OIDEAS 52

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INVITATION

The Editor invites teachers and educationists to contribute papers for publication in *Oideas*. Papers should be at least 1,500 words in length and should not exceed 5,000 words, and they should deal with aspects of education of current, practical, or historical interest.

Book reviews and shorter notices may be published also and publication will be subject to the approval of the Editorial Board.

Papers and reviews should be typed in black, in 1.5 spacing, and preferably should be transmitted to the Editor electronically. A short note on the writer's background should accompany every paper submitted and an abstract of the paper also should be provided.

Preferably, reference to authorities should be made in the text by use of the Harvard (or Authordate) system, but the British Standard (the Numeric system) also is acceptable.

Some examples:

- *Book*
  MacBeath, J. and McGlynn, A. (2004) *Self-evaluation: what's in it for schools?* London and New York, RoutledgeFalmer.
- *Book chapter in an edited volume*
  Gleeson, J. (2004) 'Cultural and Political Contexts of Irish Post-Primary Curriculum: influences, interests and issues', in Sugrue, C. (ed) *Curriculum and Ideology: Irish experiences, international perspectives*, Dublin, The Liffey Press Ltd.
- *Journal Article*
  Hayes, D. (1996) 'Aspiration, Perspiration and Reputation: idealism and self-preservation in small school primary headship', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol.26, no.2, pp.379-390.
- *Electronic source*
  Department of Education and Science, Ireland (2006) *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation in Primary Schools* [online], http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/insp_p_wse_intro.htm (accessed 26 October 2006).

AN GHAEILGE

Cuirfear fáilte ar leith roimh ailt i nGaeilge. Mura gcuirtear ar fáil dúinn iad ní féidir linn iad a fhoilsiú.

Aon tuairimí a nochtar sna hailt in *Oideas* is iad tuairimí na n-údar féin iad. Ní gá go leireoidís, ná go réiteoidís le, beartas na Roinne Oideachais agus Eolaíochta.

Opinions expressed in papers in *Oideas* are those of the authors. They need not necessarily express, or be in accord with, the policy of the Department of Education and Science.

Foilsítear *Oideas* faoi stiúradh Boird Eagarthóireachta.

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Nóta ón Eagarthóir

Ó bunaíodh *Oideas* sa bhliain 1968 bhí sé mar fhóram do scríbhneoirí ó gach earnáil den chóras oideachais le go bhféadfaidís teagmháil a dhéanamh leis an bpobal oideachais ar fad. Chuige sin, tá saothar taighdeoirí gairmiúla foilsithe againn le hais saothar ó chleachtóirí smaointeacha sa rang. Chuir a gcuid saothar go léir go mór lenár dtuisint ar phróiseas an oideachais agus molaimid iad as a gcuid scoláireachta. Tá fás suntasach tagtha ar líon na scríbhinní a fhaigheann an iris i ngeall ar an mborradh atá tagtha ar staidéir iarchéime i ranna oideachais na n-ollscoileanna, agus is cúis mhór sástachta é seo dúinn ó léiríonn sé go bhfuil níos mó daoine ná riamh ag díriú go féinmhuiníneach ar cheisteanna tábhachtacha oideachais.

San eagrán seo tá seacht gcinn de pháipéir a bhaineann go díreach le cleachtóirí ag gach leibhéal den chóras oideachais. Aibhsíonn an **Dr. Michael O'Leary,** ina pháipéar siúd, an tábhacht as cuimse a ghabhann le heolas measúnachta ar ardchaighdeán a bheith ar fáil mar bhonn taca lenár gcinnteoireacht, agus molann go gceapfaí córas cothromaithe a bheidh dírithe go praiticiúil ar riachtanais ár bpáistí. Idirdhealaíonn sé idir measúnacht don fhoghlaim agus measúnacht ar fhoghlaim agus áitíonn go mbíonn córais measúnachta as riocht in go leor tíortha agus go bhfaightear léiriú air sin, is baolach, sa tosaíocht a thugtar d'éilimh mhaorlathacha ar eolas in ionad d'fhíor-riachtanais na bhfoghlaimeoirí.

Tá **Gerry Jeffers** ar son na tuairime gur cheart do scoileanna a bheith ina bpobail foghlama ina dtabharfaí tús áite do mhachnamh i gcomhroinn agus do chomhráite gairmiúla. Aibhsíonn sé an dúshlán do cheannairí scoile tosaíocht chuí a thabhairt don teagasc agus don fhoghlaim agus tráchtann ar thionscadal faisnéiseach idir an scoil agus an ollscoil a ceapadh chun scoileanna a neartú mar phobail ghníomhacha foghlama.

Tuairiscíonn **an Dr Gerry McNamara agus Carmel Mulcahy** ar thaighde a rinneadh le hoideachasóirí aosaigh a bhí i mbun clár forbartha do mhúinteoirí ina gcoláiste siúd. An rud a tháinig chun solais ná an tionchar dearfach, i dtaca le forás pearsanta agus scileanna idirphearsanta, a fhéadann a bheith ag ardoideachas ar dhaoine fásta agus ar na pobail imeallaithe ina gcónaíonn agus ina n-oibríonn na múinteoirí seo faoi oiliúint.

Pléann **Deirdre Breatnach** dearcadh na múinteoirí faoi oiliúint agus a dtuairimí ar an gcleachtadh múinteoireachta ina coláiste oiliúna siúd. Aithníonn sí ocht gcinn d'údair imní agus tugann sraith moltaí atá taiscéalaíoch ó thaobh cineál de, ach a d'fhéadfadh cur go mór amach anseo le taithí na múinteoirí faoi oiliúint nuair a bheidh siad ar shochrúchán agus le taithí na múinteoirí a bheidh i bhfeighil orthu.

Tá spéis ar leith ag **Joseph Fogarty** sa tráchtálachas mar fheiniméan i mbunscoileanna na hÉireann. Pléann sé an tráchtálas i dtús báire mar ghné de pharadaím oideachais margadh-láraithe a mbíonn tionchar aige ar an óige ach breathnaíonn sé dá éis ar an réasúnaíocht agus ar na hoibríochtaí atá laistiar den chaoi a ndíoltar agus a gcuirtear earraí chun tosaigh do pháistí scoile. Cuireann

sé lena argóint le samplaí de thionscnaimh thráchtála a díríodh ar scoileanna agus críochnaíonn le moladh go gcuirfí beartas soiléir oifigiúil i dtoll a chéile maidir leis an gcaoi ar chóir do scoileanna déileáil le treocht seo an tráchtálachais atá ag fás go mear.

Tionscadal Mílaoise FÍS do Bhunscoileanna atá faoi chaibidil ag **Gerry McNamara** agus **Sean Griffin.** Tionscadal í seo a chuartaigh bealaí chun léirthuisint ar scannáin agus scannánóireacht a úsáid mar mheán teagaisc. Gné lárnach den tionscadal ab ea an ardaidhm go mbeadh an tionscadal mar áis d'fhoghlaim ghníomhach agus chomhoibritheach agus go gcuirfeadh sé bealaí nuálacha ar fáil chun raon leathan ábhar a mhúineadh de réir bhunphrionsabail Churaclam na nBunscoileanna (1999). Tuairiscíonn na húdair gur éirigh go rí-mhaith leis an tionscadal agus gurbh fhíor sin go háirithe i gcás páistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta acu agus páistí gur beag claonadh atá iontu i leith an oideachais acadúil. Is í a dtuairim dá bharr sin go rachaidh an t-oideachas scannáin i dtreise mar mheán teagaisc i scoileanna ar fud an domhain.

Cuireann **Michael Flanagan** siamsaíocht ar fáil i dteannta an eolais. Ag trácht dó ar na bunathruithe atá tagtha ar chultúr na hóige sa tír seo le deich mbliana anuas, díríonn sé ár n-aire ar an meath atá tagtha ar luachanna traidisiúnta agus mionsonraíonn an tionchar a bheidh aige sin ar leas ár mac léinn. Luann sé éilimh atá préamhaithe i gcultúr na linne seo a thagann salach dar leis ar fhíoraidhmeanna na scolaíochta. Áitíonn sé gur mórdhúshlán a bheidh ann do scoileanna comhréiteach a dhéanamh idir na héilimh chontrártha seo agus críochnaíonn le moladh go ndéanfaimis machnamh ar an gcaoi is fearr lenár bpáistí a threalmhú chun déileáil leis na réaltachtaí éagsúla sóisialta agus cultúrtha míthaitneamhacha atá mar chomharthaí sóirt ar dhomhan seo againne an aonú aois ar fhichead.

Mar fhocal scoir, is dona linn gur éag **Tomás Ó Domhnalláin** mí na Samhna seo caite in aois mhór a dhá bhliain déag is ceithre scór. Ba é Tomás céad eagarthóir agus príomhthionscnóir *Oideas* ceathracha bliain nó mar sin ó shin. Fear beag a bhí ann ach ba fhathach é i gcúrsaí éirime agus ba mhór an feabhas a chuir sé ar chúrsaí oideachais na hÉireann mar chigire agus mar stiúrthóir ar an Institiúid Teangeolaíochta araon. Suaimhneas síoraí dá anam.

Editorial Comment

From its initiation in 1968 *Oideas* has provided a forum for writers from all sectors of the education system to reach out to the wider education community. To this end, we have published the work of the professional researcher side by side with that of the reflective classroom practitioner. Their deliberations have contributed in no small way to illuminating our understanding of the education process and we salute them for their scholarship. The growth of postgraduate studies in the education departments of our universities has led to a substantial increase of submissions to the journal and we look on this with satisfaction as testimony to a growing confidence and engagement with important education issues.

In the current issue we feature seven papers of direct relevance to practitioners at all levels of the education system. In his paper, **Dr Michael O'Leary** highlights the crucial importance of high quality assessment information to the underpinning of decision-making, and calls for a balanced system that is practically geared to our children's needs. Distinguishing between assessment for learning and assessment of learning, he argues that in many countries assessment systems are out of balance and this unfortunately is reflected in bureaucratic information needs being given a pre-eminence over the vital needs of learners.

Gerry Jeffers promotes the view that schools should be learning communities characterised by cultures that place a premium on shared reflection and professional conversations. Highlighting the challenge for school leaders to give due prominence to teaching and learning, he locates the discussion within the context of a highly illuminating school-university project aimed at strengthening schools as active learning communities.

Dr Gerry McNamara and Carmel Mulcahy report on research conducted with adult educators taking teacher development programmes at their college. What emerges is an interesting picture of the positive impact in terms of personal development and interpersonal skills that higher education can have on adults and on the marginalized communities in which these students work and live.

Deirdre Breathnach explores the perspectives of student teachers and their reflections on their teaching practice in her college of education. Identifying eight evolving areas of concern, she presents a series of recommendations that are exploratory in nature but which may serve to make a significant contribution to enhancing the future experiences both of student teachers on placement and their supervisors.

Joseph Fogarty has a particular interest in the phenomenon of commercialism in Irish primary schools. Initially situating the issue of commercialism within the wider context of a market centred paradigm of education and its influence on childhood, he goes on to explore the rationale and operations behind the sale and promotion of goods to schoolchildren. He illustrates his argument by providing examples of commercial initiatives aimed at schools and concludes with a call for a formulation of a clear official policy in respect of how schools ought to address the growing trend of commercialism.

The paper by **Gerry McNamara** and **Seán Griffin** deals with the FÍS Millennium Project for Primary Schools which essentially sought to find ways of using film appreciation and film-making as an educational medium. A central element was encapsulated in an aspiration that the project would prove to be a vehicle for active and cooperative learning and would contribute to innovative ways of teaching a wide range of subjects in accordance with the fundamental principles of Primary School Curriculum (1999). The authors report the achievement of a high level of success, and particularly so in the case of children with special needs and those who are less academically inclined. This leads them to the view that film education is set to occupy an increasingly significant role in the delivery of curricula in schools throughout the world.

Michael Flanagan entertains as well as enlightens. Commenting that the culture of Irish childhood has undergone significant change in the last decade, he draws attention to the erosion of time-honoured values and details the implications of this for the welfare of students. He points to current demands rooted in modern popular culture and notes how they conflict with the true aims of schooling. He suggests that reconciling these conflicting demands represents a major challenge for schools and he concludes by calling for reflection on how best we may equip our children to deal with the many unpalatable social an cultural realities that are the hallmark of our brave new twenty-first century world.

Finally, we mark the passing of the late **Tomás Ó Domhnalláin** who died last November at the age of ninety-two. Tomás was our first editor and primary instigator of *Oideas* some forty years ago. Although small in stature, he was an intellectual giant and made a major contribution to Irish education both as an inspector and as director of the Linguistics Institute of Ireland. May he rest in peace.

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Michael O'Leary

TOWARDS A BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM FOR IRISH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Michael O'Leary is a former primary school teacher currently working as a lecturer in the education department of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. He holds a PhD from Boston College in the area of educational research, measurement and evaluation.

ABSTRACT: A balanced assessment system is defined in this paper as one that prioritises and meets the information needs of those with a stake in ensuring that all students meet the highest possible standards of achievement. The paper begins with an argument that high quality assessment is about providing the best possible information to support good decision-making. An expanded definition of assessment is offered and the terms assessment for learning and assessment of learning are introduced. At this point a distinction is made between classroom assessment that is used for teaching and learning and official assessment that is used for bureaucratic purposes. Some of the literature with respect to both is then reviewed. The conclusion reached is that in many countries assessment systems are out of balance as bureaucratic information needs are prioritised over the needs of learners. Following that, a tentative model for a balanced system in Ireland is outlined. The paper concludes with a request for all stakeholders to become involved in translating a balanced assessment system in theory to the kind of balanced system in practice that best serves our children's needs.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of assessment is one that has begun to feature more and more in debates about Irish education. At primary level assessment features strongly in the 1999 curriculum documents and many involved in education are conscious of the need for in-service in the area. At second level, changes to the syllabi at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate cycles have also raised issue regarding

the merits and appropriateness of different assessment approaches, especially continuous assessment. In 2003 assessment came into very sharp focus when the Minister for Education and Science announced plans for national testing at primary level.

Internationally, assessment has been at the forefront of educational debate for some time. In countries such as England and the US, complex high stakes systems of assessment are in place and vast sums of money are spent on checking whether or not students are meeting what are termed "world-class" educational standards. In addition, the popularity of international comparative assessments of student achievement in areas such as mathematics, reading and science continues unabated. For example, over forty countries are currently involved in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). As countries vie with each other in a competitive global economy, the outcomes of these assessments can be particularly newsworthy especially when a country perceives itself to be under-performing.

In some countries considerable controversy surrounds assessment as it is used by politicians and others outside schools not just as a way of monitoring what happens in schools but also as a way of making schools accountable for student learning. The experience of National Curriculum Assessment is a particularly good example. I will come back to this.

Among the community of educational professionals with a specialist interest in the area, assessment has become important for an altogether different reason. In this community there is a growing confidence that assessment can be used as a means of increasing student achievement and not simply as a means of measuring it. This will be an important theme in this paper. However, I want to turn my attention first to defining exactly what I mean by assessment and how assessment connects to decision making in the educational context.

AN EXPANDED DEFINITION OF ASSESSMENT

In this paper I offer a definition of educational assessment as the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using and communicating information about all aspects of a learner's development (social, emotional, physical, cognitive) to aid decision making. This definition is constructed from the many other definitions used by assessment theorists and practitioners in the literature (e.g. Airasian, 1997; Stiggins, 1997). Throughout I want to make a distinction between the term *assessment* as defined above and the term *testing* – a formal systematic procedure for obtaining a sample of pupil behaviour (Airasian, 1997). I want to make it clear that I do not regard them as synonymous as I consider assessment to be an umbrella term that includes the act of testing. In addition as I proceed, the etymology of the term "assessment" should be borne in mind. It comes from the Latin, *assidere*, which means "to sit beside." The image of teacher and learner sitting beside each other is a rather different one from that normally associated

with testing. Indeed, the deliberate use of the term "assessment" rather than "testing" is intended to convey the expanded notion of assessment as debated in the literature over the past ten to fifteen years.

A major development in this regard has been an effort to shift from a culture of testing to a culture of assessment. The traditional notion of testing placed it at the end of a linear process that involved teaching followed by learning, followed by testing. In many respects ideas about assessment were challenged by the research and writings of psychologists such as Bruner and Vygotsky. While it would be incorrect to suggest that this body of work presented a single coherent message, it did suggest that learning was an active process of mental construction and sense making in the social context and that existing knowledge structures and beliefs enabled or impeded new learning. These ideas challenged the traditional notion of testing as an event following instruction. A new body of work on assessment began to appear. Publications such as Gipps' (1994) *Beyond Testing*, articles such as Shepard's (2001) *The role of assessment in a learning culture* and the work of educators such as those involved with the Assessment Reform Group in the UK were influential in developing new conceptions of assessment. People were now distinguishing between **assessment for learning** and **assessment of learning** in the context of discussing the diagnostic, formative, summative and evaluative functions of assessment. Most importantly, a strong case was being made for assessment approaches that would be used to understand prior knowledge, be used to support learning, be integrated with instruction, involve learning processes as well as learning outcomes and involve pupils in self-assessment (Shepard, 2000).

ASSESSMENT, DECISION MAKING AND BALANCE

In essence, assessment is about getting information to make decisions. Information about student progress and achievement can be gleaned from questioning, observations, teacher-made tests, standardised tests, performance tasks, conferences, portfolios, profiles, quizzes, and the like. Irrespective of the method used, the usefulness of decisions made will depend on having quality information about achievement. Good assessment is about getting the best possible information to make the best possible decisions. However, a complicating factor in terms of assessment and decision-making is that key individuals or stakeholders in the educational system need to make different types of decisions. For example, the day to day decisions a teacher needs to make about her pupils will require a different type of assessment information than that which might inform the public about national reading standards. Therefore, it is important when considering balance that the diverse information needs of different stakeholders be taken into account. While this may seem an obvious point, the reality in many countries is that this fact, arguably more than any other, has caused a great deal of confusion and tension. The tension arises out of a

lack of debate and understanding about the needs of the different stakeholders (or at least some of them) and a lack of clarity about what information needs to be prioritised and what a balanced assessment system might look like. I intend to grapple with some of these issues here.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT AND OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT

At this point I want to introduce another way of thinking about assessment that will facilitate the arguments to follow. This involves two categories that may be called **classroom assessment** and **official assessment**. Classroom assessment involves all the assessments that teachers and pupils engage with during normal teaching and learning activities in the classroom. It includes all assessments and tests that are focused predominantly on learning as it is ongoing and can be diagnostic, formative, or summative in nature. Official assessment, on the other hand, refers to assessment that is used by teachers, schools, inspectors, policy makers and others to meet bureaucratic requirements such as reporting to parents (e.g. summer reports), maintaining school records, selection for entry to third-level education, and evaluating standards of achievement. I will now focus on research relevant to both forms types of assessment and will endeavour to tease out how both can be used in a balanced way to serve the decision making needs of different stakeholders.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

Perhaps the most significant thing we know about assessment at this point is that formative assessment for learning has the potential to make a significant difference to student achievement. By far and away the most important publication on the effects of assessment on achievement over the past ten years has been Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam's major review of studies on formative assessment. Their work was published in the journal, *Assessment in Education* in 1998. As part of a review of over 250 studies they examined twenty that compared average test score gains for pupils in classrooms where formative assessment was improved with averages for other pupils where it was not. Some of these studies were themselves meta analyses of other studies and so Black and Wiliam were essentially summarising the outcomes of hundreds of studies. What they found for a whole host of different classroom settings (from five-year-olds to university graduates), in different countries and for different subject area were typical effect sizes ranging between 0.4 and 0.7. In an Irish context we could explain an effect size of 0.4 as meaning that an average pupil taught by a teacher using high quality formative assessment would record the same score on the DPRT or MICRA-T reading tests as another pupil in the top 35% whose teacher was not

using high quality formative assessment. If what Black and Wiliam found were to be applied in an Irish secondary school context, then formative assessment has the following potential in terms of Leaving Cert performance: applying an effect size of .4 would mean that a student with one of the D grades would get one of the C grades and; applying an effect size of .7, an average performer with 290 or so points would increase his or her points by almost 100. Using the same logic and applying it to Irish performance in the Thirds International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), an effect size gain of 0.7, for example, would have resulted in a top three performance out of 40+ countries for both our primary and secondary school students.

