocation of a dedicated fund, other aspects remain to be delivered, such as governance and committee arrangements as well as a technical unit.

Irish policy on community education

In 2012 the Department of Education and Skills issued *Community Education Programme: Operational Guidelines for Providers* (DES, 2012) to the Vocational Education Committees. The guidelines set out the definition of community education located ‘outside the formal sector’, ‘fostering empowerment’ and ‘contributing to civic society’ (p. 3). The programme is explicitly targeted at local groups, both area-based and issue-based with a ‘particular emphasis on reducing educational and social disadvantage’ (p. 4). Adults with low or no formal educational qualifications, the unemployed, one parent families, Travellers, older people and homeless people and many other groups are the focus of the community education programme. The programme provides them with a step ‘to more active community involvement or certified learning’ (p. 4). ‘Intensive outreach work is a key method’ employed in the programme. The guidelines have regard to the current high levels of unemployment, and target particularly ‘the low skilled, the long term unemployed, under 35s and those formerly employed in construction, retail and manufacturing’ (p. 5). These sectors have experienced significant job losses since 2008.

Community Education Facilitators Association: position paper

The Community Education Facilitators Association launched their position paper *Community Education: Enhancing Learning, Fostering Empowerment and Contributing to Civic Society* in November 2011 (CEFA, 2011). The paper sets out a collective view on the core principles and ethos of community education and a shared focus on the future direction of the work in Ireland. The paper is inspired by the ‘transformation in individuals and communities’ which community education facilitators have experienced in their work over the past decade. The paper outlines a clear vision of community education; the philosophy and ethos, the

objectives, the methodology of the work, the role of the facilitator and tutor, the pedagogical approach, and the target groups.

The unique feature of this way of working is the possibility of engaging people at four levels in the one course, personal development, community development, social analysis and political participation (p. 4). An example is illustrative. An art course will contribute to personal development, enabling expression, a way of relaxing, and develop creative skills. The images painted or etched may raise themes in the community enabling dialogue about life in the community. These can become the spark for deeper analysis of issues in the locality and contribute to confidence in taking action at a political level.

CEFA identify four key issues arising for community education in Ireland (i) the need to value and reassert social purpose as well as economic or labour market purpose in line with EU policy, (ii) the need to improve knowledge, research capacity and measurement systems to further capture the value of community education, (iii) to improve the targeting of community education for particular marginalized groups, and (iv) to strengthen partnership with local and community development and ensure its support at inter-departmental level also (CEFA, 2011, pp. 9-13).

The paper concludes with seven specific proposals on the path forward, only one of which has been delivered namely, the Department of Education operational guidelines for community education. The remaining proposals acknowledge resource constraints at this time, nevertheless, a ring-fenced budget and a dedicated community educational technical unit is called for as well as a working group tasked with agreeing indicators for measuring outcomes and tracking progression. Given that other sectors have dedicated inspectorates and curriculum development units, the scale of numbers now participating in adult and community education merit similar supports at Department of Education level.

Infrastructural change in further education and training

In 2013, the government has reconfigured the infrastructure supporting further education and training. FAS, the state training and employment agency, is being disbanded. Its job placement services have been moved to the Department of Social Protection as stated earlier. Its training function will be moved to 16 Education and Training Boards (formerly 33 VECs) in 2014. SOLAS a new Further Education and Training Authority will be established to co-ordinate and fund the wide range of training and further education in Ireland with the Education and Training Boards being responsible for delivery of the programmes in local areas. These changes arise from a reconfiguration mooted by the OECD (Grubb, Singh & Tergeist, 2009, p. 137) and other commentators for the purpose of enabling a more co-ordinated approach.

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) has a vital role in informing policymakers about the impact of budgetary, welfare and employment policies on the unemployed. The INOU marked their twenty fifth anniversary in 2012 in the midst of yet another unemployment crisis. The hope back in 1987 was that the INOU ‘wouldn’t have a 25th anniversary of the organisation’ (INOU, 2012, p. 31).

The twin objectives of the INOU namely ‘decent jobs for all’ and ‘proper living standards for jobseekers’ (p. 7) were recalled at the twenty fifth anniversary conference. The conference report sets out the role proposed for education and training in tackling the unemployment crisis. The conference called for ‘quality training to be at the heart of every labour market

initiative' (p. 3). This is relevant in the roll out of Intreo offices where unemployed people may be assisted in finding jobs and the establishment of the new Education and Training Boards.

Prioritise training with strong links to the labour market as this tends to enhance employment prospects. However, for some participants this may not be an accessible option so training should be provided based on the person's needs. (INOUE, 2012, p. 4)

Putting people on courses which are not appropriate to their needs is counterproductive. The conference heard that quality adult education should include a good matching of courses to the needs of individual learners and provide 'good programme supports', as well as 'good quality tutors' and 'flexibility to take into account the life circumstances of the adult participants' (p. 4). Finally, it should pave the way for progression to a job or further education and training.

Considering that 80% of those who are unemployed are without a qualification (p. 4), the implicit message community educators can take from this conference report is that community education can provide a vital link for people on the pathway to future work.

Conclusion

What is clear from this review of EU and Irish policy on the role of lifelong learning in relation to labour activation and employability is the status which non-formal and informal learning occupies in EU policy. It clearly has a key role in the future development of Europe both in economic and social terms. Ireland is some way off the target participation rates set out by the EU for the adult population. The development of the new Europe is not solely the business of accredited formal education but also requires non-formal and informal learning. Clearly, this orientation in EU policy should have a positive impact on Irish policymaking in lifelong learning and further education and training in general. Labour activation policies which are integrated and focused on the best interests of people who are unemployed depend on a co-ordinated approach involving a number of partners including the further education and training system of which community education is an important part.

3. Research

Introduction

In this section, research on the most relevant aspects of community education and its impact on employability on labour market activation will be considered at European, UK and Irish levels. There are a number of strands in the literature which have a bearing on the question posed at the outset of this literature review, *in what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?* These include the wider benefits of lifelong learning, recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the employability outcomes of lifelong learning. The research and academic studies assembled in this part are drawn from Europe, UK and Ireland. The purpose here is to identify those studies which point to the contribution which community education as non-formal and informal learning does make to enhancing learners's employability and labour market readiness.

Europe

Cedefop: Researching the wider benefits of lifelong learning

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) is an agency of the European Commission which provides information, analysis and research on education and training systems across EU member states. Though the focus may be on vocational education and training, the work of Cedefop informs further education and training and is relevant for our purposes in community education. In recent years, Cedefop have pursued a useful theme in researching the social and non-market benefits of vocational education and training. This review considers the conclusions of two of their studies in this area.

Cedefop's 2013 publication *Benefits of vocational education and training in Europe* provides a summary of Cedefop's research into the market and non-market benefits of VET since it commenced its enquiry in 2008. The report recognises the comparative lack of research into the non-market or social benefits of education compared to the market or economic benefits.

The Cedefop study argues that there has been too much focus on the potential of education and training to develop human capital to the exclusion of social, cultural and identity capital. These forms of capital make an important contribution to the economy and society also. However, it is solely human capital defined as the 'stock of knowledge, skills and competence' acquired by individuals which has been fully recognised in measurement terms. Human capital in market terms is measured in 'higher wages' and 'improved job and career prospects' (p. 20). In other words, only the economic or market benefits in terms of human capital are worthy as outcomes of an education process. This misses the important contribution which social capital, defined as social networks between groups of people, cultural capital, defined as educational, linguistic and functional competence in human groups can make to the economy. These have tended to be overlooked as outcomes of education. The Cedefop review makes several conclusions and those which are most directly relevant for this literature review are the 'non-market benefits' (p. 26) of continuing vocational education and training (VET). These benefits are variously described as 'better health' (p. 6), 'longer lives', 'more satisfying leisure time' (p. 17), positive effects on children in the learner's family 'which can lead to higher levels of education for children' (p. 17) and 'greater civic responsibility which can lead to stronger and more stable democracies' (p. 18). Cedefop research has found the non-market benefits accruing to individuals include 'civic competences' and 'improved health-related behaviour' and 'political interest and interpersonal trust' (p. 26).

For individuals, non-market benefits are commonly measured by positive psychological effects on individuals' motivation or attitudes, such as increasing self-esteem and self-confidence, especially among unemployed people.

(Cedefop, 2013a, p. 26)

In the European context, continuing VET equates to non-formal and informal lifelong learning and is therefore most closely aligned with community education in the Irish context. The conclusion of chapter three in the Cedefop study outlining the benefits of VET makes an important final point.

This argues for investment in VET being directed not only by economic considerations but also by social (market and non-market) returns. The problem lies in expressing the value of social (market and non-market) returns in money terms to make their scale visible. (Cedefop, 2013a, p. 31)

Clearly, the economy and monetary return from VET is a dominant paradigm of our time. Yet this ignores the social return from VET. There is a danger that if no direct monetary gain in terms of a wage can be demonstrated from participating in VET or non-formal and informal learning including community education, then these courses will be considered less a priority by cash-strapped governments. It is for this reason that VET, particularly non-formal and informal lifelong learning including community education are forced to put a monetary value on outcomes which are hard to quantify in monetary terms, i.e. empowerment, confidence, self-esteem.

An earlier study *Vocational education and training is good for you* (Cedefop, 2011) describes the direct benefits to the labour market associated with the social benefits of vocational education and training (VET), quite apart from the economic benefits. This report examines the premise that:

'positive VET experience, promoting individual's self esteem, confidence and agency (self-directedness), skills which are becoming extremely valuable in the labour market, should enable labour market success. It should lead to further learning.'

(Cedefop, 2011, p. 9)

EU perspective on recognising non-formal and informal learning

Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) document much of the thinking and rationale underpinning the EU's policy on recognising informal and non-formal learning. The validation of this kind of learning is 'very much related' to the Lisbon agenda of a 'knowledge-based economy' which places lifelong learning at the centre of 'competitiveness, employability, individual fulfillment and self-development' (p. 69). An overarching vision informs this recognition:

The purpose is to make visible the entire scope of knowledge and experience held by an individual, irrespective of the context where the learning originally took place. For an employer it is a question of human resource management, for individuals a question of having the full range of skills and competences valued and for society a question of making full use of existing knowledge and experience.

(Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004, p. 69)

Colardyn and Bjornavold document the efforts undertaken by Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) to undertake an inventory of recognition practices across member states as well as the quest for agreement on common principles discussed earlier. The Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council, 2012) discussed earlier is the culmination of this work.

Britain

National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

Over the past two years quite a number of articles published in *Adults Learning*, the periodical of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, make the case for continuing public investment in adult and community education in all its forms, formal, non-formal and informal (Thomson, 2013; Spear, 2012, Sedgmore et al, 2010). This is seen as especially important in a time of economic and social crisis. The articles have been in response to the UK government's spending reviews since 2010.

More benefit than cost

Thomson (2013) argues for a rebalancing of the education budget to allocate more to the post 25 year age category, i.e. adult education. The raising of retirement age and increasing older population are proffered as reasons. He refers to the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills report *Measuring the economic impact of further education* (DBIS, 2011) in making his case:

vocational qualifications delivered in the workplace, and apprenticeships delivered a return of £35 for every pound spent. Similarly, if spending on offender learning reduces recidivism there will be a saving in the criminal justice system.