Black and Wiliam noted that the effects they found for formative assessment were larger than for any educational intervention they knew of, including class size. Indeed, the potential of classroom assessment for increasing Leaving Cert point might just be a way of attracting attention to it in a context where teachers are under tremendous pressure to "cover the course" rather than innovate in terms of teaching and learning. Another important finding by Black and Wiliam was "that improved formative assessment helps low achievers more than other students and so reduces the range of achievement while raising achievement overall." In light of concerns about the number of pupils with basic literacy problems in this country, this is a finding that needs to be heeded (see DES Inspectorate 2005b; Eivers *et al.,* 2004). Indeed, I would recommend that the extent of formative assessment use (assuming it can be measured) be included as a teacher-level variable in explanatory models for reading achievement in the future.

OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT AND MANDATED TESTING

In terms of official assessment in the guise of mandated testing, the most obvious thing to say is that in most countries around the world it enjoys a much higher profile than classroom assessment. Certificate examinations, international comparative studies of achievement and accountability testing get a lot of attention from policy makers, politicians, newspapers and the general public. We can also say that in many countries a huge amount of official assessment goes on (see Haney, Madaus & Lyons, 1993; Wall, 1997). Figure 1 provides details of testing in England for 2004.

Figure 1. *Testing in England in 2004*

Test Name	Age Group Tested	Areas Tested	Percent of Pupils Tested	Results Published?
Foundation Stage Profile	5	Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Maths, Social Dev.	100	No
Key Stage 1	7	English, Maths	100	No
Optional Tests	8	English, Maths	90+	No
Optional Tests	9	English, Maths	90+	No
Optional tests	10	English, Maths	90+	No
Key Stage 2	11	English, Maths	100	Yes
Progress Tests	12	English, Maths	Low Achievers	No
Optional Tests	13	English, Maths	30	No
Key Stage 3	14	English, Maths, Science	100	
GCSE	16	Core and Optional subjects	100	Yes
A Levels	18	Chosen subjects		No

Source: Whetton, 2004

So how does a testing regime such as this become embedded in an educational system? One argument I want to make is that I believe that assessment systems all over the world, and especially this one in the UK, are designed primarily to provide adult decision makers with information and are not designed primarily to cater for the information and decision-making needs of learners. To illustrate the point, I want to examine briefly what has happened in England and Wales since the introduction of National Curriculum Assessment in 1988. The advice given to the education minister Kenneth Baker in 1987 by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) was to implement a system of assessment that would serve both the formative needs of pupils and the evaluation/accountability needs of policy makers and politicians and use performance tasks to focus attention on deep learning. Many would argue now that Paul Black and his colleagues in TGAT were well ahead of their time in highlighting and emphasising the importance of ongoing assessment for learning (Hall and Burke, 2003). However, when it came

to implementing the TGAT recommendations, many problems arose. Excellent accounts of this are provided by Daugherty (1995) and Whetton (2004). In a nutshell, the system put in place was found to be costly in terms of time and money and did not provide information that could easily be compared across schools. A crucial lesson learned was that assessment designed to meet formative information needs could not easily be used to meet the summative accountability needs of policy makers and politicians. As Sainsbury (1996) describes, there was a great deal of tension between having assessments that were manageable to implement, assessments that were valid in terms of what children were required to do and assessments that could provide reliable information for comparability purposes. Eventually, performance tasks gave way to more traditional paper and pencil type standardised tests. While teacher assessments continued to be a part of the assessment system, the need to provide standardised information across schools (for the purpose of compiling school league tables) dominated the agenda and relegated assessment for learning to a distant second place. Many complained bitterly that while the publication of school league tables sold newspapers, the league tables themselves were of very little value to a pupil grappling with a reading problem. In the same vein, Whetton (2004) makes the useful distinction between systems where testing is done early in the school year and the information used for diagnostic purposes (e.g. France) and summative systems where testing is done as close as possible to the end of a schooling phase and used for accountability purposes (e.g. England). He also notes that after a dozen or more years of National Curriculum Assessment, the Welsh education system is abandoning the Key Stage 1 and 2 tests and moving back to a more formative/diagnostic orientation.

Since the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, a regular quip used by commentators on the fall-out since has been that now in the US no child is left untested. Given the absence of a national curriculum and a diverse range of educational systems across the states, the sheer scale of official mandated testing is impressive. And of course most of it happens in the context of inattention to the assessment information needs of students. Fuhrman (2003) points out that assessment in all fifty states is dominated by test results that in many cases are used to hold schools accountable for student performance. She also notes the parallel between education systems focusing on increased consequences for performance and accountability models used in the business world. This adult oriented thinking is commented upon by Stiggins (2004) who concludes that most testing programmes in the US are premised on the mistaken belief that adults are in charge of learning and are designed first and foremost to inform adult decision makers. From the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 right through to the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (2001) there seems to be an unshakable belief in the US that continuous testing will force standards of achievement up. Whetton (2004) notes a similar belief in the UK:

> …politicians see the testing system as an instrument of policy to set and illustrate standards and to then use them in target setting to

> improve a public service. This is a similar philosophy to that being applied to other public services in an age where the role of the state is moving towards one of providing a climate in which citizens can largely make their own choices rather than have a monolithic state provision. Underlying this is both the need to improve education standards generally to ensure the economic competitiveness of the country in the future, and….. a belief that testing leads to an improvement in standards… (p. 22).

However, outcomes from a range of research studies conducted in the UK and the US undermine such beliefs (Carnoy and Loeb 2004; Haney 2000; Klein *et al*., 2002; Koretz 2001; Koretz and Barron 1998; Massey *et al*., 2003; Tymms 2003; Whetton 2004). A key finding in this respect is that while test scores might improve, improvements in real achievement (as measured by other assessments) do not necessarily follow. In short, students learn test-taking skills that seriously undermine the validity of any inferences that can be made about the test scores (poor "consequential validity" to use Messick's [1995] term). Other negative consequences of official mandated testing described by Gipps *et al*. (1995), the Assessment Reform Group (2002), and Kellaghan *et al*. (1996) are the high cost to teachers' and pupils' lives in terms of decreasing self-esteem and motivation.

TOWARDS BALANCE IN THE IRISH SYSTEM

So, knowing something about assessment as it has been experienced elsewhere and taking into account the previous policy regarding assessment in Ireland, what might an ideal system for Irish schools look like? To answer this question I believe that we need to follow two guiding principles.

- First, we need to ensure that when we plan on providing information to decision makers that there is a balance between classroom assessments and official assessments. This is important because we know some of the problems that can arise in countries where assessments systems are out of balance.

- Second, we need to identify priorities for both classroom assessment and official assessment. This is important because while we can aspire to an ideal system, it may not be possible to achieve everything we want, given the fairly serious demands assessment puts on teachers, schools, policy makers and others in terms of time, money and expertise.

That said, I now want to turn my attention to priority issues for classroom assessment.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT DECISION MAKING AND PRIORITIES

To restate a point, I believe that pupils are the most important users of assessment information. And the most important assessment information pupils need is that which allows them to decide where they are now in terms of their learning and what they need to do to progress beyond that point. By learning here I mean learning in terms of knowledge, skills and dispositions and learning as it pertains to cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Pupils make crucially important decisions about themselves as learners and these decisions are more important in terms of day to day learning than the decisions made by policy makers, politicians and others. Crucially, it is the classroom teacher that facilitates the flow of information to the pupil. The reality is that the information needs of pupils and the classroom assessment skills of teachers are inextricably linked.

It is well documented that teachers make hundreds of classroom-based decisions every day. Many of these decisions are made on the basis of assessment information and impact not just on pupil learning but on their own teaching as well. That is what we mean when we say that assessment is integral to good teaching and learning. Teachers should also be able to provide parents/guardians with progress information at a point during the school year that they can act on the information if necessary.

However, the bad news in terms of classroom assessment is that it is "beset with problems and shortcomings" (Black and Wiliam, 1998b, p.5). And this is as true for countries where assessments often dominates the educational agenda as it is in Ireland (see for example, Hall and Burke, 2003; Popham, 2004; Stiggins, 1995). Two recent implementation evaluations of the 1999 curriculum highlight assessment as an area requiring "significant attention and improvement" (DES Inspectorate, 2005, p51; NCCA, 2005). Problems with respect to assessment practice are also discussed in two reports on literacy in disadvantaged schools (DES Inspectorate 2005b; Eivers et al. 2005). Therefore, a key component (if not the key component) of having a balanced system is that we put a plan in place that will ensure that all teachers become highly skilled in classroom assessment.

I have outlined an agenda for professional development in another paper and note that the task of improving assessment literacy is a formidable one (O'Leary, 2005). However, others have approached this task in a way that allows teachers to prioritise their needs. The work of the NCCA's Junior Cycle Review Committee (NCCA, 2004a) and the King's Medway/ Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (Black et al., 2003) are cases in point. Here a focus on assessment areas such as questioning, feedback through marking, the formative use of summative tests and peer and self-assessment by students was successful in getting teachers to change their practice.

I do not assume that classroom teachers are the only ones in need of professional development. I believe that many individuals involved in pre-service teacher education, in-service provision and the inspectorate would welcome opportunities to learn more about classroom assessment.

DECISION MAKING AND OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT

While getting the best possible assessment information to learners should be a cornerstone of any assessment system, the assessment information needs of a number of other stakeholders will require that a plan be put in place for official assessments also.

Parents/guardians need access to two types of official assessment information. They need a clear statement of strengths and weaknesses at the end of a school year and as part of the process of choosing a school for their child they need access to assessment information that will help them evaluate the extent to which the school is likely to meet the social, emotional, and cognitive development needs of their child.

A core element in whole school evaluation is the quality of learning that is taking place in the school. The inspectorate, therefore, needs access to high quality information about learning. As things currently stand, the quality and range of information about learning held in schools seems to vary considerably across the country.

When pupils transfer between primary schools, between secondary schools and most importantly between primary and secondary school, it is obvious that high quality assessment information about the transferring pupil has the potential to make a big difference in terms of the decisions that are made about that pupil. In many instances, a secondary school may take pupils from ten or more primary schools and secondary school principals have voiced frustration about the fact that the assessment information they receive about their new pupils is either too vague in terms of curriculum coverage and achievement or lacking in consistency across pupils (see Smyth *et al.* 2004).

At the policy level, high quality assessment information needs to be available to inform decisions about achievement standards and about targeting resources where they are most needed. Over the past twenty or thirty years the national assessments conducted at the Educational Research Centre have provided good trend longitudinal data about reading and mathematics (e.g. Cosgrove et al., 2000; Shiel and Kelly, 2001). In addition, international studies such as IAEP2, TIMSS and PISA have allowed us to compare the reading, maths and science achievements of our primary and secondary students with their counterparts all over the world. However, while such information is generally of high quality, some would argue that since it is derived from samples it is not detailed enough to support good decision making with respect to issues concerning individual schools and the targeting of resources for learning support.

OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT PRIORITIES

First, a common format (standardised or semi-standardised system) for recording summative assessment information for all pupils in schools should be agreed

among the stakeholders. What I mean by semi-standardised is that there should be components of the record that are the same across every school and components that are at the discretion of individual schools. The record card for each pupil should be held in the school and updated at the end of each school year. At a minimum it should contain clear statements (not summary grades) about a pupil's achievements and areas for improvement across the curriculum. It should also contain relevant information about the pupil's performance on any standardised tests taken.

This recording system should be the basis for providing official assessment information to parents, other schools and the inspectorate. Again, I believe that if we want to avoid some of the problems associated with current practice in primary and secondary schools, we need to develop a common format (standardised or semi-standardised) report card system for reporting to parents and other schools. There needs to be consensus about the nature and type of assessment information that will be on these cards when they are sent to parents and when they are used for the purpose of providing information about a child when he or she transfers from one school to another. The recording system should also be the basis for providing relevant assessment information to psychologists from NEPS and to the inspectorate and for ensuring that there is a consistency about the information an inspector receives irrespective of the school he or she visits. Methodologies such as curriculum profiling provide a possible means of supporting efficient recording and clear reporting of achievement in primary school without overburdening the teacher. In the mid 1990s a considerable amount of work was undertaken at the Educational Research Centre to develop curriculum profiles in English, Mathematics, Gaeilge and music (see, for example, O'Leary and Shiel, 1997; Shiel and Murphy, 2000).

Second, a set of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced standardised tests should be developed and added to the list of those already being used by schools. In my view, priority should be given to (a) diagnostic instruments that help teachers with the process of identifying learning difficulties in primary school and (b) instruments that aid the process of assessing cross curricular skills (e.g. problem solving, critical thinking) especially in secondary school.

Once these tests are available all schools should be required to conduct norm-referenced standardised testing of their pupils. My preference would be for two kinds of testing:

- general achievement testing of reading and mathematics at the end of First Class (or early in Second Class), Fifth Class and early in the Second Year of secondary school. Pupils with perceived learning difficulties should be excluded from this testing and administered diagnostic tests instead. The information from the diagnostic tests could be used by teachers, the inspectorate and policy makers to confirm judgements about the numbers of pupils requiring learning support in schools.

- testing of cross-curricular skills perhaps at one point in Primary school e.g. Fifth Class and early in Second Year of secondary school.

While tests such as these would be useful as a means of providing teachers with a norm-referenced picture of achievement, they should also be used for formative purposes (hence early administration where possible). With respect to the testing of cross-curricular skills at second level, information from the tests should be shared among the subject teachers and used to implement joint strategies for tackling any problems. However, this may be easier said than done. There is a good deal of evidence worldwide that summative tests are not being used for formative purposes at present (Black *et al*., 2003).

In general, I do not believe that a single state developed standardised test should be recommended for use for any of these purposes as there is a danger that too much will be read into the outcomes of a single test and that the outcomes will be used to compare schools. My view is that schools should be given a choice about which tests to use and the rationale for choices should be contained in the schools' policy documents.

Third, the system of national assessments using representative samples currently in place for reading, Mathematics and Gaeilge in primary school should continue. Science could be added to the list in time. National assessments in subjects like Music and Art and for process skills in different subject areas have been conducted successfully in countries like New Zealand without unduly burdening teachers and students and using hands on performance tasks (Flockton and Crooks, 1995; Crooks and Flockton, 1997). In time these should be considered if we are serious about valuing all subjects in the curriculum and if we want to provide our curriculum developers and in-service providers with information for planning purposes. Ireland's involvement in international assessments should continue at post-primary level. However, the international agenda should be expanded to include at least the area of reading at primary level. Given the reservations about some of the outcomes of national assessments in reading (e.g. low achievement in disadvantaged schools, no major gains since 1998 [see, Eivers *et al*. 2005]), the opportunity to engage in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) would seem like an opportunity lost. These studies do not just provide information from representative samples on how systems compare in terms of achievement, but also provide a context for the exchange of ideas about effective teaching and learning and about the potential of particular policy initiatives for improving standards. The next PIRLS study is due to begin in 2006. I believe is that with a little more work and expense, our national and international assessments are well capable of providing us with information that will meet most of the decision making needs of policy makers, curriculum planners and educators reviewing educational practices and resources. In addition, information from these assessments can be used for public accountability purposes without risking the negative consequences of mandated national testing of all students.

Fourth, while I do not pretend to have an in-depth insight into many of the

issues surrounding the Leaving Certificate examination, I think that it would be improved if a greater variety of assessment approaches were used. It has been argued elsewhere that "the lack of reform in this programme could be described as a lack of assessment reform" (NCCA, 2004b, p. 18) and there seems to be general agreement that the way in which students taking the exam are assessed is problematic in terms of what it says about the learning we value (low level cognitive functioning?). That said, there is a strong possibility that if assessment approaches involving continuous teacher assessment are introduced, assessment for learning will be undermined. The argument that teachers and their students are "on the same side" under the current examination regime is relevant here. Theoretically, assessment for learning can prosper in this context. However, if a teacher's classroom assessment (e.g. grade for a portfolio) were to have a direct bearing on the final summary Leaving Certificate grade achieved by a student, then a different relationship might ensue. For example, a teacher might not give students responsibility for self-assessment or a student might not be willing to discuss her learning problems with the teacher. Both cases describe an environment not conducive to assessment for learning.

I am not including mandated national testing as part of a balanced system. My arguments for this are that I believe it has little to offer in educational terms, has poor consequential validity, and is open to argument about what the outcomes mean in terms of real achievement. Moreover, if the systems that I have just described are put in place, it becomes redundant unless someone is really serious about having data that will facilitate the compilation of school league tables. Thankfully, the current Minister for Education and Science (Mary Hanafin) has stated categorically that she is not in favour of such tables.

That said, I believe that as a fifth element of a balanced official assessment system, schools need to be much more proactive about providing a wide range of information to parents and the public about what they do and the achievements of their students. A recent survey suggests that there is an appetite among the public for publishing school results (Kellaghan *et al.,* 2004). However, no matter how many opinion polls indicate that people favour the publication of test/examination results, I do not believe that good judgements can be made about schools on the basis of how students do on single assessments no matter how much confidence we have in them (I'm thinking here about the Leaving Certificate in particular). I am also willing to hazard a guess that many of those who call for the publication of results are not fully aware of the potential negative consequences of such actions. That said, I believe that schools need to lead the way in this area. If they wish to counteract the pressure to publish test results in this age of public accountability and transparency (and Freedom of Information) then they will need to make it clear what they have accomplished in the past and how they are likely to matter to the lives of prospective students in the future. I support the call others have made for schools to begin publishing a prospectus containing a wide range of information including relevant information about different achievements. Even if individual schools make the decision to publish Leaving Certificate results (and some do), I believe that genuine student achievements can be described

in ways that will inform prospective parents without leading to the publication of league tables of results. We should look to our colleagues in Northern Ireland for guidance here. After consultation with teachers, schools, parents and unions, the Department of Education of Northern Ireland decided to drop league tables in 2001. Instead, schools now publish results and achievements in their individual prospectuses.

CONCLUSION

At this point in the history of educational testing and assessment it seems fair to say that in most countries around the world assessments providing information for evaluative/bureaucratic decision making at the system level tend to be prioritised over assessments supporting teaching and learning in the classroom. The former enjoy a higher public profile, get more development money, get more attention from the measurement experts and are prized as methods of leveraging change in school systems that are seen as slow to change. However, there is a great irony in the fact that research seems to indicate that official assessments are nowhere near as powerful a mechanism for raising pupil achievement as classroom assessments.

I have tried to sketch out a tentative model of what I consider to be a balanced system for Irish schools. I now offer this model as a basis for debate and discussion. While I make no apologies for prioritising classroom assessment in this model, I accept fully that assessment must also serve the needs of those working outside the classroom. The good news is that if we pay attention to classroom assessment, the assessment information we need for other purposes will also be of a higher quality. We also have evidence to suggest that teachers do not have to choose between teaching well and getting good results (Wiliam *et al.* 2004). In that respect, we need to begin thinking of good assessment simply as good teaching. Ultimately, we should strive to apply the principle that all assessments must make a positive contribution to teaching and learning.

In this paper I have not reviewed Irish policy documents relevant to assessment. Others have done this e.g. Hall (2000). However, I want to note that, with respect to primary education, since the publication of the report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum in 1990 (NCCA 990) there is a tension evident between documents that support classroom assessment as a priority (e.g. NCCA, 1993) and those preoccupied by what Hall calls “measurement issues” (e.g. the Department of Education Green Paper, 1992). While I feel that the basic thrust of policy documents considered together is not a threat to prospects for classroom assessment in this country, the fact that proposals for mandated national testing keep recurring suggests that we cannot take anything for granted. Other documents such as the INTO’s (1997) *Issues in assessment*, suggest that teachers would be broadly supportive of the kind of system I have outlined here even if it has major implications for the amount of professional

development they need to undertake. The recently established Teaching Council will also have an important part to play in promoting good assessment practice in schools and in ensuring that teachers are provided with opportunities for high quality professional development in the area.

As an assessment specialist and as a former classroom teacher my bottom line is that assessment must serve the needs of our students first and foremost. The assessment information needs of others can then be tackled. As things stand in this country, we must acknowledge that we have a way to go on both fronts. That said, we have never before been so conscious as we are today of the importance of assessment to good teaching and learning in the classroom. It is now up to us all to do something positive about it.

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Gerry Jeffers

CONVERSATIONS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING: A CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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This paper is based on a presentation made at the first workshop for Principals and Deputy Principals taking part in the Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century project (TL21), Education Department, NUI Maynooth, 26 February 2004. TL21 is a four-year joint research and development project between the university department and sixteen schools with the aims of developing existing good practice and promoting fresh thinking and action about teaching and learning processes. Further details are available at the project's website www.nuim.ie/TL21.

ABSTRACT: This paper presents the view that schools should be learning communities characterised by cultures that value shared reflection and that promote and nurture professional conversations. Based on evidence from the author's own professional experiences and other sources, the challenges for school leaders to keep teaching and learning high on their list of priorities are explored. School principals and deputy principals are seen not only as supporters and facilitators of meaningful and relevant professional conversations among school staff members but are encouraged to be active leaders of such conversations, not least among themselves. Some rethinking about the role of school leaders is proposed and some practical suggestions offered. The discussion is located in the context of TL21, a school-university partnership project that aims to strengthen schools as active learning communities.

INTRODUCTION

If a focus on teaching and learning is at the heart of school improvement, then it seems reasonable that such a focus should be a central feature of the daily work of principals and deputy principals. There is considerable evidence that, despite their best intentions, principals are continually deflected from this focus, frequently because of the multiple pressures and demands that arise from the immediacy of school life. Furthermore, even when teaching and learning are given a high priority, for example in the context of School Development Planning, the evidence suggests that legal and operational issues take precedence. (SDPI, 2002)

In his aptly titled *Schools Must Speak for Themselves*, John Macbeath (1999) contends that self-evaluation is the route to school improvement. This title succinctly captures three distinct imperatives for today's schools: greater 'ownership' of their work by those employed in schools, an increased sense of accountability to stakeholders and the need to manage their public relations. Macbeath's work is based on a recognition that each school has its own unique history, cast of characters, and narrative that unfolds over time, sometimes in unanticipated directions. Those who work in positions of school leadership are keenly aware that there are various audiences out there judging their schools, often working with limited data. School personnel know that if they don't speak up for their schools, few others are likely to do so.

The view proposed in this paper is that, in order to reach a readiness for telling their own stories self-confidently and self-critically, schools must, to rephrase Macbeath, speak *to* themselves. It is based on a belief that effective schools should be learning communities characterised by cultures that value shared reflection and that promote and nurture professional conversations. Futhermore, it is proposed that school leaders should lead by example, ensuring that improving the quality of teaching and learning is a central feature of such conversations. The perspective offered here has been forged on anvils of experience, as teacher, as school leader, as member of an educational support service, and more recently, as a staff member within a university education department.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Following his appointment to the post of a vice-principal (nowadays Deputy Principal) this author learned a vivid and sobering lesson. At that time, the school, a new community college in a Dublin suburb, was only two years old with an enrolment of 320 students and twenty-three teachers. As a team, the school staff was very much at the stage of 'inventing' a school and, indeed, the invention was accompanied by many professional conversations. For example, a cursory analysis of end-of-term test results and of reports that were sent home to parents prompted some concerns. These centred around that occupational dilemma of, on the one hand, maintaining standards, while, on the other, not discouraging students In

particular, the question arose 'why do so many students seem to have achieved relatively low grades? In reviewing the exam papers it emerged that, among other things, seven different subject areas posed questions related to 'measurement' - Mathematics, Science, Geography, Woodwork, Home Economics, Metalwork and Mechanical Drawing, to give the subjects their historically correct titles. Teachers confirmed that some students were struggling with the basics of measurement. The possibility that attempting to teach measurement in seven different ways might be confusing for some students was acknowledged. However, the apparently obvious next step – that of devising a module on measurement to be taught early in first year with the aim of consolidating students' basic understandings of distance, area and volume – met with strong resistance. This enthusiastic Vice-Principal learned an important lesson.

Teachers were less than impressed by the proposed cross-curricular, interdisciplinary module. Two particular perspectives are worth recalling from the conversations related to this topic. Firstly, teachers can be fiercely territorial about their own subjects. ' No, we do it in a special way in Geography/Metalwork/ Home Economics.' Secondly, there was an even more fundamental undercurrent to their responses. The essential message, delivered with various levels of directness, could be decoded as: 'Who do you think you are as Vice-Principal, sticking your nose into my subject area? Do you not know that your job is to make sure there is a teacher in every class and that misbehaving students are dealt with?'

And so, with a metaphorical bloodied nose, this particular school leader retreated and reflected. So what was this job as a Vice-Principal, he asked himself? If teaching and learning are the central activities of the school, then surely supporting teaching and learning has to be a central concern for anyone interested in aspiring to effective school leadership? This individual had crashed into a cluster of questions with which everyone involved in school leadership must engage. In particular, there is the clear difference in expertise in relation to subject areas; often, the individual teacher is an undisputed specialist while the school leader may only have a cursory knowledge of the subject; the power differential favours the individual teacher. How should the school leader react when he or she feels intimidated by his or her ignorance in particular subject areas, especially if the effect is to increase the distance between school leader and classroom practice?

Faced with these dilemmas, this leader decided that he needed to develop a greater familiarity with a wide range of school subjects. Syllabi and examiners' reports were read but some of the most useful - and interesting - parts of that learning journey involved listening to teachers talking about their subjects, engaging with them in professional conversations. Given the right circumstances, the majority of teachers were not only happy to talk about their teaching but frequently articulated strong commitment and passion for their subjects. Hearing individuals talk about their hopes and aspirations for their students and classes was most instructive for the recently appointed school leader. Of course, some of these conversations arose out of minor crises: students misbehaving, classes under-performing, teachers experiencing frustration and so forth.

On reflection, it seems that increased insight and empathy are more likely to result from such conversations when at least three school-related realities are recognized:

1. There is genuine *respect* for the fact that individual subject teachers are 'experts', with particular knowledge and insights that a school leader may not have. As school leaders gain more confidence in such conversations, acknowledging their own ignorance should become less difficult! To initiate such conversations, school leaders may have to take the lead. Such conversations often approach what Friere refers to as 'true dialogue', where 'dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence'. (Friere, 1970, p 72)
2. Quite often the school leader's role in these conversations may be primarily one of *listening* to what teachers have to say, clarifying for understanding in a way that reinforces the first point.
3. Because of the nature of school life, conversations are often 'bitty' and interrupted. From a school leader's viewpoint, valuing brief conversations on the corridor, in the staffroom and elsewhere as *part of a wider, ongoing professional conversation* can be useful. For example, informal enquiries to a teacher in the staffroom asking about progress following an incident that weeks ago seemed to be intensely urgent can be very effective in facilitating a calmer professional discussion about the issue.

Barth's (1990, p. 46) contention that 'the most crucial role of the principal is as head learner …. experiencing, displaying, modelling and celebrating what it is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do' is a useful perspective in this regard.

For this leader, these experiences early in his newfound role were formative lessons. He grew to appreciate more the double-edged 'autonomy-isolation' tension with which all teachers struggle; to acknowledge that one teacher's autonomy can be another's isolation; to realise that, while individual teachers may wish to be autonomous in many situations, there are other times when collegiality, a sense of solidarity and a lack of isolation are important. Indeed, this tension can be seen as one of the defining characteristics of the teaching profession. Yet, as Lortie (1975) and many others have asserted, teachers say that they learn best from other teachers. So, another question looms: in promoting teachers' professional development how can school leaders best promote autonomy while at the same time counteract isolation?

TEAMWORK

If school leaders must be chief learners, leading by example, then they must also be active in promoting teamwork. In particular, teamwork in schools needs to be directed towards facilitating teachers sharing their practice with each other. Examples of teacher solidarity abound, and are often very evident in staffrooms. It is especially visible when an individual teacher arrives in after a particular class or incident and is clearly upset, disappointed, frustrated, angry, or indeed, all of the above. Colleagues rally round offering words of empathy and support. In such critical moments, one often hears the forceful articulation of key shared values, sometimes about students, sometimes about the job of being a teacher, sometimes about the leadership within the school, sometimes even about the frustration of being human. Negatives are often mixed with positives. Partly because of the ways schools are organized, much of this sharing of perspectives on the role of the teacher takes place informally. Teachers identify like-minded colleagues and school sub-cultures develop. A challenge for school leadership is to harness existing collegial relationships and at the same time encourage new ones directed at supporting the school's needs. Formal teams within schools can be grouped into three main categories:

- Subject focused teams, e.g. English, Modern Languages, Civic, Social and Political Education etc.
- Pastoral teams e.g. Anti-bullying; Year head and class tutors, Bereavement support, etc.
- Special task focused teams e.g. discipline, the Christmas Concert, Sports Day etc.

When teams work well, whether their focus is in a subject area, in the pastoral arena or related to a specific school project, they are nourished by professional conversations. With such teamwork, we begin to glimpse the validity of Sergiovanni's (1996) contention that shifting the thinking about the school from that of an 'organisation' to 'a community' changes how we think schools should be structured. As he says:

> Communities are organised around relationships and ideas. They create structures that bond people together in a one-ness, and that bind them to a set of shared values and ideas.
>
> (Sergiovanni, 1996, p 46)

Mc Dermott, echoing Habermas, captures some of the attraction of team-working for teachers when he observes,

> *I have always been attracted to the idea of team, and the collegiality it implies. My ideal of team is of a professional space, where the*

participants feel safe; where respect is reciprocated; where communication is open and questioning; where work-related emotions are not experienced as destructive; and where each individual has an opportunity to flourish and to inspire. This ideal is one which, I believe, can influence, in a powerful way, the reality of team-formation in the everyday circumstances of school life.

(McDermott 2004, p.65)

TEACHING AND LEARNING 21

Strengthening and affirming schools as active learning communities is a major goal of TL21. This project aims to increase teachers' capacities as authors of their own work and to encourage students to become more active and responsible participants in their own learning. Professional conversations are critically important in realizing these aims. At the individual teacher level, regular conversations with a colleague, 'a critical friend', about one's own classroom work is an essential component. Subject focused workshops involving teachers from clusters of neighbouring schools will be driven by the power of teachers talking to each other about their work. The team sees a similar process operating at the leadership level, with principals and deputy principals dedicating time and space within busy schedules to talk to each other about relevant teaching and learning issues within their schools. Workshops with school leaders from participating schools provide further structured opportunities to explore such issues. Furthermore, those of us working on the university side of this partnership see TL21 as an ongoing conversation between schools and project team members. The belief is that , by engaging in greater collegiality, teachers are more likely to enhance their capacity for autonomy, and become more confident and competent about their own work. TL21's ambition is also that by rooting itself initially in four subject areas[1], the energy, enthusiasm and practical insights from the work will spread throughout the school community, particularly by fostering greater conversation, discussion and debate on key teaching and learning issues.

It is worth emphasizing that school leaders are both expected to facilitate this process among teachers, and, critically, to engage actively in conversations about teaching and learning themselves. Indeed, the TL21 project team expects that improved quality and frequency of conversations about teaching and learning between principals and deputies is likely to become both an outcome of the project, and an important indicator of its impact in individual schools. The intention is that some of the thinking and strategies outlined in this paper will contribute to this.

1 The initial subjects in TL21 are English, Mathematics, Gaeilge and Science. There is also a cross-curricular ICT strand.

THE PASTORAL AND THE SUBJECT FOCUS

A casual conversation with a friend, returning to Ireland after spending nearly twenty years teaching in mainland Europe, helped illuminate a further aspect of the teaching and learning challenge for school leaders. Asked what changes he observed in schools, he didn't hesitate. 'The shift towards pastoral care', he replied. This resonated with the experience, referred to earlier, of 'inventing' a school during the 1980s. Consciously and deliberately the post of responsibility system was structured around year-heads and class tutors, each with a job description that was strongly pastoral. As the conversation developed the flip-side of the friend's response was explored: with such an emphatic swing towards the pastoral, what might have lost out? 'Subject departments', he replied, without hesitation.

That conversation brought into sharp focus a central question related to school organisation: when a school consciously deploys its formal posts of responsibility in developing a pastoral system - effective year-heads and tutors - how can subject departments be nurtured? If the posts are insufficient to ensure a head in every department are there not senior positions to do with curriculum, staff development, teaching and learning and subject leadership that need to be put in place? This question is in no way intended to negate the much needed pastoral emphasis evident in many schools, but the question is increasingly relevant, especially at a time of major curricular and syllabi changes.

A minor incident serves to illustrate what can happen when a school's subject department structure is weak. During the course of a day-long staff meeting in the school mentioned previously, subject specific meetings were scheduled. In order to facilitate more than seventy teachers it was usually necessary to arrange three different combinations of subject meetings, each lasting thirty minutes. This was a major investment of staff time. The returns often appeared uneven, none more so than the meeting that lasted barely five minutes! 'We've decided the books for next year', the school leader was informed when he enquired what had happened, as if that was all those particular subject teachers had to talk about. However, rather than blame the participants, this school leadership team agreed that unstructured meetings were unlikely to be effective, that instructing a subject departments to 'have a meeting' is rarely sufficient. Eventually a list of suggested activities for subject meetings emerged, directed towards getting teachers to talk about their practice. To be meaningful, subject meetings need preparation, facilitation –preferably by someone willing and prepared - and a framework to promote professional conversations. Talking to subject-convenors or department heads, individually and collectively, about developing their role may be among the most important conversations in which principals and deputies need to engage.

KEY CONVERSATIONS

While it is important to encourage professional conversations among teachers and between teachers and school leaders in order to promote a culture that puts teaching and learning at the heart of school leaders' roles, the quality of the conversations between Principals and Deputy Principals is also vitally important. Frequently the busy nature of the school day appears to make it next to impossible for these school leaders to find time to discuss teaching and learning. Something else always seems more pressing. And yet, if these conversations are not taking place, 'teaching and learning' can easily slip down the priority list.

In the school mentioned earlier both Principal and Deputy valued strongly the power of such conversations. The most vivid manifestation of these beliefs came each summer when the important work of drawing up the coming year's timetables were interspersed with extensive, sometimes structured, sometimes non-linear, conversations about the school and about teaching and learning. In terms of monitoring staff development, one of the key questions was: if teacher X is experiencing real difficulties in his/her classroom, who on the staff is he/she likely to approach for support? This exercise involved inserting each teacher's name at 'X'. Often networks of supports, sometimes involving subject departments or tutor and year-head teams or friendship groups could be identified. Informal mentoring was widespread. Anyone who appeared particularly isolated became a priority for conversational support, either from the school leadership – though one has to acknowledge frequently that was least likely -, or, preferably, a subject leader. Of course, there was resistance. But there were also significant breakthroughs. As time went on it became clear that the informal pairing of teachers was often more powerful than full subject teams. School leaders, it seems, need to facilitate and support both.

These summer conversations between the Principal and Deputy were built around a particularly useful structure. This entailed a formal, individual consultation with all teachers. These conversations took place from March onwards and focused on teachers' timetables for the following year. Prior to a face-to-face meeting, each teacher filled in a simple form. The form sought information from teachers as follows:

1. What classes are you currently teaching and how well or otherwise are they going?

2. What classes/subjects would you wish to teach next year?

While this process emphasized the language of consultation, it was clear that the ultimate value was to devise a viable timetable that would operate in the first week of September and beyond. This mechanism ensured that, at least once a year, every teacher had a formal conversation with either Principal or Deputy Principal about his or her teaching.

On occasions when this practice is recounted, teachers react with surprise. Responses such as: *Do you know that in twenty years teaching, my principal never sat me down in a formal way and asked me about my teaching* are common. Others agree and then, usually, someone else comes up with the reasonable point: but that's like inspection? This sparks further lively debate! One is left with a sobering question: if Principals and Deputy Principals are not engaged in extended conversations with teachers about their teaching, why not?

FUTURE TRENDS

The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) has given a fresh clarity to the respective roles of school leaders, teachers and to the Inspectorate. Undoubtedly, in the future, professional conversations between teachers and inspectors are going to play a greater part in teachers' professional development than has been our tradition. The chances of teachers having worthwhile professional conversations with inspectors are more likely if such conversations are already taking place within schools, among the teaching team. This takes us back to the centrality of schools speaking *to* themselves. It also links neatly with some of Donald Schon's ideas about reflective practitioners and Peter Senge's vision of learning organizations.

There are two further, brief, points worth making about Principals and Deputy Principals working together. Firstly, school leaders' views about teaching and learning find concrete expression in a school's timetable. The timetable is an unequivocal statement about how particular students, teachers, programmes and subjects are valued. Debates about mixed-ability, multiple intelligences, inclusive schools, streaming, tracking, curricular breadth and balance, subject choices, hierarchies and teamwork are settled, at least for the coming year, in the annual timetable. Ideally, school leaders should be able to offer educationally defensible explanations to every detail of a school's timetable 'Blaming' a computer programme or hiding behind some other excuse seems like abdication of responsibility.

Secondly, not only is the quality of the relationship between principal and a deputy of crucial importance for an effective school, the participants, as in all relationships, need to work at nurturing that relationship. Sometimes the pair in the relationship may have little prior history of working together. In this author's case, he met the principal - with whom he was going to work side by side for the next eleven years - for the first time on the day of the interview for the position of deputy. The principal wasn't a member of the interview board but was pacing up and down welcoming candidates and muttering about arranged marriages. The metaphor of 'arranged marriage' is one to which all principals and deputies can relate!

In working together to forge a professional relationship, both worked hard at developing a shared vision for the kind of school they wished to construct. At a

more basic level, the principal and deputy tried to ensure that there weren't too many chinks in the joint presentation of leadership to staff. Both were keenly aware that there were teachers, students and parents, who, for whatever reasons, would be only too happy to exploit any perceived tensions between them. That situation can be especially difficult for the deputy who's often the one who ends up biting his or her tongue. This points towards another question: how can a principal and deputy best operate a professional relationship that respects different viewpoints but is also collaborative in the best interests of students' learning? Here again, much of the answer is worked out in ongoing professional conversations between principal and deputy. Put another way, in the goldfish bowl that is a school, if principal and deputy are not engaged in meaningful professional dialogue with each other, what messages does this send to teachers, students and other stakeholders? Indeed, how principal and deputy deal with their differences - in viewpoints, values and styles – is a critical feature of any school's development. For example, one suspects that, in some schools, the resolution of certain difficulties could begin with the principal and deputy starting to talk to each other about such differences.

IMMEDIACY

With the value of hindsight, it is easier now to see how the process of trying to engage with teaching and learning, attempting to be a curriculum leader, is often a story of limited success. Time is a key issue; there never seems to be enough. In a culture where the metaphorical fire brigade dimension of a school leader's role is often seen as critically important, strategic planning can seem like a luxury. So often, something that appears more urgent demands attention. Broken windows, broken hearts and broken bones are all more immediately engaging when compared to reflection on teaching and learning.

This former school leader has to admit that he found the 'buzz' of the 'immediate' engaging, invigorating and at times even mildly addictive! For some, there can be a seductive attractiveness in being seen as central to the effective operation of a school. Because schools are such immediate places, the need for 'troubleshooting', for practical responses to all manner of minor crises, are very real. People with the label 'principal' attached are often perceived as those who should deal with all these issues. Making time and space for teaching and learning will always involve a struggle. Working out a balance between dealing with the day-to-day routines of school life and the more reflective, strategic aspects of leadership will always be challenging. A decade ago, in one of the few published studies of Irish school leaders, Leader and Boldt (1994, p.95) observed that 'the unmistakable evidence from the diaries, the interviews and the case studies' was that principals generally involved themselves 'directly with low value tasks. Many of these tasks are maintenance and janitorial in character'. How much has changed since 1994?