(Thomson, 2013, p. 5)

He also acknowledges the difficulties in measuring the ‘full value of adult learning’ (p. 5) and mentions the New Economics Foundation model, *social return on investment*, as well as NIACE’s own econometric approaches, and the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (p. 5). These are discussed further in this literature review. He concludes with a warning to government that cutting public expenditure on adult learning would be ‘counterproductive’, leading to ‘higher costs in other areas of public expenditure such as health, welfare benefits, criminal justice, and social cohesion’ (p. 5).

Adult learners’ week and employability

Spear (2012) reflects on the difference which the annual Adult Learners’ Week in Wales is making in terms of value and impact in public spending terms. Spear poses the question ‘how does adult learners’ week get people back into work?’ (pp. 4-5). The focus of the campaign is on those most ‘hard to reach groups’ (p. 5) and half of the 25,000 participants have ‘little or no (prior) learning’ (p. 5). Acknowledging that ‘the post-16 policy arena is dominated by the skills agenda, with preparation for work being the main show in town’ (p. 5), he argues that it is important to provide a wide variety of ‘appealing activities’ to encourage people to take up learning again. Taster courses such as ‘First Aid for Parents’ or ‘Healthy Cooking on a Budget’ (p. 5) are not to be dismissed as they are vital to someone taking the first step back into learning toward employment, ‘particularly those who may lack confidence’ (p. 5). Developing confidence he asserts is ‘a critical employability skill’ (p.5).

Safeguarding adult learning from cuts

Following the 2010 comprehensive spending review (UK Government) which safeguarded or ring-fenced the adult and community learning budget from the overall 25% cut in further education, Sedgmore (2010) welcomed this protection, but expressed some concern at a decision to withdraw free tuition to entry level awards ‘a first step on the ladder of employability for many people’ (p. 9). Bolshin (cited in Sedgmore et al, 2010) similarly welcomes the protection, but feels the devil may be in the detail of the safeguard. He refers to cuts in adult learning emanating from other government departments, for example projects such as ‘Take Part’, ‘Learning for Community Involvement’ or ‘Tackling Racial Inequality’ (p. 11). Furthermore, cuts in local council budgets could result in closure of local services ‘including those for adults, as well as libraries, theatres, museums, village halls and community centres’ (p. 11), precisely the venues where adult learning needs to take place. Jarvis, Berkeley and Broughton (2012) point to the importance of locating provision in the community, and this is also a central tenet of community education.

Adult learning and dealing with unemployment

Uden (2009) reflects on the cycles of growth and recession and the impact on unemployment. He argues that in the face of this recession, it is important to know 'who the unemployed are going to be this time' (p. 24). The assumption that the unemployed are 'predominantly unskilled' needs to be debunked. Having previously contributed to a REPLAN programme from 1984 to 1991, Uden has some experience of previous unemployment crises. Some aspects have not changed, 'unemployment is a debilitating experience and without help, work habits, self-confidence, even motivation, can ebb away if it persists over time' (p. 24). Key employability skills may be lost and Uden names these as generally agreed by employers as 'personal and interpersonal skills and basic IT skills' (p. 24). His observations are worth emphasizing:

Learner-centred adult learning is a key way of instilling and maintaining these skills. Employability skills cannot in themselves easily be turned into a curriculum and 'taught'. Adult learning, if allowed to be flexible and learner-centred, can help people gain or maintain these 'softer' skills, which are key to employability.

(Uden, 2010, p. 24)

Measuring the social benefits of adult and community education

Translating the positive impacts of adult and community education into an econometric format which appeals to decision makers is relatively new and not easily done. Whilst community educators are more convinced by narrative and qualitative testimony from learners themselves about the benefits of community education, much of this new quantitative language will seem unfamiliar and barren. Yet, at a purely pragmatic level, if it contributes to maintaining the level of resources for the most vulnerable groups during hard times, then it is more likely to be embraced, albeit with some reluctance. Three such measurements are considered below.

The first measure outlined in the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skill's research paper on *measuring the economic impact of further education* (DBIS, 2011) was to assess precisely that by developing a 'model' to assess the impact of further education on 'providing people with the skills they need in the labour market' (p. 2). The calculation in the BIS paper is based on a 'net present value' NPV (p. 5) of the difference between benefits and costs of participating in further education calculated over the person's working life. Benefits are expected to accrue in terms of increased wages and increased employment for those participating in further education compared to those not participating. Costs to be deducted in the calculation include the public funded costs e.g. tuition, a portion of centre overheads, state support for fees and foregone costs e.g. the productivity value of employment time is foregone where time is spent on a course.

Taking the most basic courses 'Basic Skills' and 'Developmental Learning' in a range of FE courses provided in the UK, the NPV for someone who completes this level is £47,000, and the NPV for every one pound of state funding spent providing the course gives a return of £25 (p. 9). The research findings conclude that 'the NPV of qualifications started in 2008/09 is estimated to be £75bn over the years in which successful learners remain in the workforce' and represents a return of around '£35-£40 per pound of funding' invested by the state in further education (p. 5).

The second measure comes from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the UK who also embarked on quantifying the value of adult learning in recent years. Fujiwara (2012) presents an analysis of the effect of adult learning on different domains in life. The

four domains are; health, employment, social relationships and volunteering (p. 1). He uses a *well-being valuation approach (WV)*. Not only does this study present the model which is similar to the NPV model above, but it also presents the results ‘proving’ the impact of adult learning.

The Well-being Valuation (WV) approach estimates monetary values by looking at how a good or service impacts on a person’s well-being and finding the monetary equivalent of this impact. (Fujiwara, 2012, p. 1)

In this research, Fujiwara analysed standardised data collected as part of the British Household Panel Survey (equivalent to the Quarterly National Household Survey in Ireland). The WV methodology relies on statistical formulae and regression analysis and therefore is unlikely to be useful for community educators who are by and large not statisticians. Fujiwara reports that ‘adult learning, as measured by people’s participation in part-time courses, has positive effects on all four domains’ (p. 12). Results are reported in terms of statistically significant positive benefits. Focusing on employment, for our purposes in this literature review, ‘taking a part-time course in the previous year has a statistically significant positive effect on the likelihood of someone being employed in the current year’ (p. 12). Similarly, taking part in a course increases the likelihood of volunteering by 4% which is also statistically significant. These positive benefits are then converted into monetary values which indicate the gains in monetary terms.

The third econometric worth mentioning in this section is the New Economics Foundation’s *social return on investment* (Cabinet Office & Office of the Third Sector (UK), 2009). In the UK government’s guide on *sroi*, the aim is to provide a standardised method of value that goes beyond financial value to include social and environmental value. Social return on investment is based on social accounting and cost-benefit analysis. While *sroi* is about value rather than money’ it nevertheless ‘uses monetary values’ (p. 8) to represent the value of social, economic and environmental outcomes resulting from activities. It is based on seven principles (CO & OTS, 2009, p. 9):

- involving stakeholders
- understand what changes
- value the things that matter
- only include what is material
- do not over-claim
- be transparent
- verify the result

In assessing the impact of an activity such as a community education intervention, the steps in the process will involve establishing inputs, outputs and outcomes and monetising these. The impact can be identified when factors are eliminated which would have occurred anyway had the intervention not been implemented (p. 10). Westerman, Schifferes and Maguire’s (2013) case study of *sroi* involving four adult residential colleges in England shows that ‘quantifying the unquantifiable’ (p. 37) is not impossible.

The significance of these three measures of the social benefits of adult and community education is that they exist at all. Adult and community educators would challenge a culture in education which is fixated with numbers, measurement, measureable outcomes etc. Too much of the lifechanging impact of community education is not easily measured in quantitative ways. In a sector which values the qualitative it is significant that the sector is

now proving itself equally innovative in measuring the impacts in terms of market and monetary equivalents as other sectors of the economy.

Employability research: A clear line of sight to work

The adult and community education sector in the UK has been confronted by similar challenges to that of the Irish sector over the past two decades. The global economic crisis and its specific impact on the UK has had similar though less devastating effects than those experienced in Ireland. The change from a new labour to a conservative-led government has seen some shift of emphasis in social and economic discourse, though critical adult education commentators (Crowther, 2011; Tett, 2010) trace the continuing dominance of an economic purpose paradigm at the heart of education policy and provision. They argue this paradigm narrowly positions education at the service of a ‘skills’ and ‘employability’ agenda set by the captains of industry, meeting the needs of the neoliberal market economy.

It is against this backdrop that Williams (2013) reviews the new report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, aptly entitled ‘*It’s about work: Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*’ launched in March 2013 (CAVTL, 2013a). Williams, who is head of the commission, calls on all involved to ‘raise their game’ so as to ‘respond to and prepare us all for changes in work, advances in knowledge and technology, and the increasing demand for people with higher levels of skills’ (Williams, 2013, p. 12). The report points to two key factors in achieving the above goals, firstly ‘*a clear line of sight to work*’ (p. 12) and secondly, employer-provider collaboration. The latter will pose challenges for non-formal, non-accredited provision such as community education, as clear lines of sight to employment are not easily predicted as an outcome of community education. However, a clear line of sight in the other direction from the workplace often points back to the first step involving a community education course.

Ireland

AONTAS The National Adult Learning Organisation

AONTAS commissioned research in 2009 as part of an extensive enquiry into community education practice in Ireland. The research covered both statutory or governmental provision of community education through VECs and non-statutory or non-governmental provision in community education delivered by independently managed groups. The latter includes community development projects and voluntary organizational member groups of AONTAS. In this section the outcomes of both research studies will be examined with particular reference to what the findings say about employability and labour activation.

The first research study (Bailey, Breen and Ward, 2011) examined Department of Education and Skills funded community education through the 33 VECs. This funding came through the *Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES)*. Whilst this research focused on statutory provision delivered through VEC community education facilitators, a non-statutory element, the *Community Strand of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)* was also included in the enquiry. The report does draw some comparisons between both, but these are less relevant to the specific purpose of this literature review.

This research was extensive and involved a survey of 683 learners, eleven case studies, surveys of VEC personnel and interviews with key informants (p. 9). In relation to the target groups catered for by DES funded community education (approx. 35,000 reported by VECs for this research), between 33% (ALCES) and 39% (BTEI) were ‘unemployed’ (pp. 47-48). 45% were ‘not in the labour market’ (p. 48). The respondents to the research indicate their

experiences and views concerning a range of community education outcomes considered under the following headings; access persistence and retention, civic and social engagement, health outcomes, progression outcomes, contribution to a fair, just and prosperous Ireland. Whilst employability and labour market outcomes feature across the headings, the most relevant are those concerning progression in chapter nine of the study (pp. 159-173). 45% of respondents reported that the reason they took part in community education courses was 'to improve my employment prospects and get a job' (p. 108). Furthermore the aggregate of responses relating to improving employment prospects and gaining a qualification amount to 'almost half the learners' in the study (p. 109). Nevertheless the report concludes that particular target groups 'lone parents, disadvantaged men, the homeless, younger people with disabilities, Travellers and ethnic minorities, and the unemployed are being less effectively targeted for community education' (p. 43). For those unemployed who are engaged in DES community education provision, what employability outcomes are evident?