The 2002 Report from the School Development Planning Initiative noted, in a telling observation, that

> …. although issues relating to teaching and learning have been prioritised by a significant proportion of Post-Primary schools, they have tended to be overshadowed in the SDP process by legal and organisational concerns**.**
>
> (SDPI, 2002, p.51)

In this context, Hargreaves (1994) offers some illuminating frameworks on how teachers understand 'time' in the context of school, Indeed, his perspectives on teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age are worthy of serious consideration by those in school leadership positions.

Thus, experience suggests that it will be a constant struggle to keep teaching and learning centre stage within school life. And this points to the formulation of another set of key questions that often arises in conversations about teaching and learning. For example, what do changes in teaching and learning practices actually look like? Should principals and deputies have a list of indicators of change in teaching and learning? If so, what would be on such a list? How good are we at recognizing the signs of really productive teaching and learning?

Each school leadership team could profitably work on its own set of responses to these questions, identifying its own preferred issues and targets. Sometimes, indicators can be minor ones that take on a symbolic significance. A small example illustrates this point. This particular deputy principal used to teach eight hours per week, much of it in the same classroom. He regularly tried to re-shape the learning space, often arranging the desks in a rectangle rather than in the traditional rows, with a view to increasing student participation and co-operative learning. Often, on returning to the room, he observed that other teachers had reverted to serried rows. However, on other occasions he could see that some colleagues also preferred the changed learning space. The struggle for change in school practices is worked out frequently through such minor skirmishes as well as through broad policy shifts.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SCHOOL GOALS

As already mentioned, the 1998 Education Act brings the need for more professional conversations within school to the forefront of educational planning within schools. Traditionally, policy directions in Irish education have evolved haphazardly and have often been characterized by a certain vagueness (see, for example, OECD 1991; Coolahan 1994; Cromien 2000; Gleeson, 2004). The 1998 Education Act marks an important shift towards more formal descriptions of roles and responsibilities. The contention here is that much of the underlying thrusts within the Act support the need for schools to engage more in professional conversations focused on teaching and learning.

For example, one of the objects of the Education Act, 1998 is: 'To promote best practice in teaching methods with regard to the diverse needs of students and the development of the skills and competences of teachers (Section 6 f), while one of the central functions of a school is to 'Meet the educational needs of all students' (9 a).

A further function is to:

> Establish and maintain systems whereby the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations can be assessed, including the quality and effectiveness of teaching in the school and the attainment levels and academic standards of the students (9 k).

Building on the general responsibilities of schools, the Act becomes more explicit when it sets out the responsibilities of the Principal and teaching staff.

> The job of the Principal and the teachers is to encourage learning in students (22a).

Furthermore, a vision of school leaders' collaborating with others towards a collegial culture that supports teaching and learning is also quite explicit in the Act. For example, one of the tasks of the Principal is to

> Be responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers (23c).

Whatever was possible in the past, it seems that our new educational context will mean that it will be vital for principals and deputies to be engaged in on-going meaningful conversation with each other, especially about the professional growth of the teachers in that school. Realistically, this in turn requires extensive conversations by both principal and deputy with those teachers.

TRANSITION YEAR SUPPORT

While much of the perspective being proposed here was developed through the experience of working as a deputy principal over eleven years, subsequent work has tended to reinforce such views. Two examples are illustrative.

Membership of the Support Service for Transition Year during the mid and late 1990s involved working with a wide variety of school staffs. Unlike other school programmes curriculum content in Transition Year (TY) 'is a matter for selection and adaptation by the individual school' (Department of Education, 1993, p.5). This presents school staffs with opportunities to be innovative. One of the

striking features observed while working with many staffs was their limited belief in themselves, their lack of professional self-respect. They seemed to put more faith in external 'experts' then in their own expertise. This tended to come into sharp relief when the Support Service emphasised that the greatest expertise to devise an imaginative TY programme, in line with their particular students' needs, resided within the school: what teachers needed to do was to talk to each other. It was quite a common observation of many members of that team, especially in the first stage of support, that such suggestions were met by seas of disbelieving faces. Collective professional self-belief was low. Indeed, for school leaders there are unique opportunities around TY to respond to teachers' basic needs for recognition and affirmation.

These experiences in schools, including many conversations with principals and TY co-ordinators, continually brought into focus another central question that faces school leaders: how can the undoubted expertise about teaching and learning that resides in each staff, be shared among all who work in any given school? This challenge is well illustrated by a conundrum that most school leaders have encountered, that of the two adjacent classrooms. The conundrum is this: Room 13 appears to be a classroom in which wonderful educational experiences occur regularly; next door, Room 14, however, appears to approach chaos; what interventions can school leaders make to ensure that some of the professional expertise evident in Room 13 is shared with the teacher who seems to be struggling in Room 14? Once again, while not wanting to imply that there are simple answers to these dilemmas, the proposition is that professional conversations can make a critical difference.

TEACHER SUPPORT PROJECT

The final example relating to professional conversations arises from facilitating a recent teacher support project, different from TL21, but with some similar orientations. Ten volunteers in a suburban post-primary school agreed to work in pairs. They observed each others' classes and then conversed with each other about the experiences. Then, every six weeks or so, the ten volunteer teachers, the principal or deputy and the external facilitator came together to talk about the experiences. These were powerfully rich conversations. One particular insight seems especially relevant here. A participant commented that for her, the main value of the project was:

> *I like the fact that we are talking about teaching in a non-crisis situation. So often we talk to each other about teaching after a dreadful class, letting off steam but not (in a) very reflective (way).*

That observation helps formulate another useful question for school leaders: how can conversations be promoted between teachers that encourage their talking about teaching in non-crisis situations? Part of any answer will be 'time', but allocating time alone seems unlikely to bring about such conversations. Structure, facilitation and a climate of trust are also essential.

CONCLUSION

The intention has been to highlight the centrality of teaching and learning in the work of any school and to illustrate with some examples from the author's professional experience, how, in practice, this can be challenging. For those in positions of school leadership, keeping teaching and learning close to the top of one's priorities can be a continual struggle. Our profession's collective understanding of the school as a workplace is often characterized by an emphasis on professional autonomy; the emphasis here is that this needs to be counterbalanced by a genuine collegiality that is characterized by professional conversations. Paradoxically, increased collaboration among teachers can promote greater individual autonomy. We may grapple to find a common vocabulary to talk to each other about teaching and learning but the alternative - isolated individual teachers who rarely converse with each other about what really matters in schools - is a recipe for sterile professional relationships, frustrating work environments and, ultimately, poorer student learning. As Libermann and Miller remark:

> Professional learning is most powerful, long lasting, and sustainable when it occurs as a result of one's being a member of a group of colleagues who struggle together to plan for a given group of students, replacing the traditional isolation of teachers from one another. (1999, p. 62)

Many national and international reports throughout the last decade have highlighted the need for innovative approaches to teaching and learning e.g. *Charting our Education Future* (Government of Ireland, 1995), *Schooling for Tomorrow: What Schools for the Future?* (OECD, 2001). The TL21 project seeks to support schools move from a vision of fresh thinking about teaching and learning to implementation. The project team is keenly aware that such change is complex, sensitive to the insights of Fullan (2005), not least when he draws attention to the assertion by Black and Gregerson (2002, p.70) that

> The clearer the new vision the easier it is for people to see all the specific ways in which they will be incompetent and look stupid. Many prefer to be competent at the (old) wrong thing than incompetent at the (new) things.

Furthermore, as Callan (2002) indicates 'the systems of teacher development, curriculum development and school development are inextricably inter-linked' and supporting such development is multi-faceted. Thus, implementing real change in teaching and learning practices in schools requires extensive professional conversations between teachers, between school leaders and between teachers and leaders. As a research and development project involving schools and a university education department, TL21 has been built on a strong belief in the transformative power of such conversations. For school leaders, the vision is of Principals and Deputies not only as facilitators of teachers seeking to improve their practice but of they themselves as actively engaged in leading the way. Through relevant and meaningful professional conversations with each other and with their staffs and students, school leaders can enhance their understanding of students' and teachers' learning needs. In so doing they are more likely to be better positioned to support innovative approaches, inside and outside classrooms, aimed at enriching young people's learning.

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Gerry McNamara and Carmel Mulcahy

GOING FURTHER: ADULT EDUCATORS REFLECT ON THE IMPACT OF FURTHER EDUCATION ON THEMSELVES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports on research conducted with adult educators taking teacher development programmes at the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University. The programmes were designed around a national training needs analysis of educators working in the Adult and Further Education Sectors. This research showed that as well as teaching and curriculum development skills, these adult educators valued their personal development highly and interpersonal skills, both for their own professional development and to equip them to deliver better programmes to their clients. This follow-up research, largely qualitative in nature was designed to assess the extent to which the adult educators feel they are gaining these skills in their training and to gauge the benefits of such learning in their own lives and in delivering their programmes. What emerges is a very interesting picture of the positive impact that higher education can make on adults and, of even more importance, on the largely marginalised communities in which these particular students work and live.

Adult Education is the last area of mass education to be developed in Ireland. The rationale for investment in Adult Education does not rest on purely economic issues, but also on the central role of learning in creating a democratic society, in promoting culture and identity, and in enriching and strengthening individuals, families and communities.

(White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*, 2000)

INTRODUCTION

The publication of the White Paper on Adult Education *Learning for Life* (DES, 2000) at the outset of the millennium marked a major event for those involved in the field of Adult Education in Ireland. For many years seen as the Cinderella of the Irish education system and heavily reliant on voluntary and community effort, the new initiative holds out promise of greater investment in and support for the sector. There can be no doubt that economic issues and the need to project a well-developed education and training system and an adaptable workforce willing to upskill and embrace change strongly influenced the new found support for lifelong learning. This is indeed acknowledged in the foreword. The Government Minister with responsibility for Adult Education at the time, Mr. Willie O'Dea, identified globalisation, increased competition and the impact of new technologies as catalysts for a systematic investment in the sector (*Learning for Life*, 2000, p9) He goes on, however, to highlight the role of the sector in addressing inter-generational poverty and disadvantage, strengthening individuals, families and communities and promoting democracy and social cohesion. It is this aspect of adult education, which we wish to address in this paper.

RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH

Learning for Life (DES, 2000, p.12) defines adult education as "*systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training".* For the purposes of this work we have taken on board this definition, though we are aware that some of those involved in the research are working with groups of adults who may or may not have concluded any form of initial education. The research is set against the backdrop of previous work conducted by our department, analysing the training needs of trainers within the Further Education (FE) sector in Ireland. (McNamara, Mulcahy and O'Hara, 2001). The conclusions of this research conducted from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective, identified key training needs. There was a strong emphasis placed on person-centred learning, including guidance and counselling, group and interpersonal skills, facilitation and communication skills and, of central

importance, understanding of and empathy with the needs and concerns of adult learners (ibid, p. 33) Most of the trainers interviewed work with adults who are experiencing disadvantage in their lives. As outlined by one trainer:

> *Staff requires training in encouraging people. They need to see beyond the disadvantage. If you can bring adults along, if they respect and care for you, then this is half the battle. People fall out of education because of personal issues. If staff can work on these issues then students won't be resistant to education.*
>
> (*Ibid*, p.27)

Subsequent to that study the School of Education Studies at Dublin City University designed and implemented a number of programmes based on the needs identified and the priorities expressed by the adult educators who contributed to the research. It is now appropriate to examine the impact of the training provided by the Education Studies Department in Dublin City University for adult educators in the sector. The research set out to look at whether our courses had a positive effect both on their professional lives as educators within their individual centres and on their own lives as adult students in a formal university setting.

In setting out a role for adult education in society, the White Paper (DES, 2000, p.28) identifies six priority areas:

- Consciousness Raising
- Citizenship
- Cohesion
- Competitiveness
- Cultural Development
- Community Building

While the research did not specifically highlight these issues, it did inform the research methodology from the perspective of the interview schedule and observation of course participant work.

Many of the initiatives which form the backdrop of the Further Education Sector in Ireland sector grew out of the work of community based activists who responded very often in an ad hoc fashion to the needs of their local communities. Most of the initiatives were and continue to be based in areas of high unemployment and social deprivation. Our students work in rural and urban centres, some travelling a round trip of 160 miles, twice weekly to attend our courses.

During the lifetime of our Certificate and Diploma courses we have built up a profile of our students based on their initial application forms, questionnaires, course work, observation and post course research.

The initial records indicate that a majority of our students while well skilled in a particular field, do not have any previous formal education, beyond the end of compulsory schooling. Many are perceived as leaders and activists in their own

communities including at least one member of local government, but they have faced many obstacles in the return to formal education. The initial step inside the gates of university has, for many, been intimidating and threatening. Two of our female graduates are members of the Travelling community, who deliver training to their fellow Traveller women.

Our research tracks the progress of a group of these students and attempts to ascertain the impact of their time in university on a range of issues. These include:

- Personal development
- Continuing Professional development
- Impact on their organisations
- Changes in employment
- Engagement in civil society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed here was mainly qualitative in nature. It is a search for a local truth through a focus on, what Habermas (1979) refers to as the *lifeworld* of the participants. This focus is developed through multiple perspectives, which are compared and contrasted through discourse and dialogical engagement. The use of narrative analysis as espoused by Mishler (1986) and Labov (1982) informed the analysis and interpretation of the data. The research is a faithful representation of the views expressed by our students and because of our close engagement with them we hope that we have been able to elucidate meaning "as virtual participants in the process of reaching understanding among those immediately involved" (Pusey, 1987, p.61).

BACKGROUND

The School of Education Studies forms part of Dublin City University and is primarily involved in the delivery of courses in the field of Continuing Professional Development. Some years ago, the School, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science, set up a Certificate in Further Education and Training. This was followed a year later by a Diploma in Further Education and Training. The primary participants on our courses are educators and trainers in the FE field who to date have not received any formal teacher training. The emergence of an FE sector in Ireland and its fairly recent acknowledgement by the Department of Education and Science has heralded a major paradigm shift in Irish education from a singularly academic approach to a recognition of a diverse education and

training sector. This new field of FE includes Post Leaving Certificate Courses, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) for the long term unemployed, Youthreach, which caters for early school leavers, prisoner education, Traveller Training Centres to cater for our ethnic traveller community, centres catering for people with disabilities, area based partnerships and community initiatives.

The new programmes recognised that many of those involved in delivering Adult Education courses were recruited on the basis of a trade or business qualification or may have progressed through the ranks of the community and voluntary sector. Many of those presenting for the Certificate did not possess formal qualifications but were accepted on the basis of prior learning, workplace based learning and expertise and experience learned in the field.

The Department of Education and Science covers fees and subsistence on the courses for those applicants who work in centres funded by it. There is also provision for funding for applicants who work in the disability sector. Each year the courses also attract trainers from other government agencies, the private sector, community-based groups and a range of non-government agencies. This mix of students creates a very interesting dynamic within the group and allows for the transfer of skills and the cross fertilisation of ideas. As the research indicates, it may also involve a change in mindset and a clearer understanding of how public, private and community based initiatives may work more closely together.

Students must achieve a specified grade before being allowed to progress from Certificate to Diploma level. The Department of Education and Science does not give formal recognition to the courses for appointment purposes (to permanent posts in Adult and Further Education) but does offer allowances for the qualifications if a trainer does become a permanent member of staff.

THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

The Diploma class of 2002 is used here to illustrate a fairly typical student profile. The class of twenty-six students was predominantly female (70%) and 60% of the class was in the forty plus age bracket. As this was a diploma class, all of the students had completed some form of tertiary education to Certificate level. Completion rate for the Diploma was almost 90%. Students came from various backgrounds including Youthreach, Traveller Training, childcare, the disability sector, literacy groups, Trade Unions, prison education and private industry. A new aspect of the course was the involvement of students who work with refugees and asylum seekers.

This reflects the increase in immigration in Ireland in recent years. In recognition of this fact, the White Paper (DES, 2000) defines inter-culturalism as one of the three core principles underpinning Adult Education in Ireland.

The profile of the group was unusual for adults in Higher Education . There was a high percentage of adults in the 45-54-age group, who had not completed upper secondary education. Traditionally, this group has been under-represented

at university level. The De Buitlear Report (HEA ,1999, p.79) shows that mature students in the Republic of Ireland are predominantly middle class and likely to have completed at least upper secondary education. Our picture is more representative of a group which lost out on education first time round and have returned to it through local or community involvement. There were an estimated 100,000 women involved in community education in Ireland in 2000 and there can be little doubt that this figure has grown considerably in the intervening years (Aontas, 2001). This may account for the predominance of women on our courses. Also, female participation rates in educational programmes is 61% in contrast to much lower rates of female participation in training and employment schemes (39%) (*Ibid.* p.12).

Students were asked to indicate their reasons for pursuing a Diploma in Further Education and Training. In order of importance, these were the top ten reasons given:

- To increase self-esteem
- Personal development
- Professional development
- To develop skills as a trainer
- To better job prospects
- To improve the lives of those with whom I work
- To undertake further study
- To change career
- To enhance IT skills
- To enhance counselling skills.

These areas were further explored through interviews with students from the class of 2002 and previous years and their views are reproduced in the remainder of this paper. There is one other significant point that was noted in profiling both this class and these of previous years. A significant number of students are parents of children who are suffering from learning disability, a specific learning difficulty or some form of chronic illness. This was a sensitive area to pursue with students but some gave this as a reason for their involvement in further education. A range of their comments is reproduced below.

- *From a personal perspective, within the area of disability, I have and will continue to advocate positive change in this area particularly with regard to education and training.*

- *All my life I have been advocating for the disabled. Now I feel I can do it with greater authority and respect.*

- *I gave over a huge block of time to be there for my child. I was an advocate in terms of her school, her place in life, daft things when I look back now. You were always justifying her. You hear all the data about disability and the rights of the disabled and it is a hard, uphill climb.*

- *We have to take on leadership roles in our fight. Maybe that is why we become leaders in our communities and grasp the opportunity to return to education and find out more.*

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Research conducted in University College, Cork in 1996, with reference to adult education and empowerment, examines the dimensions of personal change from four perspectives, namely, instrumental, expressive, ideological and activist. (O'Fathaigh and O'Sullivan, 1996, p.185) Our research studied the theme of personal development and continuing professional development from both the instrumental and expressive standpoint as it applied to our students.

It might be assumed that people undertaking a course in education and training are interested primarily in gaining a qualification and getting permanent jobs. However, the research indicates that this is secondary to the growth in self -esteem and personal development. These results are even more relevant in light of our previous research, which indicates that only 17 % of Further Education co-ordinators surveyed hold a permanent position and up to 85% of trainers fall into the part-time category (McNamara, *et al.*, 2001, pp.12-14).

One student spoke of the impact on her personal development in terms of her growth in self-esteem in dealing with figures of authority.

> *The impact of the courses on my personal development has been tremendous. My confidence has increased enormously when dealing with the CEO and members of the DES. I am more than able to refute their arguments and feel much more comfortable in articulating my own views. I also think that the qualification in FE gives credence to what you say. People in authority take you more seriously and you have a lot more clout.*

A student from a community based centre, which has recently experienced many difficulties from a management perspective, expresses a similar viewpoint:

> *A return to study has given me confidence for a start. It was very much about confidence building for me. It also made me focus on different parts of my work. I hate the rigour and the discipline*

and yet I love the rigour and the discipline. It has given me great confidence in my own ability and not to be intimidated by situations that would previously intimidated me. In a place like this you get consultants coming in and it is good to be confident enough to challenge their view of the organisation. Attending DCU has given me a position within the organisation, not a recognised one maybe, but I now know what I am talking about. You feel much more confident and much more pro-active in suggesting management change. You can identify the reasons for it and the context of it. Beforehand I just wouldn't have known these things.