This research does not reveal a cohort of learners who prior to taking up a community education course were unemployed and then gain employment after the course. Such a simplistic linear outcome is not traced here. What is significant however is the desire among learners for progression to an accredited course or qualification which will in time lead to a job. Again, the DES-funded community education which is non-accredited and non-formal is viewed as an important building block for progression to 'further education and training' according to 64% of providers and for 'labour market progression' according to 30% of providers (pp. 162-163). An analysis of the learner responses to the survey on what progression they wished for reveals that 'learning a new skill' (70%) and to 'do a non-certified course with this group or centre' (55%) feature highest. However, 23% wanted 'to get a job because I am unemployed', 16% wanted to 'get a better job' and 33% wanted to 'get advice on employment/education' (p. 164).

The second AONTAS research study (Bailey, Ward and Goodrick, 2011) examined the outcomes and impact of what is termed the 'social action model of community education' (p. 22). 22% of the sample of 285 learners surveyed were unemployed, with 16% who were long-term unemployed (p. 28). The top courses provided by the centres were social, personal and vocational in content reflecting learners' needs 'to improve self confidence and to gain qualifications and improve employment prospects' (p. 80). Furthermore 'bridging to the labour market' is important to learners who believe courses should lead to accreditation (p. 80). In response to questions regarding reasons for participation in community education, '70% of (220) learners wanted to improve their employment prospects' (p. 71).

A conclusion not explicitly stated but suggested by these studies is that even though community education does not specifically set out to place a participant in a job at the end of a course, it is clear that participants are choosing community education courses with these employability outcomes in mind.

National Economic and Social Forum NESF

Labour market vulnerability is a theme which the National Economic and Social Forum addressed in a 2006 report. The report drew on findings of two case studies carried out under the same theme in an urban and rural setting, North Dublin and Donegal / Sligo (Duggan and Loftus, 2005).

From a research and policy perspective, the NESF report (2006) *creating a more inclusive labour market* is noteworthy because it was written at a time of unprecedented economic

growth and high employment during the boom, yet there were many individuals and groups excluded from the labour market. The labour market vulnerability experienced by these groups persisted despite jobs growth. The report points to Ireland's poor record on equality 'one of the highest levels of market income inequality' (p. ix) and '51 out of 56 countries in terms of equality of economic opportunity for women' (p. xiii) among the reasons why particular groups experience labour market vulnerability. The earlier research report (Duggan and Loftus, 2005) identify the groups affected; 'the long term unemployed, lone parents, ex-drug users, ex-offenders, members of the Traveller community, asylum seekers and refugees, people with disability, women returners' (pp. 14-15).

A key issue which the NESF report raised was the issue of 'discrimination and prejudice' on the part of employers (p. xi). This is a theme which is not adequately addressed in current labour market activation strategies. The INOU conference report (2012) referred to earlier described how 'many employers have not traditionally regarded the public employment service as their first choice as a source from which to recruit staff' (p. 29). The NESF report goes on to say that unemployment also contributed to 'low self-esteem' (p. xi) and job loss in the 'manufacturing' sector (p. x) created a cohort of people with 'low-skills' and/or 'obsolete skills' (xii) who were labour market vulnerable. The response recommended by the NESF included 'an expansion of part-time, flexible opportunities by training and education providers for both those at work and those seeking work with a focus on courses leading to qualifications' (p. xvii). Furthermore, education and training aimed at improving 'the employability of people' (p. xvii) needs to happen at times and locations which suit learners.

In the years following 2006, community education continued to work with the most vulnerable groups in the midst of an economic boom, and the statistics presented in this literature review bear this out with an average 50,000 participants annually. Flexible learning at times and places to suit the community group is a hallmark of community education in Ireland. Unfortunately, very little has changed in the intervening years for the cohort of people who had always experienced labour market vulnerability, and community education continues to reach out to these individuals and groups.

National Economic and Social Council NESC

The role of the National Economic and Social Council is to provide advice to the Taoiseach on 'strategic issues for Ireland's economic and social development' (NESC, 2013). Over the past twenty years, the council has undertaken research and evaluation on key policies and programmes undertaken by the state and is therefore well placed to assess the impact of the economic boom and recession alike. One such study *Supports and services for unemployed jobseekers* (NESC, 2011) includes chapters on employability and activation respectively. The financial constraints impacting on public policy are stated at the outset:

'the recession is bringing policy makers, operating within exceptionally tight fiscal constraints, to want a much improved evidence base for identifying what training or education delivers best and for whom, and to seek better outcomes from given levels of public spending on Further Education and Training (FET). (NESC, 2011, p. 9)

This report also comments on the quality of 'labour market intelligence' in the sense that jobseekers are 'entitled to courses' where not only content, but also 'teaching methods' and 'pedagogies' are relevant to 'how the world of work is evolving' (p. 10). Surveys of skills needs in the economy therefore needs to be reliable, comprehensive and relevant. The NESC study argues that 'only a co-ordinated approach on the part of employers, educational and

training providers, labour market experts and policy-makers will deliver what unemployed people really need and want' (2011, p. 10). Such collaboration needs to happen on assessing jobs potential in alternative strategies such as climate change, preventive and primary health, responsible tourism and sustainable agriculture to name but a few. The national skills strategy may need to emerge as creative and innovative rather than passive and reactive to the market 'out there'. In that context, community education is at the fore in supporting sustainable communities with innovative responses to disadvantage and poverty. Some examples are included in the practice sections of this review.

Conclusion

This part of the literature review has examined EU, UK and Irish research papers, academic journals and periodicals on further education and training with a view to its impact on employability and active citizenship. What emerges is a clear picture that FET in its various forms including non-formal and informal learning contributes in positive ways not only to social objectives but also to employability objectives. The research also indicates that considerable work continues in the sector in relation to measurement of these outcomes.

4. Practice

Introduction

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that there is a dearth of documented practice examples in the literature of adult and community education, particularly where the practice demonstrates a connectedness to employability or labour market outcomes.

As stated earlier, the Community Education Facilitators Association (2011) have called for the establishment of 'systems that will measure outcomes, track progression and set down qualitative indicators' along with 'an ongoing research budget' (p. 14). CEFA also cite European backing for such research in the *Action Plan on Adult Learning 2007-2010* (European Commission, 2007). The action plan 'outlined the need for a research infrastructure to support practice-to-policy feedback' (CEFA, 2011, p. 11).

This section presents a small sample of evidence drawn from researchers, community educators and academics of good practice examples of how community education has been supporting individuals to prepare for entry or re-entry into the labour market. This work is being done at a collective community level and also empowers individuals to realise their potential as active citizens. Much of this education work has used a non-formal and informal learning approach. As outlined in previous sections, non-formal and informal learning is gaining significant recognition across the EU as an important strategy for lifelong learning which contributes to employability. Examples are drawn from work in Ireland and the UK.

Employable

Women's community education, community employment and labour activation

Patterson and Dowd (2010) document a case study of women's community education in the Irish context of the economic crisis and how the project contributes to labour activation whilst retaining the core philosophy and approach which is unique to women's community education. This community-based women's project supports women 'trapped in a cycle of welfare dependency and isolation' (p. 121). The centre runs a FAS funded community employment scheme specifically designed using a women's community education approach. Women have the opportunity to gain valuable workplace experience in the nursery / childcare

facility of the project as well as the reception areas. They also participate in learning designed to meet their needs. The educational approach is described as:

a potent collective education process that supports the empowerment of women and seeks to address the socio-political aspects of women's experience through collective activism. (Patterson & Dowd, 2010, p. 123)

The positive outcomes for participants are reflected in expressions such as having 'space to develop confidence and learn or re-learn skills', 'I didn't feel intimidated – the atmosphere made all the difference', and testimony to the value of the 'collective' approach, 'we helped each other, and encouraged each other' (p. 128). Clearly, there is value in women's community education designed and delivered by women and for women in the community. This contrasts with the experience of 20% of trainees who reported higher stress levels associated with assessments on accredited courses (p. 128). The success of the programme is reflected in the progression rate into external employment which is 70% (20 of the 34 women participants). This is significant for women who were previously long term unemployed. At the outset the authors refer to the bulk of education and training provision being provided directly by FAS and VECs (p. 121), however, their account demonstrates the value of statutory and community engagement at the community grassroots level. The article also points to the value of a third sector approach to employment generation which is neither exclusively public nor exclusively private.

Community education participant testimonies

Every year as part of its Adult Learners' Festival, AONTAS, the Irish National Adult Learning Organization hosts a lobby for learning day. In 2013, this event focused on 'the role of community education in serving the needs of people most distant from education and training, and the labour market, and as a valid form of activation' (AONTAS, 2013, p. 2). The seminar involved a cross section of community education learners and providers. Key policy makers including the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr. Ciaran Canon, T.D. participated in the event. The lobby for learning day considered community education's contribution under a number of themes including; community education as an essential labour activation measure, a second chance at education and training, offering tailored supports, offering choice and leading to employment, as well as generating social purpose objectives such as better civic engagement and better health (AONTAS, 2013).

Some of the testimony of community education participants provides further evidence of the important role which community education plays in preparing people for the workplace. These testimonies quoted below reflect the importance of community education in confidence building, personal development and improved self-esteem as well as providing a stepping stone to the labour market and a future career or course of studies. These testimonies are presented under a number of headings below.

Employment:

Learners talked about how community education has assisted them in reaching their goals of achieving qualifications which can lead to good quality employment both within and outside the sector (p. 4).

Without community education supports such as personal development and mentoring I wouldn't have gained the confidence to secure employment (p.8).

I was brought back into the work environment through community education, I now have a full time job and my life couldn't be better. (p. 8).

Confidence and self esteem:

My confidence was diminished to the stage where it was almost impossible to apply for positions as I would get another rejection. My mentor has supported me to keep going and not get discouraged. (p. 5)

After feeling isolated with low self-esteem community education offered me a new lease of life. (p. 5)

A stepping stone:

I needed the time to try out courses and test my own abilities before I could take on some thing more serious. (p.5)

Active in the Labour Market

Responding to participant learning needs

Slevin's (2009) account of her community work in one of the most deprived areas of the state, along the border of east Donegal is a good example of how to balance the longer term social change objectives of community education, on the one hand, with the very practical labour market skills training, on the other. The area was particularly disadvantaged, being close to the border, 'the unemployment rate in St. Johnston was 19.2%, more than double the national average' (p. 49). Bear in mind, this was 2006 during the economic boom. Whilst the national picture of Ireland in 2006 portrayed a booming economy and low joblessness, there were many areas where deprivation and unemployment were particularly severe.

Slevin describes community education work with a group of unemployed men on the 'Accelerate Programme, a minibus driver training programme with a difference' (p. 55). The minibus driver training programme was not solely that, it also incorporated first aid, child protection, passenger assistance training as well. The Accelerate programme also included FETAC level 3 communications and basic computers and was run in the local Family Resource Centre with funding from FAS, the VEC and Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Community education starts where people are at, identifying their needs and working with learners from that base. Empowerment is a clear objective of community education and this usually starts with careful foundation work. There is often a practical dimension to the community education provided. The minibus driver training course described by Slevin is one way to engage men in what will lead to benefits in varied ways to support their re-entry into the labour market.