Many of our students work in the area of personal development. An evaluation conducted by one of our students into courses delivered to pre- release prisoners elicited an interesting comment from one of the prisoners in the area of personal development and self esteem. In conversation with the researcher about the course content of pre- release courses, he referred to courses in personal development as *"the only thing the system can do to help people develop themselves".* He went on to state " *I can't understand how people giving pre-release courses, how they haven't got the qualifications in personal development. I know they're experimenting, right".* Such a comment clearly identifies the need to ensure that the self-esteem of our students is developed during our courses if they are going to provide help to their own students. This point is picked up in a comment from a diploma graduate working in the area of personal development within the Youthreach sector:

Working in the area of personal development, return to work and complementary medicine, I have felt a lack of academic/theoretical background in what I was doing. This had a negative impact on my self-esteem and my assessment of myself as a course provider. I now have greater confidence in my professional work.

What was clear from the interviews was that improved self-esteem and greater confidence tended to validate experiential learning and while promotion did not feature as a priority for students, course involvement had greatly enhanced employability. Students had in some instances been head hunted by other organisations in their local community, others had become permanent and several were promoted within their organisations. One centre co-ordinator, who lacked a professional qualification and was hoping to use the course to further his career, stated at the conclusion of the course:

If there were no possibility of further promotion, I would say the course has been worth it to me. I always felt that I could do the work and was professional but yet I feel this qualification has further enhanced my self-esteem. I want to go further, on to degree level. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to do this course.

Because of the lack of academic qualifications, I needed to prove to myself that I could do it.

The research highlighted a further unexpected outcome. The format of our courses which is based very much on a learner-centred, experiential approach to learning places great emphasis on small group interaction, discussion and presentation. This feature of the course was chosen to illustrate an increase in self- esteem and personal development by one graduate from the disability sector. Already A has got a degree and falls into the twenty to thirty age category. For him the key benefit of the course resulted from this delivery format:

I am a quiet enough person in general when in a group setting. I do not lack confidence but often find myself stopping from saying something because I've not been assertive. The course has helped me become more assertive as well as adding to my self-confidence. I also learned to hone my interpersonal skills through group assignments. Finally, I never addressed a large group like I did in the group presentations. While I found it a daunting prospect, I would not be as intimidated again by the thought of it.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The progression rates of students were taken as an indicator of the success of our courses in providing adults with a secure environment in which to study. The School now offers a follow-on degree and a survey of students who have completed courses at Certificate and/ or Diploma level since 1997 indicates a substantial progression rate to further studies at Degree level and to postgraduate studies. In total since our courses commenced in 1996, 16 students have transferred to postgraduate studies. A good illustration of this progression is the Certificate class of 1998. On completion of the Certificate, only one qualified student chose not to progress to Diploma level. A further nine students opted to continue with their studies on completion of the Diploma. This represents a progression rate of 40%. While the majority opted to stay within the faculty, at least one student progressed to further studies outside Ireland. Our research also indicates that other graduates from the Diploma, while not progressing to a formal course at university level, do take up short term courses in areas that have captured their interest. For example, on completion of the Diploma in 1998, while only three students opted to transfer to post graduate studies, a further six students took up short term courses in other institutions. This represented a total figure of 51% who participated in further studies. While the progression rates to further study from the Certificate and Diploma are encouraging, the research does highlight some very interesting issues.

- There seems to be a strong reluctance on the part of the adult student to make the first tentative step inside the gates of the university. As one student stated, *" I was terrified of making the first move. My memories of school were bad and my self-confidence had taken a battering over the years. Without the level of support that I got I would have run away."* Another student referred to *"initial concerns re ability to commit to and complete the course. I'm delighted to have succeeded in finishing it. I needed an anchor in the midst of uncertainty and this was provided for me."* Other students interviewed for this research refer to the importance of a clearly defined structure, a well thought out induction course and the need to provide time for the group to get to know each other. Faced with these levels of insecurity and indecision, it is clear that the resources and personnel need to be put into providing a structured, open and approachable environment, particularly in the initial stages.

- Figures compiled recently (McGill and Morgan, p37) indicate that there are 430, 000 people which they term '*nearly ready*' adults between the ages of 25 and 64. The term 'nearly ready' indicates those adults who have completed upper secondary education and are nearly ready to progress to university. The '*learning poor*' in the same age bracket numbers 806,000 people or 44.9% of adults who have achieved minimum levels of education. Many of our Certificate students fall into the 'learning poor' category. The client group within their centres almost entirely fit into this category. By completing the Certificate they move up to the 'nearly ready' category. The initial step on to this ladder remains the most difficult to make. Once inside the gates of the Academy however the growth in self-confidence and the desire to proceed as far as possible emerges rapidly.

For example 90% of students from the 2002 Diploma class progressed to degree level when this final tier of the programme become available in 2003. Further encouragement is drawn from the fact that those students who have enrolled to pursue postgraduate studies within the Department achieve high grades. At least one student has emerged with a First Class honours at Masters level. Reflecting on the impact of further study on her personal and professional life as part of our research, she made the following observations.

> *Learning at university for me was an intensely positive and rewarding experience. I absolutely loved every minute of it. It affirmed me as a person and validated previous knowledge and experience. It in no small way added to my store of knowledge and gave me a recognised national and international qualification. It also whetted my appetite for more and more knowledge.*

Many students echo this thirst for knowledge and learning. They refer to *"the addictive nature of study".* Sample comments include:

- *I found myself wanting to find out more and more*
- *I have to be kept out of bookshops*
- *I look in every source, books, library, the Internet, you name it*
- *I was really enjoying college and I wanted to continue. It was something I had wanted to do for a long time. I enjoyed what it was doing to my head.*

Students were also aware that while the initial courses had validated their work in practice, further study would afford an opportunity to expand their horizons even more.

> *I feel that the course has in some way validated my own practice and this has given me the encouragement to continue on. It has given me a greater understanding of good work practice, the need for structure and the importance of evaluation in an educational setting. I want to continue. I hear my little interlocutor ask if I am able for it. To which I reply, 'shut up, I'll try it*'.

COMMUNITY CHANGE AGENTS

Change at the ideological and activist level was evident from all our respondents in relation to the work conducted in their centres and to a lesser extent in the broader community. At an activist level some of these changes have already been explored in relation to the advocacy role adopted by those involved in the disability sector. From an ideological perspective two students presented some interesting and unexpected insights.

D is a trainer with one of the large multinational companies working in the greater Dublin area. He joined the course to gain a formal qualification in the field of training. For him the interaction with a group of people largely working with the marginalised in society had a profound effect.

> *The interaction changed me a lot. It was interesting to hear views from so many different backgrounds. I have always worked in industry and I would never have met people who worked in these disadvantaged areas. It has made a huge impact on me, especially meeting people from the Travelling community. Just to hear people dealing with them and all the work they did was impressive. It was the same with Youthreach. I am now aware of the bad press such groups get. I sit up and take note of the Citizen Traveller*

campaign, something that would have passed me by in a previous life. I now question something I would not have done in the past. I only knew of the bad things but to hear people speak with such fondness of these groups, has affected me deeply. I respect the work they do and that of the Travelling community in particular. I have become aware of a Youthreach centre round the corner from me and I intend to go down and offer my services. I'm not sure what I can do but I'm willing to offer. I would never have thought of this before. I have changed a lot in the last year. I can see myself getting involved at community level. This is something I would not even have considered in the past.

P is a freelance trainer working with the elderly. For many years he has attempted to bring courses for the elderly into the adult education sector and has been a strong advocate in this field. He received government funding to run a conference to highlight the issues of the elderly the year he joined the course. For him the course has acted as a disincentive.

For many years I have lobbied for the elderly. I have lobbied politically and at national level. The module on Policy and Practice and the research I did for that paper made me clearly aware of the lack of policy in relation to the elderly. Policy is not policy unless is accompanied by legislation and I learned that no such policy exists. It is like banging your head against a stone wall. In this instance knowledge is not power but quite the opposite. I now wish to use my qualification in a field where there is legislation and my work can be effective.

Despite such a negative outcome P was adamant that he would repeat the experience again and seemed happy that it had helped him to make an ideological stance. For others, the ability to analyse and read a situation has had implications for their workplaces through enhanced awareness and understanding:

I'm not as emotive. The research allows you to become more analytical. I reflect more particularly in relation to gaps in management. You ask yourself questions and you no longer take things at face value.

At another level the course and project work undertaken by students had a direct and positive impact on the quality of training that they provided to their trainees. Several modules such as Advanced Teaching Strategies, Mediation, Learning Difficulties and Evaluation were mentioned as areas where the theoretical input informed the practical application and delivery. In conducting curriculum design, evaluations and action research students consulted course providers, management and trainees. As a result many of those most marginalised in our

education sector were afforded an opportunity to voice their opinions on course content, delivery methodologies and change management. One example would be in the childcare field where parents were asked for their views on the quality of childcare:

> *I was looking at the impact of the course I was delivering on the recipients of the course. Parents were delighted to be involved. They couldn't believe I was interested in what they had to say. The unfortunate thing was I didn't have enough time. But it raised the issue of valuable data and I was able to feed my information back into the main organisation and they can now see the benefits of conducting research in this field. They see the benefit of tracking and now we are at a point where the benefit of a small-scale piece of research for an evaluation will bring about change in the entire organisation at national level.*

The practical nature of such research also appealed to the students:

> *Up until Action Research I did not have a lot of feelings about it. I thought Action Research was great. You picked a topic and applied it in your workplace. And you didn't apply it in a laboratory sort of way, an abstract way. You applied it to a real situation in a real way. It was good and I enjoyed it.*

Others made use of the knowledge of different learning theories and styles to improve their work and in particular the work of Kolb, Gagne and Howard Gardner appeared to open up new horizons for their approach to training.

One key area of community change that must be highlighted is the issue of Traveller Education. In Ireland Travellers are viewed as an ethnic minority. They have a very low completion rate of formal education due to the nomadic nature of their lives, early marriage and the need to enter employment at a young age. Two members of that community have completed courses at Certificate and Diploma level. They have acted as role models within their community. This has impacted positively on the women in their particular Traveller Training Centre. The achievement is all the more remarkable given that Traveller women are not encouraged to move outside the home, to travel on their own at night or to interact with the settled community. One of these students interviewed for the Irish Times during the Citizen Traveller campaign spoke glowingly of her experience and of the support of her fellow students on the course. Further excellent work has been conducted by co-ordinators of these centres, who have completed our courses and involved the Travellers in the centres as key stakeholders in course design and evaluation. Research conducted by one student at post graduate level calls for research into assessment and certification for Travellers to ascertain the cultural appropriateness of systems of assessment designed by settled people for this minority ethnic group. She states, *"Perhaps now in the words of Yeats*

that the fire has been lit, new and creative ways of fanning the flame will be used to benefit Travellers in our education system'' (Connolly, p. 108).

CONCLUSION

It is our hope that our graduates will fan the flame in adult education throughout Ireland. The signs from this small-scale research give cause for hope. It is clear that returning to education often has a major positive impact on individual adults, their families and communities. It is not simply a question of improved knowledge and skills, although this will without question improve the quality of programmes offered to the most marginalised. It is also perhaps more importantly, that increased self-esteem and confidence among the adult educators will influence others to follow the same route. If much of Further and Adult Education enables ordinary people from deprived communities to work in the sector then involvement in Higher Education adds a beacon of encouragement to their clients and communities. In the context of genuinely combating disadvantage it would be hard to find a more beneficial and cost effective method than subsidising the education of educators who work in Further and Adult Education.

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Deirdre Breatnach

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING PRACTICE: EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT TEACHERS

Deirdre Breatnach is a former primary school teacher and principal and currently she is working as a lecturer in the Education Department at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. This paper is based on a thesis entitled 'A Qualitative Study Exploring Reflections on Field Experience in Teacher Education' for which she was awarded a Masters of Education by the University of Limerick in 2002.

ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the scope and nature of four student teachers' reflections regarding their three final school placements. Through an investigation of the reflective commentaries of the participants, this paper discusses the crucial concerns of the preservice educators. It suggests that the research participants were primarily focused on eight areas of concern. The paper contends that these issues evolve over time and argues that critical reflection is influenced by the context of the teaching practice period. This paper concludes by presenting recommendations and by outlining implications for future research.

INTRODUCTION

> The primary objective of teacher preparation courses is to provide students with the competence to teach and to educate.
>
> (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p. 120)

Field experience, i.e., teaching practice in schools, is regarded as an integral element of initial teacher preparation. By their direct involvement in classrooms, it is envisaged that preservice teachers can be enabled to develop their understanding of education. Existing structures within Colleges of Education systems facilitate student teachers' appreciation of the theoretical foundations and pedagogical

skills required to become educators. Field experience is perceived as a means of enhancing this knowledge base.

Hence, the essential function of teaching practice 'is that the student begins to see, experience and understand the teaching situation and the teaching process' (Burke, 1993, p.107).

This paper presents and discusses the findings of a small-scale research study which examined significant issues pertaining to field placement. To this end, perspectives relating to student teachers' experience in this aspect of preservice preparation were explored. Three teaching practice periods, which constituted the final field placements of a teacher education programme, were investigated in light of reflections gathered from four final-year student teachers in a College of Education.

THE FIELD EXPERIENCE COMPONENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The provision of teacher education worldwide is generally facilitated through courses affiliated to third level institutions. The principal functions of teacher preparation involve developing student teachers' understanding of education and providing them with the competence to teach in schools.

Field experience has been regarded as the 'focal point of preparation' (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p.120). Teaching practice constitutes a period whereby preservice teachers are provided with an 'introduction to the work of the school' are enabled to 'acquire practical skills in classroom management, classroom planning and the organisation of pupils' and are afforded the opportunity to integrate the theoretical and practical sections of their coursework into 'real-life situations' (*Ibid*.).

Although variations exist in the types of courses offered in colleges of education in Ireland, teaching practice constitutes a significant portion of each programme. Approximately one fifth of the initial teacher preparation is spent in field experience. These school placements are of significant importance for students as it is necessary to pass teaching practice in all the colleges of education in order to be awarded a Bachelor of Education degree. In certain colleges, honours in teaching practice is a requirement for an honours qualification. Indeed, it has been noted in one of the larger colleges that

> the level of degree award was decided mainly by the student's performance on teaching practice.
>
> (Cremin, 1998, p.15)

FEATURES OF TEACHING PRACTICE

The field experience aspect of teacher education programmes is widely regarded as an essential element of preservice preparation. Field placement is thus viewed as a means by which student teachers can enhance their classroom skills and develop their educational methodologies. However, in recent decades, the importance of reflection or critical thinking about one's actions has also been emphasized within teaching practice situations. The significance of reflective practice in fields such as medicine, social work and education has been highlighted by the influence of individuals such as Schön (1983, 1987).

Schön's writings have stressed the importance of analytical thought on daily routines in order to minimize the gap between theory and practice. Thus, in the sphere of education, Schön's work values the professional knowledge embedded in teachers' own interpretations of their experience rather than 'technical rationality' based on theory (Francis, 1995, p.230). Reflective practice, therefore, has implications for teacher education and especially for the field experience element therein.

> One of the key concerns in modern European teacher education is to establish a greater inter-penetrative influence between theoretical inputs and practical teaching experience…Increasingly the aim is to help the student teachers to be self-analytical and reflective on their own practice.
>
> (Coolahan, 2001, p.355)

To this end, school settings provide students not only with an opportunity to acquire certain teaching skills and strategies but also enable prospective practitioners to contemplate and to investigate the complexities inherent in the educational process. Furthermore, from the perspective of teacher educators, reflection at preservice level also facilitates an understanding of the tasks and challenges faced by student teachers during their teaching practice experiences.

Due to the importance ascribed to reflection during preservice education programmes, it has been necessary to formulate strategies to assist student teachers in their reflective processes.

Several systems have evolved which enable student teachers both to analyse critically their practice and to develop their own personal theories of teaching. Participants involved in teacher preparation courses have been encouraged to record their perspectives by documenting their experiences through reflective journals, portfolios and diaries (Francis, 1995; Pollard and Tann, 1997; Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998; Rath 2000).

With these issues in mind and given the potential of teaching practice for generating reflective data, it was thus deemed appropriate to undertake certain research in this area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study sought to explore the nature and scope of four student teachers' reflections on their experiences during their three final teaching practice placements of the Bachelor of Education programme in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. It was noted that as the field experience element of a teacher education programme was the focus of this research and due to the interactive, social and idiosyncratic nature of teaching practice settings, a qualitative strategy was, therefore, selected. This approach was refined further by adopting a specific method within the qualitative paradigm i.e. the collective case study. In this type of research, which has been described in detail by Stake (1994), a certain amount of cases are investigated in order to gain insight into an issue.

In this particular research, the collective case study group consisted of a cohort of four randomly chosen undergraduate students. These students were requested to partake in this research, the nature of the project was explained to them and the level of participation required was also clarified.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The four student participants were pursuing their final year of a three year Bachelor of Education Degree. The pseudonyms Dermot, Robert, Marian and Laura were used throughout the study.

A full semester within the third year of this programme was dedicated to field experience. During this period, the student teachers encountered three different types of school placement within the primary school system. Two consecutive weeks were firstly spent teaching at Senior Class level and during this teaching practice, the students were partnered with another student teacher.

The second placement provided the preservice teachers with the opportunity to engage in a block teaching practice of five weeks at a school and class level of their own selection. The students taught on their own while on this placement and assumed full responsibility for the teaching of their chosen class.

At the end of the semester, a two-week period of *Additional Education Experience* (AEE.) was arranged by the students. These settings constituted educational environments other than mainstream national schools and the student adopted the role of an observer/assistant while on these placements. Settings included educational environments such as Special Schools, Resource Classes and Youth Encounter Projects.

This study focused, in particular, on the experiences of these students during their final three school placements. The perspectives, experiences and reflections of the participating students were recorded by them on a daily basis in their reflective journals which they kept at the request of the researcher. It was deemed appropriate that the candidates be equipped with certain guidelines

relating to the completion of journals. These participant preservice teachers were, therefore, advised by the researcher to record their perceived challenges and accomplishments as they pertained to the following issues:

- panning and preparation of curricular materials
- effectiveness of classroom management approaches
- nature of relationship with pupils, class teacher and college of education supervisor
- extent of pupil feedback
- efficient utilization of commercial and teacher-made material resources
- any other concerns relating to the wider school environment

However, as student reflective commentary was a key concern of the research, a flexible, open-ended, non-prescriptive approach to journal entries was advocated so that the participants could spontaneously express themselves in writing.

These journal accounts and interview data together with the students' college-required bi-weekly reflections and written assignments have provided investigative material for this study.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The collective case study through which this research has been conducted identified the reflections of a limited sample of preservice teachers on their final field experiences. Although the guiding principles of openness and honesty in their written accounts and interviews were encouraged by the researcher, the extent to which the position of the author within the College of Education personnel may have influenced the preservice teachers' response, was not entirely clear. While acknowledging the issues emphasised by the participants in this case study, it should be recognised that these concerns were of distinct relevance to them, to the College of Education of which they were students and to the specific school environments with which each student teacher engaged. Caution needs to be exercised, therefore, in generalising and interpreting these data.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

On examination of the data provided by the four participants in this study, the distinctive nature of each placement was evident due to the various settings in which these teaching practices occurred. The participant preservice teachers completed their Senior Class Teaching Practices in four different schools. Each

of the students' Home-Based field experiences was located in differing school environments and four distinct class levels were taught. In a similar manner, the *Additional Education Experience* of the students occurred in four diverse school settings.

However, despite the variations in the educational environments in which the students worked, the findings presented in this collective case study suggest that common themes and strands of thought exist among the participants.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and scope of the four student teachers' reflections and specifically, the researcher sought to investigate the following questions:

(i) What are the crucial concerns of preservice teachers during their final three teaching practices?

(ii) Do these concerns change or evolve over time?

(iii) What capacity do student teachers display for critical reflection on their teaching experiences?

In the subsequent section of this paper the aforementioned research questions will be considered and discussed. The first research question examined the areas of concern for the student teachers during teaching practices. These issues are summarised in the following paragraphs under three main headings:

(i) summary of the key concerns highlighted by the student teachers during their field placements
(ii) evolution of student teacher perspectives
(iii) the reflective capacity of student teachers during field placements.