Community educators and activists operating from a community development model often have to reconcile their critical perspectives with the needs of communities and recognise that personal and social change is slow and requires innovative approaches.

(Slevin, 2009, p. 58)

Slevin's account affirms empowerment for social justice as the goal of community education. Crucially, this starts by responding to people's needs. The immediate need in a jobless community is to find work. Slevin's account shows that while striving for social justice, it is possible to respond in creative ways to support people in deprived areas to prepare for employment as well.

Community education and health interventions

Co. Sligo VEC participated in another Grundvig collaboration *community education across borders* (Grundvig, 2010) which documents the programmes and methodologies in adult and community education in border areas and interfaces across the EU. Co. Sligo VEC based in one of the six southern border counties in Ireland participates in a number of EU cross-border programmes such as the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. One example of the work with which Co. Sligo VEC is involved is the Sligo Traveller Women Health Care Programme. The aim of the course is 'to prepare Traveller participants to avail of primary health care training and to become skilled primary health care/ community health workers within their own community in county Sligo' (p. 16). In labour market terms, the outcome of the course therefore has a direct employment outcome. The social outcome includes better health gain for Traveller women and the Traveller community in general. The Traveller primary health care intervention has been developed in a number of health regions across Ireland.

Practice example: A clear line of sight to work

Further to Williams' article (2013) reviewed earlier on the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning's report '*It's about work: Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*', a number of supplementary papers (CAVTL, 2013b) provide evidence of good practice in courses leading to employability outcomes. Two examples under the 'clear line of sight to work' criteria expressed by the commission are worth mentioning for their relevance to adult community education. First, a photography tutor explains:

Some pursue photography as a career...but a lot of students would actually be doing the course for personal development and their own interests...maybe it's not realistic to think about working as a photographer as a full time job, so you might end up doing wedding photography but you have another job that you do...part of the week.

(CAVTL, 2013b, p. 9)

Secondly, a construction tutor emphasises that it is important to know many adult learners 'may have had difficult employment experiences' in the past:

For a lot of my students it's the first time that they've had...someone actually pat them on the back and say 'good job'. It (the course) gives them self-esteem; it gives them a bit of routine; it gives them some achievement, it actually puts them back on the map, if you like, and accepted by people. (CAVTL, 2013b, p. 9)

Again the role of the community education tutor who has empathy and understanding of where participants are coming from is a vital element of what makes community education work.

Non-formal and Informal Learners

Identifying and valuing non-formal and informal learning

Smith (2013) reports on her involvement as a member of Knockanrawley Resource Centre in a Grundvig project aimed at producing 'innovative training modules for practitioners' in the whole area of non-formal and informal learning 'in their communities' (p. 6). Knockanrawley focused on peer mentoring and developed a dvd and workbook containing guidelines for practitioners to use with groups for the purpose of identifying and validating their non-formal and informal learning. 62 learners and 9 tutors in the Knockanrawley Resource Centre gave 'very positive' feedback about the learning tools which motivated them to 'learn more in their lives and validate it' (p. 7).

The development of practical tools to help people identify the outcomes of informal and non-formal learning is a good example of policy implementation in this area. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning, so much a feature of community education provision is taken seriously at EU level as we have seen. Systems for its recognition are encouraged. EU policy calls on member states to 'have in place, no later than 2018...arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning' (Council, 2012, p. 3). In Ireland where there is at least an emerging validation system (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004, p. 72), this system equates to the British model of accreditation of prior learning, APL (p. 72). Coughlan (2010) reaffirms this in his EU inventory report on Ireland:

The term 'recognition of non-formal and informal learning (RNFIL)' is not widely used in Ireland and is usually taken to be included in the wider term 'recognition of prior learning (RPL)'. (Coughlan, 2010, p. 1)

Clearly EU policy is moving toward established systems to recognise informal and non-formal learning given its important contribution to social and economic development in the Europe. Ireland may need to take a leaf out of the EU book in this area.

Social and economic benefits of informal community education

Tett (2010, pp. 60-65) provides a good practice example of community education as radical empowerment. A course on 'Health Issues in the Community' involving people throughout Scotland was developed to address structural inequalities in health:

In Scotland life expectancy for those born in 2001 was predicted to be 74.6 years for men and 79.8 for women in the more affluent areas compared to 69.2 for men and 76.5 for women in the least affluent areas. (MacIntyre, 2007 cited in Tett, 2010, p. 60)

The course which is locally based enabled people to come together to 'build a curriculum' (p. 61) around their health issues. By bringing people together in a collective community education process, 'private' health issues were unmasked to reveal a 'public' dimension (Jones, 1999b, cited in Tett, 2010, p. 62). The view that most health problems are contributed to by structural factors such as 'poverty, unemployment, pollution, poor housing and power imbalances' is supported by research (p. 61). Clearly better off people with higher incomes can access and afford health services more easily. Taking poor housing as an example, one group who participated in the course gained the confidence to successfully campaign collectively for 'better insulation, cladding, soundproofing and heating for their houses' (p. 62). Another group focused on healthy diet and affordability of healthy foods. The high costs of fresh fruit and vegetables in the town shopping centre were prohibitive for poor families, so they decided to buy directly from a local farmer and sell them in the community at a cheaper price. They also produced information leaflets on health eating (p. 63). These examples illustrate the radical approach to community education; curriculum design to meet the expressed needs of the community leading to awareness raising and collective action for social change.

Whilst Tett does not deal here with the economic dividend of this community education intervention, there are now tools discussed earlier which can be used to demonstrate this value, for example, the New Economics Foundation's *Social Return on Investment* model (Cabinet Office & Office of the Third Sector (UK), 2009). In monetary terms, the modest cost of the community education course could be measured against savings in expenditure on public health treatment. The surplus savings represent a dividend for the state.

The sample of practice examples drawn upon for this part of the literature review sought to provide evidence of the employability, labour market preparedness and active citizenship benefits gained from participation in community education. The sample covers a range of practice in Ireland, the UK and internationally. The sector would benefit from the publication of more practice case studies and a research hub would certainly contribute in this regard.

5. CONCLUSION

This literature review has sought to assemble a range of policy, research and practice papers from EU, UK and Irish sources, which address the question *in what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?* A number of conclusions emerge from the literature.

Policy

At the level of policy, it is clear that there is strong recognition at EU level for the contribution which non-formal and informal learning makes to participants' employability and labour market readiness as well as their involvement as active citizens in shaping the social Europe. Irish policymakers are somewhat behind the curve compared to the EU when it comes to recognising and valuing informal and non-formal learning such as community education. This is reflected in the fact that 'Ireland lags considerably behind leading countries in LLL participation rates' (Cedefop, 2013c, p. 3). The statistics presented in this review support this argument. However, there are signs that Ireland is embracing the EU agenda of lifelong learning. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2007, p. 99) recognised the need to engage higher numbers of adults in lifelong learning.

It is against the backdrop of an unemployment crisis in Ireland and labour market activation policies that the community education sector seeks to maintain the space ascribed to it in *Learning for Life* the White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000). The dual meaning of community education as both an extension of education into the community and individual and collective empowerment for social change, gives it focus and flexibility. In terms of policy, the Community Education Facilitators Association, the Department of Education and Skills, and AONTAS have stated policy positions on community education which reflect this meaning. Community education is described as 'a continuum of personal development, community development, social analysis and political participation' (CEFA, 2011, p. ii). It is focused on meeting the needs of marginalised groups and communities and therefore forms part of social justice work and aligns closely with community development. It is a participative and collective educative process.

In seeking to stay true to its mission defined in policy, community education as a sector must also pay heed to current reality. In Ireland that reality is recession and unemployment, though there are signs of recovery. In the midst of the current economic crisis, governments across Europe including Ireland could make the mistake of reducing education down to a purely economic purpose, jobs-driven focus. European lifelong learning policy and Irish lifelong learning policy would suggest such a choice would be a mistake. Community education is not anti-jobs. If anything community education is actually quite effective in supporting people to grow in confidence and self-esteem and gain skills which support their access to the labour market in the future.

Research

In a time of budgetary constraints across the EU and in Ireland, it is usual to give a higher priority to frontline services over research. Yet in other sectors of the economy, research and development (R&D) is an economy in itself. This literature review has attempted to assemble research which points to the positive impacts which community education makes as the first building block for disadvantaged adult learners to engage with the labour market.

The research papers considered here from Cedefop at EU level, NIACE at UK level and AONTAS in the Irish context among others, cover important avenues of enquiry. These include; recognition of non-formal and informal learning, measuring the wider benefits of lifelong learning, research on employability and active citizenship. These research papers trace the positive impacts which non-formal and informal learning including community education hold for participants accessing the labour market.

Specific research still needs to be done. In particular there is a need to document good practice in the field of community education, particularly in relation to employability and labour market activation. Whether we accept or resist the box-ticking in education and training, the demand for evidence of the impacts of interventions such as community education is unlikely to dissipate. Some of the tools being developed by the sector, such as social return on investment (*sroi*), are illuminating the wider benefits of non-formal and informal learning. The community education sector requires dedicated resources to strengthen its research capacity in Ireland on a par with other sectors of the education system here.

Practice

Policy and research affirms that not only formal education but also non-formal and informal learning taking place in local communities has an important place on the education landscape. The evidence from practice demonstrates this also. The connections between social exclusion and labour market vulnerability are clearly linked. The issues of low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence are clear barriers to people from disadvantaged groups and communities entering the labour market. On the other side, the INOU conference report (2012) noted that employers 'have not traditionally regarded the public employment service as their first choice as a source from which to recruit staff' (p. 29). The NESF study (2006) also referred to 'discrimination and prejudice' on the part of employers and this must be challenged as well. The unemployed will play their part by enrolling on courses. Employers need to play their part too by providing meaningful jobs. There are many incentives now for employers to create jobs, including JobsPlus (Department of Social Protection, 2013b).

Community education has a clear set of principles and practices which are effective in addressing the barriers experienced by participants. The first steps for disadvantaged learners in returning to learning and engaging with the world of work are often first taken in local community education centres. It is if anything, an important stepping stone in the continuum of education and training. The small sample of practice studies presented here demonstrate the effectiveness of community education in supporting people with re-entry to the labour force in very practical and meaningful ways. As stated above, there is a need for more research and recording of these important lessons. What is presented here is but a sample of the ordinary yet vibrant changes which community education facilitators, tutors, community workers, trainers and learners are collectively achieving in their work on the ground. These narrative accounts make concrete the lines of policy and research.

In conclusion this literature review has attempted to assemble in one place the current policy, research and practice snapshots of community education as it relates to the ongoing crisis of jobless communities in 2013 Ireland. Like other sectors, the community education sector is adapting to the challenge posed by current labour market activation policy and the employability agenda dominating education and training at this time. At the same time, the sector retains its commitment to a core ethos which seeks deeper structural change to a more sustainable economy and society informed by the values of community solidarity, equality and justice. Such a vision, if allowed to flourish, may create a world of work, end labour market exclusion and empower citizens.

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