As follows:

(i) Summary of the key concerns highlighted by the student teachers during their field placement

Through the examination of their reflective accounts and retrospective interviews in relation to these three final teaching practice settings, it became apparent that the following eight issues and areas of discussion were frequently detailed by the preservice teacher participants, notably:

- assuming the role of the teacher
- developing participative teaching methodologies
- effective lesson implementation
- management of pupil behaviour
- surviving the 'stress and strain' of field experiences
- coping with college of education expectations
- fostering professional relationships
- perspectives regarding assessment procedures

In the following paragraphs the eight issues are treated in sequence.

- Assuming the Role of the Teacher
  The four student teacher participants commented upon the challenges involved in establishing themselves as teachers in field experience situations, especially during the initial phase of the placements. These student teachers were aware that they were attempting to teach 'someone else's class' (*Laura, Interview 1:24 -10-2001*) and that the pupils were becoming familiar with the 'changes to the routine that were being brought to the classroom' (*Robert, Reflective Journal A: 06-11-2001*).

This finding mirrors that of Kyriacou and Stephens (1999), when they noted that initially student teachers believe that 'not being regarded as a "real" teacher' by pupils caused anxiety and concern (*Ibid*., p.22). Johnston (1994) has referred also to the 'dilemmas' faced by student teachers due to the 'incompatibility' of practicum classroom environments with their own images of effective teaching.

- Developing Participative Teaching Methodologies
  Each of the four students was of the opinion that involving pupils in group-based work and activity-based learning formed the basis for successful teaching. When commenting on their home-based field experiences, both Robert and Dermot were quite critical of their respective class teachers' tendencies to utilize whole-class instructional approaches. These students perceived these methods as merely a 'convenience' for the teacher (Dermot, Interview 2: 19-02-2002), or else noted the 'dictatorial' style of the classroom interaction *(Robert, Interview 2: 20-02-2002).*

Laura and Marian also stressed the importance of activity-based learning as a means of maintaining pupils' interest level in the topic. Marian emphasized that active participation by the children ensured that lessons went 'smoothly' and it enhanced the pupils' enjoyment of learning (*Marian, Interview 2: 27-02-2002*).

All four participant student teachers expressed the view that allowing children to participate in group-work was a valuable learning strategy. However, they further acknowledged that preparation and organization were both vital contributory factors in reinforcing the effectiveness of this pedagogic tool.

- Effective Lesson Implementation
  The successful delivery of aspects of the curriculum did, on occasion, prove challenging for the participant preservice teachers. In common with several research studies, (Borko et al, 1987; Calderhead, 1987; Guillaume and Rudney, 1993; Kyriacou and Stephens, 1999), this cohort of students commented frequently on whether their lessons had been implemented successfully or if difficulties had arisen in any specific curricular or organizational area. Their daily reflections revealed descriptions of how particular lessons 'went well' and how other aspects of their teaching 'could have gone better' (*Dermot, Reflective Journal A: 06-11-2001*); (*Robert, Reflective Journal A: 03-12-2001*).

The appropriate pacing of lessons was initially quite difficult. Robert remarked that he often focused excessively on one particular aspect of a lesson and would subsequently have 'to rush through the remainder' (*Robert, Reflective Journal A: 07-11-2001*).

Addressing every required subject area was also a challenging undertaking for all participants. Marian stated, for example, that she constantly needed to shorten the period of time allocated to particular curricular areas in order to realize the complete implementation of her scheduled lessons. Equally, Laura maintained that during the initial stages of her home-based teaching practice experience, her proposed lessons were 'over-ambitious' for the pupils at Junior Infant class level (*Laura, Reflective Journal A: 06-11-2001*). These comments are consistent with Kyriacou and Stephens' (1999) assertion that:

> things that were put down on paper did not always match up to the realities of the classroom…timing was a particular problem because, it was noted, one has to be in the school to begin to understand how long it takes pupils to complete particular learning tasks.
>
> (*Ibid.* p.23)

- Management of Pupil Behaviour
  This research reflects the findings of many other studies, (Calderhead, 1987; Kagan, 1992; Richert, 1992; Guillaume and Rudney, 1993; Kyriacou and Stephens, 1999), where it was found that students teachers, especially at the beginning stages of their field experience, are preoccupied with maintaining control over

their pupils and with managing their classroom environments efficiently.

Each of the four students in this research expressed their concerns about classroom management in a slightly different manner. Laura noted the importance of organisation and routine in order to minimise distractions. Dermot claimed that the establishment of 'ground rules' and their consistent implementation within the classroom helped to maintain order. Marian found that arranging pupils in 'competitive' groups improved her classroom management, while Robert referred frequently to imposing control over the class and being aware of occasions when the pupils were becoming over-familiar with him.

Each of the four student teachers appeared to be keenly aware of discipline procedures in the school environment in which they worked. A similar conclusion was reached by Guillaume and Rudney (1993) who maintained that 'discipline remained an acute concern in the writings of the students throughout their training period' (*Ibid*. p.71).

- Surviving the 'Stress and Strain' of Field Experiences
  'Being a student teacher is a stressful process' (Calderhead, 1991, p.533). This statement appears to encapsulate the experiences of the student teachers involved in this research and is particularly applicable to their home-based placements.

Three of the students expressed their feelings about the strain and fatigue involved in student teaching. The Home-Based practicum required that the students taught in a solitary capacity. Thus, the students were of the opinion that 'teaching all day, every day, is very tiring and a lot different from teaching with a partner;' (*Marian, Reflective Journal A: 07-11-2001*). These students also noted that feelings of fatigue impacted on their teaching performances.

It is interesting to note that comments regarding emotional strain were not in evidence in the student teachers' reflections on their *Additional Education Experiences*. It would seem that because the student teachers' role in these environments was one of observer or assistant, they did not experience the same level of anxiety while responsible for a class in a mainstream school.

- Coping with College of Education Expectations
  The preservice teacher participants of this research study observed that fulfilling the College of Education requirements in relation to the completion of lesson notes, the preparation of visual aids and the formulation of appropriate timetables was quite time-consuming and demanding. All four students believed that it was very difficult 'to cover' all the timetabled lessons on a daily basis and that due to the amount of topics that needed to be

taught, it was not possible to deal with any subject area in great depth.

Dermot stated that he felt 'constrained' by the timetable recommended by the College of Education and Robert maintained that he merely imparted a 'superficial view of everything rather than going into subjects in detail;' (*Dermot, Reflective Journal A, 09-11-2001*); (*Robert, Interview 2: 20-02-2002*).

However, in spite of their reservations regarding the heavy workload inherent in teaching practices, all four students considered that the Home-Based field placement, in particular, was a realistic teaching experience. They cited reasons such as the longer length of their field placement, as all previous practica were of fortnightly duration or less. They also observed that the experience of teaching for a full day on their own allowed them to develop 'a real feeling for the job' (*Marian, Interview 2: 27-02-2002*).

- Fostering Professional Relationships
  It becomes evident, through investigation of the commentaries on their field experiences, that these preservice teachers viewed their relationships with the relevant participants and key personnel of the school environments, as being highly significant.

All students stressed the importance of 'getting to know the children' during each teaching practice placement (*Marian, Interview 2:27-02-2002*). While Laura described the 'pleasure' and 'job satisfaction' she received from the teaching relationship with her pupils (*Laura, Interview 2: 26-02-2002*), it was evident that the preservice teachers were also keen 'to build up a good rapport' with their classes (*Robert, Reflective Journal A: 07-11-2002*). Indeed, when these students reviewed their teaching practices in their entirety, they regarded their interactions with the pupils as the most enjoyable aspect. Guillaume and Rudney (1993) also endorse this notion by commenting upon the 'satisfaction' that the student teachers derive 'from working and being with children in the classroom' (*Ibid*. p. 72)

The adults with whom the student teachers formed professional relationships during field placements included their student teaching partners, the class teachers and the College of Education teaching practice supervisors.

When referring to their Senior Class teaching practices, the students considered teaching partners as an assistance both in terms of their physical presence in the classroom and of the moral support which they shared. Working with a student teaching partner, thus, not only allowed the students to 're-charge the batteries' (*Dermot, Interview 1: 31-10-2001*), but also afforded the preservice teachers the opportunity to witness the pupils' reaction to learning tasks from a different perspective at 'the back of the classroom' (*Laura, Interview 1: 24-10-2001*).

These student teachers were each involved with, at least, three different class teachers while they participated in their final teaching practices. In general terms, the students found the class teachers 'very helpful' but acknowledged that it was difficult to develop a strong relationship with their class teachers on the two-week field placements.

The relationships which existed between the College of Education supervisors and the student teachers were also commented on by the participants of this research study. All the preservice teachers considered that the supervisors should be supportive and in overall terms, they believed that they 'got on well' with their supervisors.

It has been suggested by other research in this area that 'the need for external approval' is a priority among student teachers (McDermott *et al*., 1995, p. 90) and that 'support from others is a major part of the student teachers' experience' (McNally *et al*., 1997, p. 497). The evidence presented by the four student teacher participants in this study would indicate that these 'relational conditions' do impact on the manner in which the student teachers respond to their field experiences.

- PerspectivesRegarding Assessment Procedures
  The evaluation of preservice teacher competence in teaching is an essential function of field experiences. The responsibility for this assessment is entrusted to the College of Education supervisors who are assigned to evaluate student teachers. This assessment caused a certain degree of anxiety among the four student teachers of this research.

Robert reported feeling 'self-conscious and uptight' while being observed (*Robert, Reflective Journal A:16-11-2001*). Marian stated that, even though she had encountered several supervisors throughout her preservice course, she was still 'quite nervous' during her penultimate field experience (*Marian, Reflective Journal A: 12-11-2001*). Laura, also, was aware of the evaluative nature of field experience, but felt it was important to act naturally. Dermot adopted a pragmatic approach, noting that satisfying one's supervisor's requirements 'was the best way to do it,' as 'an awful lot depended on your supervisor' (*Dermot, Interview 2:19-02-02*).

The assessment aspect of field placements has been highlighted as a concern of student teachers in the research literature (Calderhead, 1987; Kyriacou and Stephens, 1999; Milotich, 1999). Calderhead (1987) commented on the notion of 'putting on a performance' to satisfy college of education evaluators and Milotich (1999) stated that

> teachers felt like they were 'putting on a show' during their student teacher experience on those occasions when a seminar instructor observed their lessons. In many cases, teachers confessed that

> they attempted to conduct the lesson according to the instructor's preferences in order to receive a favourable evaluation.
>
> (*Ibid*. p.7)

The impact of the assessment element of field experience on the four preservice teacher participants of this study is clearly demonstrated when their mainstream school placements are compared to their *Additional Education Experience*. During this A.E.E., the students remarked that they were able 'to relax' and enjoy the placement because, as Marian noted, 'they did not have the pressure of supervision' (*Marian, Reflective Journal B: 10-01-2002*).

The eight crucial concerns of the research participants as they pertain to the first research question have been outlined in this section and have been drawn from both oral and written commentaries. While it is evident that each student has a unique perspective on his/her experiences, patterns have emerged which indicate common issues of concern and each commentary contributes, in an holistic manner, to the findings which have been cited.

The second research question investigated the evolving nature of student teacher thought over the course of the teaching practices. The findings in relation to this issue are detailed in the following paragraphs.

(ii) Evolution of student teacher perspectives

The existence of developmental stages in student teacher thinking has been suggested by certain studies (Fuller and Bown, 1975; Calderhead, 1987; McDermott *et al*., 1995; Hoover, 1994; McNally *et al*., 1997). These researchers have considered that, in general, preservice teachers' thoughts exhibit phases whereby their focus of concern evolves from self-centred personal survival issues to concerns relating to classroom procedures and subsequently, to consideration of the impact of their teaching on pupil learning. The findings presented by the four student teachers who participated in this research, partially contradicts these developmental stages. While it is clear that the preservice teachers emphasized their own teaching performance, particularly in the early phase of their Home-Based field experience, it would appear that their thoughts were simultaneously directed towards pedagogical procedures and pupil learning. For example, when the student teachers utilised group-work, they stressed how it was essential to ensure that all pupils in the group participated in the activity. Thus, the evolving focus of student thought was probably best summarised by Robert's admission that initially he was 'trying to get it (*the teaching*) right' from the perspective of a teacher, but as the weeks progressed he found that he was 'trying to get it right for the children' (*Robert, Interview 2: 20-02-2002*).

Each student teacher believed that their self-confidence had been enhanced over the course of their teaching practices. Two factors, in particular, seemed to strengthen their feelings of self-assurance. It was recognised that, initially,

'getting to know' their pupils entailed that they became aware of what to expect from individuals and groups within the classrooms, both in terms of learning capabilities and behaviour. Secondly, the students maintained that their lesson implementation improved with practice.

The student teachers involved in Kyriacou and Stephen's research (1999) exhibited similar perspectives regarding their improving classroom competence.

> The confidence that comes from experience was acknowledged and celebrated by several student teachers as their work in school gathered pace.
>
> (*Ibid*. p.26)

Teaching experience, knowledge and understanding of the pupils and the type of educational setting in which the students were placed, facilitated this development. The changing nature of student teachers' perceptions did not necessarily signify that, as they progressed through field experiences, they concerned themselves with different issues. It would seem, rather, that as 'they grew, they thought about things differently' (Guillaume and Rudney, 1993, p.79).

On the basis of this limited study, it can be concluded that there was evidence of evolution and development in student teacher thought during this period. Specifically, participants' attention shifted from self-survival concerns to a certain focus on pupil learning. In this regard, however, the concern for pupil learning was general in nature. Seldom, if ever, did the specific needs of individual children surface in the student teachers' reflections. Rather, the preservice teachers seemed concerned with achieving a general standard of pupil learning on a class-wide basis. Furthermore, the scope of this development in student teacher thinking was limited to the first two levels of the Fuller and Bown-based (1975) trajectory, as outlined by Hoover (1994). *Stage One* relates to concerns about survival issues and *Stage Two* involves concerns regarding curriculum and instructional strategies. However, *Stage Three* of Hoover's (1994) trajectory, where attention is focused on the relevance of teaching decisions to individual pupil requirements, did not feature to any significant extent in the preservice teachers' reflections.

The final aspect of this research referred to the manner in which student teachers reflect on their practice. The type of reflection in which the student teachers engaged is outlined in the next section.

(iii) The reflective capacity of student teachers during field placements

The third question sought evidence of critical analysis in student teacher reflection on their teaching practice experiences. Collier (1999) has defined three categories of student teacher reflection. *Category One* concerns effective application of educational knowledge and skills, *Category Two* relates to practical action which

is taken to overcome problems and *Category Three* indicates a high degree of open-mindedness including ethical/moral and social considerations. From the evidence presented through journals and interviews, the style of the reflections of these four student teachers is predominantly descriptive in nature and, therefore, similar to the first category of reflection outlined by Collier (1999).

In much of the commentary on school placements, the preservice teachers detailed their experiences by reporting on actual occurrances and how they, as teachers, had responded to various classroom events. Calderhead (1987) has maintained that the students' reflective capabilities could be hindered by the immediate nature of the teaching process and by the fact that they wanted to devote their time to preparation rather than reflection. Mansvelder-Longayroux et al (2001) have echoed this argument by suggesting that the 'performance-oriented context of teaching' causes student teachers to ask 'what works' and 'how to' questions (Ibid., p.12). Specifically, the pressing, complex nature of the classroom settings caused the students to reflect on 'what' had occurred rather than on a 'critical inquiry into the practice of teaching and their roles as educators' (Hoover, 1994, p.92).

The *Additional Education Experience* of the four student teachers did, however, seem to initiate a different type of thought about education issues in the minds of the students. The type of reflection detailed, appeared to share features with Collier's (1999) second category. Solutions were sought to problematic situations, such as the manner in which pupils with certain learning difficulties responded to classroom environments. Thus, the preservice teachers seemed to reflect on broader educational issues in *Additional Education Experience* settings than they did in their Home-Based teaching practices. It could be suggested that the unfamiliar nature of the *Additional Education Experience* settings facilitated a different level of reflection (i.e., Collier's (1999) second category of reflection), on the part of the preservice teachers. Exposure to different dimensions of education had an 'eye-opening' effect on the student teachers and their reflections seemed to broaden slightly as a result. Therefore, when the preservice teachers did not have to contend 'with classroom necessities and surviving day-to-day contingencies', a wider educational perspective was in evidence (Laurila, 1997, p.279).

From the analysis that was conducted, it can be concluded that the incidences of critical reflection, or *Category Three* of Collier's (1999) framework, in student teacher journals and interviews were scant and centred primarily around students' discussions on the *Additional Education Experience*. There was no significant evidence of any questioning of the socio-cultural or micro-political contexts in which their teaching practice experiences were located. Evidence did not exist of any interrogation of the values implicit in the ways in which the schools were organised and the curriculum mediated.

It can be stated that this lack of critical reflection was more pronounced in the mainstream school placements than in the *Additional Education Experience* placements. It could be suggested, therefore, that the student teachers' long 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975) as pupils in mainstream schools, may have resulted in an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo in schools.

Experiencing pupil-teacher interaction, through the lens of an alternative educational placement, caused the students to begin to ask more searching questions. It should also be stated that within the mainstream settings, unlike the *Additional Education Experience* settings, the preservice teachers assumed responsibility for the teaching of their classes and were supervised and evaluated in this role. In this context, it is understandable that their attention was focused primarily on self-survival, procedural and general pupil learning concerns. The intensive nature of the preparation, planning and teaching entailed that students, perhaps, were not provided with the 'time and space' for 'new levels of analysis about their work' (Richert, 1992, p. 188).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research outlined in this study was exploratory in nature and thus, the author has arrived at conclusions which should be subjected to testing by further research of longer duration, with a larger population of preservice teachers. A number of specific recommendations have been identified and are listed below:

(a) Introduction of additional educational placement at an earlier juncture

This research study has previously acknowledged the role of the *Additional Education Experience* placement in broadening the reflections of the student teachers. It appeared that the unfamiliarity of the school context caused the students to appraise the learning environment in a different manner. At present, the *Additional Education Experience* placement occurs within the College of Education as the final field experience. However, if this teaching practice were to be incorporated into the preservice programme at an earlier stage, it might encourage student teachers to reflect on other issues, instead of attempting to 'solve familiar problems using familiar means in familiar environments' (Laurila, 1997, p.279).

(b) Provision of supportive structures to enhance student teacher reflectivity

The findings of this limited research study, indicate that the students stressed the importance of encouragement and reassurance from their college supervisors and their class teachers. Harnessing this support to stimulate the reflective capabilities of student teachers, could foster further professional development.

> In order to develop an analytical and developmental approach to teaching, student teachers may require, not simply experience in schools, but assistance to reflect upon that experience.
>
> (Calderhead, 1991, p.534)

It is recommended, therefore, that the skills of analysis and critical reflection be supported more overtly by teaching practice supervisors and within the curricular provision at undergraduate level.

(c) Equality in emphasis along the preparation-teaching-reflection continuum

The evidence provided suggests that, from the perspective of student teachers, field placements demand intensive preparation, substantial organisational and instructional skills and a high degree of personal strain. All of the participants in this study remarked on the amount of time and energy demanded by the preparation of curricular schemes, lesson notes and teaching materials. Comments such as 'I never feel I teach well if I'm this exhausted' (Dermot, Reflective Journal A: 16-11-2002) and 'a good night's sleep does wonders for your teaching the following day' (Marian, Reflective Journal A: 23-11-2001) were typical of the types of remarks made by the student teachers. Clearly, on the basis of the evidence presented, the balance between the amount of energy expended by students on preparation needs to be reviewed and it is recommended that a more thorough analysis of the causes of this imbalance be investigated.

(d) Provision of a more formal role for the class teacher in the supervision of student teachers

The data which emerged from this study raised a number of issues pertaining to supervision, notably:

- student perceptions of different expectations among supervisors and inter-rater reliability issues
- student ideas regarding how to 'keep the supervisor happy'
- student's comments concerning what constitutes adequate and inadequate supervision
- issues around the 'luck factor' associated with lesson supervision

Some students proposed alternative forms of supervision. Furthermore, the advice and support which was offered by class teachers was frequently commented upon by the students in this research. In the light of evidence presented by this research and taking cognisance of international practice in teaching practice supervision, the potential for the involvement of the class teacher in the supervision of student teachers could be more thoroughly exploited.

(e) Gradual initiation/induction into the teaching role

A number of issues arose from this research regarding the involvement of students in teaching practice. Significant amongst these issues was the requirement that student teachers assume immediate responsibility for all aspects of class teaching, often from the first day of the teaching practice. The participants in this research study highlighted a number of difficulties associated with the sudden immersion into role of class teacher. Unfamiliarity with children, class routines and procedures, disciplinary strategies and teacher style were cited as areas of significant concern. On the basis of the findings of this research and on evidence provided by the studies of Johnston (1994), and Kyriacou and Stephens (1999), a more gradual initiation into the role of class teacher could be facilitated. Opportunities in this regard exist for student teachers to work in the classroom in the role of teacher's assistant and to gradually assume full responsibilities for the teaching of the class.

SUMMATIVE COMMENT

Through the exploration of their perceptions and reflections, this research study has essentially provided an interpretation of student teacher voice regarding field experience. Data emerging from this study have provided informative and thought-provoking insights into preservice teacher perspective. The impetus for broadening the potential of further research in this area of teacher preparation could be realised and sustained. Thus, elaboration of the research focus could indicate the direction of future investigation into the varying facets of field experience.

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Joseph Fogarty

AS GOOD AS GOLD? COMMERCIALISM IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT: This paper represents an initial, contextualised discussion of commercialism in Irish primary schools. At the outset the issue of commercialism is situated within the wider debates on a market-centered paradigm of education and the influence of commercialism on childhood: how children relate to advertisements and visa versa. The paper then adds an international perspective on commercialism in schools and explores the rationale and principal means behind the sale and promotion of goods to schoolchildren. Having established this important contextual backdrop, the paper goes on to focus directly on Irish primary schools and begins by stating the official guidelines in relation to commercialism. Five contemporary sample schemes are described by way of a brief overview of the subject. A final section analyses two large-scale initiatives before concluding with recommendations as to how the question of commercialism may be best addressed. In total, this paper proposes and explores the hypotheses that commercialism in Irish primary schools exists on a macro level and that it is consistent with practice internationally.

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an analysis of commercialism in Irish primary schools. Although in-school advertising and marketing has recently featured in several high profile publications (Klein, 2000; Schlosser, 2002; Moore, 2002), discussion in relation to commercialism in primary schools in Ireland has tended to be a largely internal and subdued affair. This study believes that it should be neither. It proposes that commercialism in schools is constructed on consumerist paradigms of education and childhood and so, is inseparable from wider societal issues. It also argues that commercialism in our primary schools is consistent with trends and practices in other countries with significant consequence for education. The rationale for this investigation is encapsulated by Kenway and Bullen (2001): "More and more commercial enterprises without an educational dimension are giving themselves an educational gloss and "targeting" schools, promoting goods which are not necessarily designed to meet the specific needs of the school environment" (p. 90). This paper will not be a bland jeremiad against all commercial links with education but will rather strive for analysis that is both considered and articulate.

The work will consist firstly of contextual and comparative strands, leading towards a focussed examination of commercialism as specific to Irish primary schools. The initial section examines a consumerist paradigm of education in terms of its philosophy, language and the roles of teachers and learners. Latterly, this section will treat of the pervasive commercial influence on childhood in Western culture. An international perspective is offered through an exploration of the nature and extent of commercialism in English, Australian and US schools. Both the theoretical and relative strands will then be woven through the third and fourth sections, which will appraise the hypothesis that commercialism is widespread in Irish primary schools and operates on similar principles as in other countries. This contention will be substantiated through a limited, though representative, sample of the commercial schemes found within in Irish schools.

CONSUMERIST PARADIGMS OF EDUCATION AND CHILDHOOD

A consumerist paradigm of education

In many Western countries, education has become increasingly based on a free-market model as "the global market economy, communication technologies and the international adoption of many common cultural values have impacted both on governments and educators" (Foskett, 2002, p. 241). Many writers have commented upon the radically changed environment in which schools find themselves, with an emphasis on decentralisation, accountability and market awareness. O' Sullivan (2000) describes the transition in Irish education policy "where the theocentric paradigm, which dominated until the 1950s, was replaced

by a market paradigm that continues to expand" (p. 119). Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe (1995, p.1) note that, after a succession of Educational Reform Acts, English schools

> are now set within the whole paraphernalia of a market system, albeit a market which is strongly politically regulated.....The framework of market discipline is set by parental choice, open enrolment, devolved budgets and formula funding.

Giroux (2000, p.84) observes a similar application of market theory to public education in the U.S.A. where

> Influential educational consultants….now advise their clients in the name of efficiency to act like corporations selling products and seek 'market niches' to save themselves.

Education is herein perceived as being primarily responsible for and responsive to the manpower needs of the economy. Drives for comparative standards and rigorous testing of students have contributed to the rationalisation and commodification of education as a saleable good.

The language of the market

For practitioners within the system, the responsiveness demanded by a consumerist philosophy of education entails a move from a "culture of professional responsibility to one of market and/or political responsibility" (Foskett, 2002, p. 254). Also apparent has been the emergence of a distinctive terminology used in relation to consumerist-oriented education. Gerwitz *et al*. (1995) link this new educational lexicon to the wider changes taking place; "This new language of schooling is indicative of transformations which are occurring at a deeper level." (p. 97) They present evidence of a shift in the language of management within schools:

> Increasingly headteachers and senior management…refer to their "unique selling propositions", they talk of "getting the product right", analysing "market trends" and developing "corporate images".
>
> (p. 96).

Downes (1994, p.60) reflects that, with principals vying to succeed in the culture of the market rather than that of education, it is not surprising that some "have become trapped in the jargon and thinking of the market." Commercialisation of and in schools share not only a common vocabulary but also a commodified image of education and a particular view of students as consumers of education.

A consumerist paradigm of childhood

To the extent that childhood exists as a social construct, rather than a biological entity, Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997) propose that it has been produced by the social, cultural, political and economic forces operating upon it. They claim that "The new era of childhood - the post-modern childhood - cannot escape the influence of the post modern condition with its electronic media saturation" (p. 14). Each successive generation appears more technologically aware and so can be addressed independently of their parents through television, video games, DVDs, music media and in cyberspace. Subtle and attentive marketing strategies are employed in the "opening and maintaining the communicational passageways between the marketplace and the consumer" (Kline, 1993, p. 72) so that children are offered attractive and affirming identities connected to their roles as consumers in the market. Guber and Berry (1993) state that even young children are keenly aware of brands, advertising and their roles as consumers. In such a cultural environment the challenge for marketers is to connect as often and as meaningfully as possible with the child's psyche in order to maximise sales.

The literature on marketing to children shows how child consumers are typically separated along lines of age and gender. Del Vecchio (1997) observes the significance of gender in marketing to children. "Around the time children enter grade school a strong sense of gender identity forms. Boys begin to bond together, as do girls, into separate tribes" (p.109). Although parent-dependent children between the ages of four and six have little disposable income of their own, they can influence parent spending through their "pester power". As children develop greater literacy and reasoning skills around age nine they are found to be particularly susceptible to collectibles and use of humour.

Simultaneous to their fragmenting the child market, advertisers also seek to harmonize entertainment and advertising. This conflation is achieved through the marketing forms of cross-selling and licensed merchandising, programme-length commercials and product placement. All of these hybrid forms act to disguise the advertising intent and construct advertising as playful and pleasurable. Adults and teachers are normally placed in opposition to young people's culture and pleasure except where entertainment and education can be intertwined to appeal to parents as consumers. Computers, books, toys and television programmes have all attracted parents attention as being "fun with a purpose". Such commodities are marketed on the basis of their ability to transcend the generational gap and gratify children and parent alike through the act of consumption.

IN-SCHOOL COMMERCIALISM - AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Why companies target schools

A number of factors combine to make educational spaces ever more appealing

for advertisers and marketers. The Consumers Union Educational Services (1995) state that, in terms of audience reach, schools represent a mass audience unrivalled in any other institution, with more than forty-three million children attending school in the USA alone. Children are no longer merely a conduit to parental spending but are a much coveted consumer group. Those under twelve spent £95 million in the U.K. during 1999 while The Consumers Union Educational Services (1995) state that elementary-age children in the USA have a spending power of around $15 billion per year. In addition, they influence another $160 billion of spending controlled by their parents.

Apart from addressing children en-masse, advertising in schools also allows for "narrowcasting" or customised messages targeted at pre-designated sections of the school body. From a marketers perspective

> …schools offer convenient aggregations of age-coded children and, potentially, market segments which can be identified according to gender, class and ethnicity as well as curriculum.
>
> (Kenway and Bullen, 2001, p. 94)

Within an advertising-saturated culture, marketers face the difficult challenge of making their products appear distinctive amidst the morass of jingles, billboards and television commercials. In this context schools may be considered as virgin territory for cheaper or even free advertisement of a particular brand or product.

Unlocking the school gates

Of crucial importance in understanding the pervasiveness of commercial advertising in schools internationally is the success of dedicated educational marketing companies such as *JazzyBooks* and *School Media Marketing* in Britain and *Lifelong Leaning Systems* and *Channel One Communications* in the USA. Harty (1994) cites an advertisement by *Modern Talking Picture Service Inc*. showing a child dressed as an executive and carrying the caption "Reach him at the office". It continues: "His first day job is kindergarten. Modern (i.e. *Modern Talking Picture Service Inc*.) can put your sponsored educational materials in the lesson plan" (p. 90). For purposes of clarity we will concentrate on three principal modes of in-school commercialism and offer an example of each in turn.

First, In-school advertisements displayed in or around the school constitute perhaps the most blatant form of commercialism in that they are indistinguishable from advertisements anywhere else in the media. *Channel One* is daily classroom news programme shown to approximately eight million students in 10,000 US schools. Schools are given the use of free audio-visual equipment in classrooms on the condition that students witness the twelve-minute program at least 90 percent of the time. In doing so they also present for two minutes of targeted commercials featuring the latest clothing, footwear and confectionary. Boyles (1998) writes that advertisements on the channel sell for double the rate of prime time network news and generate gross annual revenues in excess of $100 million.

Secondly, we consider a more complicated form of commercialism, corporate-sponsored educational materials (SEMs) and programs. It should be noted that certain SEMs contain no commercial messages and offer unbiased explorations of their subject matter. Others, however, display a heavy presence of logo and brand name, and are regarded by some educationalists as insidious attempts to de-limit the curriculum, restrict critical thought around a topic or falsely create positive associations around a corporation. Among the SEMs reviewed by the Consumers Union (1995) was the Exxon Education Foundation *Exxon Energy Cube* program which didn't advertise petroleum products but implied "that worries about oil spills and strip mining are unfounded, since effective remedies exist for dealing with them."

A third aspect of in-school commercialism involves corporate-sponsored contests and incentive programs. In 2003, amidst concern over obesity in British children, chocolate manufacturer *Cadbury* launched its "Get Active" scheme. The promotion, offering sports equipment for schools in exchange for tokens from *Cadbury* chocolate, including a cricket set obtainable upon receipt of "tokens from 2,730 chocolate bars, the equivalent of well in excess of half a million calories" (Lawrence, 2003, p. 1). Roberts (1994, p.81) encapsulates the objections to this type of promotion:

> The promoters are posing as benefactors of schools when in fact they are exploiting them as closed markets… Children will be pressurizing their parents to make extra purchases and doing the work of the company promoter.

COMMERCIALISATION IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Background and guidelines

The Department of Education and Science have thus far issued three circulars to schools under the title "Promotion and marketing of commercial products through schools" (Circular 23/84; Circular 7/87; Circular 38/91). The second, released in 1987, requested that school authorities (to) 'consider carefully the implications of allowing any situation to develop which would result in parents being put under undue pressure to purchase a particular commercial product'.

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) have also expressed strong concern at the promotion of commercial products of services through primary schools:

> These campaigns consume much of teachers' time and can impose considerable undesirable pressure on school going children, parents, and teachers.
>
> (INTO, 1987, p. 34)

Further to recommending that schools adopt an agreed policy on their engagement with commercial promotions, the INTO urged that where educational equipment is the reward for participation in a scheme, the promoting company should guarantee that all participating schools will be rewarded. In a similar vein the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN, 2002) recommends that schools "should not facilitate outside agencies, commercial bodies, etc. to promote their products and services through children" (p. 3) and disapproves of any schemes requiring children to influence parental spending towards a particular brand or company.

Traditionally, dedicated in-school marketing firms such as School Media Marketing and Lifelong Leaning have not been a feature of the educational landscape in this country. However, the arrival in 2000 of an Irish based "educational event management company" offering clients "unique and engaging ways of building brand awareness within the youth market"[1] suggests this may change. Of the forms of commercialism, the most prevalent and influential in Irish schools are commercially produced educational materials and sponsored contests and incentive programs. In examining a sample of each, this paper is cognisant of what Roberts (1994, p.80) describes as 'a spectrum of motivation from the sharply commercial at one end to genuine concern for the quality of education at the other'.

Analysis of Sample Schemes

(a) Sponsored educational materials[2]

- *Springtime on the Farm*

  To begin, we shall appraise educational materials provided by *Agri-Aware* and *Cadbury*. *Agri-Aware* is a charitable trust founded by agricultural businesses to promote a positive image of the Irish farming and food industry. It offers schools free fact-sheet on topics such as sugar, dairying and history of farming. A number of lesson-plan booklets for teachers are also available. These carry the logo of the *FBD Trust,* an insurance firm who sponsor a colouring competition with prizes for students and teachers. With no attempt to promote particular products and minimal reference to specific companies this material is seen to be of relatively low commercial content.

- *Have your own Egg Hunt*

  Cadbury also sponsored classroom material, in the form of a booklet it produced and distributed to schools, entitled "*Have your own Egg Hunt*." A text, presumably to be read by or to children, is a variation on the theme of the Easter Bunny and reads; "They call this wondrous chocolate world The Land of Cadbury, for "Cadbury" is the bunny word for chocolate, don't you see." The endorsement to "Choose Cadbury for Easter" appears on almost every

[1] Real Event Solutions, Services, [document online] (Cork: Real Event Solutions, 2005, accessed 13 January 2006); available from http://www.real-event.ie/services.htm; Internet

[2] All materials and documentation from sample schemes included in this paper were collected by the author as they were found in Irish primary schools during April and May of 2003

page of what one can argue is a thinly disguised attempt to increase sales by substituting advertising for educational content.

(b) Sponsored Competitions and Incentive Schemes.

- *Annual Handwriting Competition*

  In 2003 the INTO and *Educational Building Society* sponsored the 11th *Annual Handwriting Competition* in primary schools. Open to pupils in all classes and in special education, this competition aimed to "promote the art of handwriting among children at an early age" (INTO, 2003, p. 31) and offered all participating schools the chance to win a data projector and book vouchers in a draw at county and national level. There is no set text to transcribe, while both the INTO and EBS logos feature minimally in the advertising for the competition.

- *Building for the Future*

  The *Building for the Future* initiative for primary schools is sponsored by *Independent Newspapers* and *Córas Iompar Éireann* (CIE) and has been endorsed by the Minister for Education. In 2003 all participating schools were offered a TV / DVD Combi unit worth €379, "subject to reaching an agreed number of tokens collected from the *Irish Independent* and *Sunday Independent*." The token quota for each school was set at thirty tokens per child. Schools were issued with a standard letter for principals, which they "might like to photocopy and give to pupils to take home".

  > We are asking parents and friends to support us by collecting tokens on our behalf. They will appear every day in the *Irish Independent* & *Sunday Independent* until 13th April…. I'm sure you can appreciate how much this would mean to us in developing our facilities for the children of this community.

Any public appeal from schools for tokens would appear to plainly contravene the request by the Department of Education, INTO and IPPN that no pressure to purchase a particular product should be exerted on parents or on children.

- *Germcatchers*

  In 2003 teachers of first class in primary schools received an educational pack from Domestos and the Hygiene Mark. Based on the theme of "Germcatchers", the kit comprised of teaching materials and a competition, offering a sun holiday for the winning teacher and a trip to London for their class with €100 to spend in Hamleys toy store. The teaching resources, intended for "use during your SPHE lessons", included posters featuring a chaotic birthday party scene in which were "hiding" a number of cartoon germs as well as an array of Domestos bleach, Domestos spray and Domestos wipes. Children are directed to search amongst the images of girls, boys and animals in the acts of vomiting, flatulence, defecation and mucus-spraying sneezing to locate the germs and Domestos products. The intention to appeal to children as being

"gross" is patent, but this hardly excuses what appears an odious and patently commercial attempt to bias the curriculum and promote a particular brand to seven year olds.

Occupying points on a scale from the minimally commercial (*EBS*/*INTO* competition) to the explicitly advertising oriented and anti-curricular (Germcatchers) this brief overview of contemporary schemes demonstrates the complicated and vitally important issues around commercialism in the classroom. It is revealing to note that all five initiatives were advertised in full-page presentations within the INTO magazine, *InTouch*, "the most widely circulated educational magazine in Ireland", while the *Cadbury* booklet was actually distributed within its pages.

CASE STUDIES OF COMMERCIALISM IN IRISH SCHOOLS

A brief survey of commercialism in primary schools having been completed, further and final evidence is now presented in support of the claim that commercialism in Ireland is both prevalent and is predicated upon similar means and intents, as is the case internationally. By investigating the background, rationale, mechanisms and influence on schools of two major programmes, we shall draw together many of the themes that have appeared in this paper.

Tesco Computers for Schools

Over the last seven years, the *Computers for Schools* scheme operated by *Tesco* supermarkets has become an established feature on the Irish educational landscape. Under the scheme *Tesco* supermarkets issue a voucher for every €10 spent in their stores and each year between ten to fifteen million of these vouchers are collected and returned by Irish schools, in order to receive computer hardware as well as software and ancillary equipment. The vast majority of collecting is done by primary schools. This reflects both young children's enthusiasm for collectables as noted earlier and the fact that, with 11.8 students per computer, Irish primary schools are below the EU average of 9.3 and have "a lot of ground to cover to catch up" with their European neighbours in terms of Information Technology (National Centre for Technology in Education, 2004, p. 7).

Notwithstanding the disregard of the INTO's statement that, where "educational equipment is the reward for participation, the promoting company should guarantee that all participating schools will be rewarded", three elements of *Computers for Schools* may be said to be in conflict with the "no pressure" policy. First, a bright yellow poster is issued for the purpose of informing the school community at large what equipment is being collected for and carrying the message "Please ask your family, friends and neighbours to collect for our school." A collection box and progress chart help maintain ongoing awareness of the promotion within the

school. *Tesco* also send a standard letter to principals displaying their logo and ready for photocopying. The letter, to be read by parents reads:

> Please give the vouchers to your child to bring into school to add to our collection…. Please ask your friends and relatives - in fact anyone you know - to collect the vouchers for us! What about setting up a collection point at your place of work? The children are really excited about the challenge and we know we can reach our target if we try.

The use of any one of these could be said to represent a pressuring of students and their families to direct their purchases, in the name of the school, towards *Tesco*.

McDonald's Catch and Kick

As part of its "Underage Strategic Plan" the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) has inaugurated the *McDonald's Catch and Kick* programme, described as "a Coaching Programme developed by the GAA, in Partnership with McDonald's Restaurants of Ireland, and with the assistance of Cumann na mBunscoil "[3] (Daly and Watene, 2003, p. 2). Focussing on the Gaelic Football skills of catching and kicking, the scheme consists of three integral parts: coaching inputs, the "Skills Challenge" and fun blitzes. While the coaching, challenges and blitzes are organised by both county and school coordinators, the equipment and coaching materials were sent directly to primary schools. These comprised of a booklet of coaching sessions, a poster on the "Skills Challenge" for fifth and sixth classes, and a collection of bibs, footballs, cones, pump and kit bag.

The *McDonald's* logo, in a slightly altered form, appears on all literature and posters throughout the program. It is also displayed prominently on the front of the bibs that children are to wear as well as on the footballs and pump. At least one school in County Offaly has returned their equipment, believing it to contradict a "healthy eating" drive in the school. However, the material was accepted by the vast majority of the 3,000 schools selected for this programme.

In *Catch and Kick* one may witness a number of trends concerning *McDonald's*, primary schools and the issue of commercialism within them. Reflecting on *McDonald's* activities elsewhere Jary (1999, p.124) writes:

> By means of extensive PR - its sponsorship of sports events as well as its "associations" with sports stars and sports teams in its advertising - McDonald's as a non-sporting corporation has positioned itself so that it feed on the potency of sport as a source of near magical signs.

[3] Cumman na mBunscoil are an organisation affiliated to the Gaelic Athletic Association, responsible for the promotion and administration of the games at primary school level.

Gaelic games as physical, demanding and skilful sports have little in common with fast food. The transferable nature of the equipment provided by *McDonald's* increases the likelihood that children will be wearing their *McDonald's* bibs outside of the scheme, whether the PE lesson is on athletics, basketball or soccer. Clearly, the positive association between fitness, sporting prowess and *McDonald's* is offered to children, a group the company continues to aggressively target through television advertising. Roberts (1994, p.83) asks us, with tongue in cheek, to 'imagine a scenario when main National Curriculum textbooks in food and nutrition were to be sponsored by, let us say, McDonald's restaurants UK!'.

One wonders how the writer would evaluate thousands of Irish schoolchildren preparing for their PE lesson by donning their *McDonald's* bibs and inflating *McDonald's* balls with a pump displaying the same logo. A similar initiative to *Catch and Kick*, focussing on the game of hurling in primary schools was launched by the GAA in 2004. It too was sponsored by *McDonald's*.

CONCLUSION

This paper began by saying that discussion about commercialism in primary schools should not be exclusive to educators and should not be an incidental affair. It then showed that this commercialism had its roots in the evolving consumerist paradigms of education and childhood. The advertisers' view of schools was explained in the second section, which also identified some of the means used internationally to deliver commercial messages to schoolchildren. Subsequently, we enquired into the background of commercialism in the Irish context and encountered revealing samples of its presence here, sometimes with the seemingly tacit consent of major educational stakeholders. A more thorough examination of two substantial national schemes appears to confirm our tentative assertion that, commercialism of similar nature to that internationally exists on a macro, rather than the micro, level in Irish primary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While recognising the limited scope of this study, a number of recommendations may be made based on the conclusions reached. It is perhaps time to acknowledge that commercialism in education is not solely an international phenomenon but pertains equally to Irish schools. Faced with increasing volumes of commercial schemes, it appears important that all organisations concerned, from individual schools to the Department of Education and Science, review their position and formulate a clear policy in relation to this trend. Such a policy should take as its starting point the educational mission of schools as institutions and the child-centred philosophy which underpins Irish primary education. A dedicated body,

such as the Commercialism in Education Research Unit in Arizona USA, who would conduct and disseminate research on this complicated matter would appear to have a contribution to make in raising awareness and evaluating commercial schemes. Research into the relationship between commercial programmes and brand awareness or the influence of commercialism on obesity levels among Irish children would prove most instructive.

As is apparent in this paper, marketers and advertisers are most knowledgeable and skilled in their handling of schools to the benefit of their commercial interests. It is hoped that this paper may increase, however slightly, our understanding of commercial activity within Irish schools, to the benefit of the children in our care.

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Gerry McNamara and Sean Griffin

FILM IN THE CURRICULUM: AN EVALUATION OF A PILOT PROJECT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

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ABSTRACT: The paper provides a brief overview of the outcomes of the FÍS Project conducted in Irish Primary Schools in the three years up to mid 2003. The project was designed to find ways of using film appreciation and film making as an educational medium which could contribute to the implementation of the revised primary school curriculum. In particular, it was hoped that the project would be a vehicle for active and cooperative learning, give a strategic role to film and media education, and contribute to innovative ways of teaching a wide range of subjects. In essence, the evaluation found that FÍS proved very successful in each of these ways, particularly in enabling integrated project work across subjects. It also had the added benefits of re-igniting the interest and motivation of less academically inclined children and providing interesting and challenging ways of integrating technology into education. The paper is offered as part of the growing literature on film education which seems set to become an increasingly significant part of school curricula in many countries.

INTRODUCTION

The FÍS project referred to in this paper was completed in June 2003 and the final evaluation report was completed in October 2003. The following paper firstly describes the FÍS Project in the context of film education generally and the Irish Primary School Curriculum specifically. The paper then continues to consider the process of evaluating a project, the objectives of which are largely in the affective domain and expressive in nature. The final section briefly describes the key findings of the evaluation.

THE FÍS PROJECT

The FÍS Millennium Film Project for Primary Schools was launched by the then Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin, on 12 January 2000. It was described as "an historic and imaginative project" and "an unprecedented initiative in Irish education"(*DES*, 2000a). FÍS is the Irish word for "vision"- as in "imaginative foresight and guiding inspiration". Significantly, the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* presented to parents and educators after more than a decade of consultation and detailed development and planning, introduced its aims, principles and features as "a vision for primary education". It specifically outlined its vision thus:

> It promotes the active involvement of children in a learning process that is imaginative and stimulating. Its overall vision is to enable children to meet with self-confidence and assurance the demands of life both now and in the future.
>
> (Ireland, 1999 p. 6).

The FÍS project takes up this core theme of stimulating active participation in the learning process through interest-driven and creative activity:

> The initiative will emphasise teaching/learning approaches that involve children actively in their own learning. A wide range of valuable learning experiences will be in-built. These may include: creative work, acquisition of new skills/techniques, problem solving, independent work, communication skills, use of new materials, first-hand experience of the arts, language learning, collaborative activity, and self-expression.
>
> (DES, 2000b Draft Project Description, 11 January 2000, pp. 3-4).

The project, intended as a pilot scheme for the national primary education system, was given a three-year brief until June 2003. It involved approximately one-hundred teachers in twenty-eight primary schools in five co-operative clusters

located in Cork and Dublin. It was financially supported by Allied Irish Banks and overseen by a steering committee of educationalists representing the various partners and stakeholders collaborating in the project.

The overarching aim of the project was to explore film as a unique way of learning. In this way it tried to engage teachers and pupils in co-operative exploration of film appreciation and filmmaking in a productive and educationally enhancing creative classroom climate.

FILM MAKING IN OTHER CURRICULA

Examples elsewhere of successful projects incorporating film-making at primary level have involved impressive approaches to cross-curricular integration. In Banning, California, children as young as eight years old from multi-ethnic communities in disadvantaged areas have made early moving picture devices and pinhole cameras as a foundation for further exploration of visual technology leading to the creation of "video diaries", storyboard sequencing and animated films (Hoffer School, www. 1 February 2002).

Children in Year 6 of Ysgol Frongoch in rural north Wales have been making video films about local wildlife habitats and have collaborated with a partner school on a shared science project. Their finished products can be viewed via the school's web page. It is claimed that the collaborative process of planning, problem solving and communication skills characterise the real richness of the learning opportunities involved. Of the Frongoch school project, a BBC director is quoted as saying: "I haven't seen children doing things like this before and I think this type of real life learning must be the way ahead for schools" (Miranda Net, David Baugh, www, 13 February 2002).

A recent pilot study carried out by the British Educational and Communications Technology Agency (BECTA) set out to investigate how the use of digital video technology in film-making might effect pupils' engagement and behaviour and which teaching methods most inspired and assisted pupils' work with digital video. Reported findings from the six month project involving fifty British primary and secondary schools indicate a range of positive outcomes chiefly concerning the level of pupil motivation and engagement with the curriculum and the enhancement of communication skills and differentiated learning opportunities. One major finding of the project is that 'use of DV activities has led to an increase in pupil engagement with a range of learning styles; something BECTA's project officer Helen Walker feels is a major potential benefit: 'young pupils are able to use digital video to communicate at a higher level than would be possible if they were only writing'. The project also found that the work has led to 'developing a widening of the learning styles available in the classroom and the increased motivation noted may be a by-product of this' (*Education Guardian*, November 19, 2002).

THE FÍS PROJECT: CURRICULUM CONTEXT AND PROJECT GOALS

Fís and the primary school curriculum.

The revised Irish primary school curriculum (1999) provides the central context and policy rationale for the FÍS project. In line with the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum* (Ireland, 1999) children are meant to be actively involved in their own learning; motivation is based on interest, enjoyment and subject integration; communication skills are emphasised; problem solving, critical thinking, investigation and analysis are considered to be crucial components; and social and personal awareness as well as collaborative and co-operative endeavour are important principles and practices to be promoted and valued. The FÍS project aims to synthesize all of these elements in a technologically accessible, culturally appealing and creative arts context.

A strong commitment to fostering the centrality of the arts in Irish education underpins official enthusiasm for the FÍS project.

> This commitment promotes an education system which encourages young people to be positive, responsible and active agents in society by emphasising their personal and social creativity…such a nurturing of creativity assists the young person to become a tolerant, critically aware and socially committed citizen who can live confidently in the world.
>
> (Ireland, 1995, p.21).

The FÍS Project is linked primarily with this new emphasis in the revised curriculum on the exploration of creativity as a means of learning and self-expression through the visual arts, drama, music, dance and literature (FÍS 2000 Project Plan and Report to Steering Committee, 4 May 2000, p. 3).

In addition, the unique twinning of film as an art form and the utilisation of digital, computerised and web-based technology complements the work of *Schools IT 2000,* an initiative of the Department of Education and Science which aims to explore how ICT can be used to enhance learning across the curriculum.

A long-term goal of the FÍS project is "to inform curriculum development in film education in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment" (DES, 2000b). A desired outcome of the project is "the development of models of good practice which will contribute to the evolution of film as a form of learning in the primary school curriculum". An ultimate goal of the project is to share the piloting experience with all primary schools and thereby to promote the positive pedagogical possibilities of working with film in a classroom context.

The wide-ranging goals of the project endeavour also to encompass implicitly the potential for motivating and re-vivifying teacher enthusiasm and engagement

in the revised curriculum. The broadly similar aims of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* introduced to Irish primary schools in 1971 and those of *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) remained, to a large extent, frustratingly aspirational and unattained due to poor support and resource arrangements at that time (OECD, 1991). A co-ordinated national strategy for on-going in-service training for all schools has accompanied the introduction of the current revised *Primary School Curriculum*. A key element in the realisation of the FÍS project therefore was the construction and promotion of appropriate and continuous in-career development training for the schools involved in the project. This also incorporated school-based and off-campus in-service support on an ongoing basis. This essential dimension of the project was co-ordinated by the Creative Director and his assistants. A planned outcome of this support activity as outlined in the originating documentation is that "a mainstream in-service initiative" will develop from the project which "will involve the training of a team of tutors who can support curriculum initiatives in film education" (DES, 2000b). The FÍS project, as well as providing a laboratory for curricular experimentation, also introduced a focus for whole-school collaboration, provided possibilities for differentiated and alternative modes of learning and assessment, and promoted realistic opportunities for parental and community involvement.

THE GOALS OF THE FÍS PROJECT

The goals of the FÍS project as described in the originating literature set out:

- to enhance the educational/life experience of pupils in a range of school subjects;
- to promote whole-school initiatives which will impact on pupils, teachers, parents and the community;
- to focus on pupil learning through arts/media collaborative activity;
- to consolidate the development of models of good practice for the use of film as a learning resource in the primary school;
- to develop the professional skills of teachers in facilitating arts/media activities;
- to become viable when it has been established;
- to include a social/cultural dimension which will benefit the community into the future

(Draft Project Description DES, 2000b, p. 3).

These goals are substantially summarised in the four central aims of the project:

> (i) to enhance the educational and life experience of the child through creative activities;
> (ii) to provide opportunities for appreciation and response to film;
> (iii) to provide experience of aspects of the film making process;
> (iv) to involve pupils, teachers, parents and the wider school community.
>
> (DES, 2000a)

One might further summarise the envisaged scope of the project under two headings:

> (i) developing knowledge, skills, concepts and understandings related to film appreciation and film-making as a way of learning;
> (ii) enhancing creativity, communication, collaboration, cross-curricular activity and community building in the school situation.

It could also be claimed that these twin aims might apply in the learning context equally and inter-relatedly both to pupils and teachers. As its most effective outcome, FÍS envisages not so much an add-on dimension to the curriculum as a means of generating an authentic learning community within the school as an agent of promoting the philosophy and principles of *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

IMPLEMENTING PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM (1999) THROUGH FÍS

The three pedagogical principles espoused in the 1971 *Curaclam na Bunscoile* – guided discovery and activity methods; subject integration; environment-based learning – were endorsed by the 1999 revised curriculum. They were furthermore expanded into a wider range of learning principles that were intended to characterise more fully the kinds of learning process that were envisaged. Among the learning principals listed are:

- the child's sense of wonder and natural curiosity is a primary motivating factor in learning;
- the child is an active agent in his or her learning;
- learning should involve guided discovery and activity methods;
- learning is most effective when it is integrated;

- skills that facilitate the transfer of learning should be fostered;
- higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills should be developed;
- collaborative learning should feature in the learning process;
- the range of individual difference should be taken into account in the learning process

(Ireland, 1999, pp 8-9).

The aims of the FÍS project, as stated below, mirror succinctly many of the kinds of learning processes advocated in *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

> FÍS will enhance the creative and educational learning experiences of children and provide them with direct involvement in the learning process. The project will emphasise the engagement of children in both artistic expression and response to the medium. Specifically, project activities will help those involved to develop key skills in communication, problem solving, critical thinking, inquiry, investigation and analysis and social and personal awareness interaction.
>
> (Project Plan and Report to Steering Committee, 4 May 2000)

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

After initial briefing with the co-ordinator follow up meetings with the teachers took place at the in-service training weeks in July and August of Year One. Research (Cullingford, 1999) shows that teachers respond to inspection and appraisal with increased stress and determination to perform well - 'to put on a show'. In our experience the same applies to the evaluation of new programmes. Even if we make it clear that it is the programme that is being evaluated the teachers involved feel that their work is also being appraised. Just as in inspection this often results in evaluation greatly overstating the value of a particular initiative since it is a special effort or performance that is put on, rather than the day-to-day reality.

In this evaluation it was made clear to the teachers that the philosophy of the approach was teacher centred - the evaluators planned not to appraise the project, still less the work of the teachers, but rather to allow the teachers to evaluate it themselves. The centrality as we see it of enabling teachers to evaluate, interpret, accept or reject innovations was emphasised, as was our view that only teachers are in a position to judge the real as opposed to the rhetorical possibilities of any new initiative. This was strongly endorsed by those involved, and while not willing to collect data themselves in an action research structure as we proposed, the teachers collaborated in designing ways of obtaining a good picture of their responses to the project as they implemented it.

In the first instance the teachers suggested a range of criteria by which they themselves would judge the true value of the FÍS programme. Three criteria in particular were prioritised:

(1) the potential of FÍS to be integrated in ways which would improve the day to day implementation of the curriculum in various subject areas
(2) the potential to provide a vehicle for the teachers to use more active and experiential learning methods as espoused by the curriculum
(3) the potential of FÍS to engage the interest of pupils, particularly those who tended to be demotivated by 'normal' school whether through poor academic ability, special needs or social disadvantage.

The teachers were also concerned with and interested in evaluating other related issues. 'Change fatigue' following a steady flow of innovation, new curricula and in-service has been a constant feature of school life in the past decade. In this context the teachers believe that any initiative such as FÍS must not only be able to meet the criteria outlined above but must do so in a resource effective way. This view raised further criteria as follows:

(4) is the cost of FÍS defensible or could the resources be better used?
(5) is the support for teachers - particularly in-service training - effective, worthwhile, or too demanding of time and levels of expertise?
(6) how would the full implementation of FÍS impact on the resources, time and structure of schools?

A final criterion related to the possible role of FÍS in fulfilling increasing demands for the development of familiarity with Information and Communications Technology among school children. Up to now this has resulted in considerable equipment (invariably PCs) being made available to schools, and some in-service training provision for teachers, but as yet no very clear methods of integrating teaching approaches such as online learning into the day to day curriculum. A criterion therefore that many of the teachers saw as important in relation to FÍS was:

(7) can FÍS expand the opportunities to introduce children to a range of ICT activities perhaps more meaningful and relevant to them than the current initiatives allow?

Having designed the criteria by which they would evaluate the value of the FÍS initiative the practitioners proceeded to identify what they considered the best way of collecting the data relating to these criteria. A number of methodologies were agreed upon:

(a) a questionnaire seeking the views of all the teachers (including principal teachers involved in the project); the questionnaires to be designed by the evaluators and Project Co-ordinator with an input from the teachers and to concentrate on teacher perceptions in relation to the criteria identified;

(b) brief interviews with as many of the teachers involved as possible to be held at the summer in-service weeks during each year of the project;

(c) as part of a case study of eight of the schools involved, more in-depth interviews with the teaching staff, observation of FÍS related activities and meetings with classes and pupils involved;

(d) film-elicitation interviews where teachers who chose to do so would, with the pupils involved, show the work they had done using it to prompt pupil responses to FÍS. The film-elicitation interviews would themselves be filmed to provide a record, in the same medium as the project, of the opinions and judgements of teachers and pupils.

This final methodology was new to all concerned and is explained more fully in the next section.

THE FÍS EVALUATION AND VISUAL RESEARCH METHODS

In illuminating the learning arising from the project and identifying ways in which such learning can be incorporated into the broader school curriculum the teachers felt it was vital to develop research approaches which would be non-threatening to the participants (both pupils and teachers) and which equally could get beyond the limitations and constraints of language. Experience teaches that these are difficult objectives to achieve with instruments such as questionnaires and interviews, even with adult professionals. With children the quality of data emerging from these methods tends to be even more problematic. In this case however it seemed that the products (films/story boards/photographs and so on) produced by the teachers and pupils represented an excellent vehicle to elicit the perspectives of those most closely involved in the learning. In this way it

was hoped to overcome a truism of educational evaluation, namely that most evaluations fail to involve those at the cutting edge of the innovation - namely, pupils.

The methodology chosen for this purpose first involved the viewing by the evaluation team of the films and other project work produced in the schools involved. These gave a very interesting picture of the range of learning activities which had occurred. However of greater interest and value to the evaluation was the methodology of image-based research in the form of photo-elicitation or in this case video/film-elicitation interviews. This essentially involves viewing the films, animations, storyboards and scripts with the pupils who produced them and encouraging to give a commentary on their thoughts, ideas etc as they look back together on their work. This methodology is described in the work of Gold (1997) and Schratz and Walker, (1995). It seeks to encourage the respondents to 'narrative' the film in the sense of enabling and encouraging verbal interpretation and story telling while showing/viewing the films made by the respondents. Pink (2001, p. 18) asserts that "comments in the form of story telling serve to expand and complement the often minimal responses common to other forms of research", and that "triggers" for these responses in the form of films, photographs etc are most appropriate to achieve these extended responses.

It was decided therefore to conduct a series of film-elicitation interviews with teachers and their classes based on the films and other materials which that group had produced. These interviews were largely open-ended and unstructured (other than by a pre-viewing of the films by the evaluators and by the parameters of the project). To a great extent the interviews/discussions were guided by the images created by the participants and allowed them to articulate in their own way their experiences of the project.

In this evaluation, film-elicitation interviews took place in the schools that were case studied. The interviews involving the class groups and teachers took place in school after a viewing of the films and with the related material - storyboards, scripts, still photographs, etc. to hand (usually up around the classroom walls).

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

Teaching methods

It becomes clear from the interviews that FÍS teachers use a range of strategies to deliver the project at classroom level. The project challenges traditional teaching approaches, especially as one tries to develop the areas of pre-production, filming and editing. Teachers have to re-think much of their pedagogy in applying the aims of the project to classroom practice. The move from the traditional 'provider of knowledge' to a 'facilitator of learning' is seen to be relatively easy for some practitioners but a giant leap for others. Those who progress in this evolution engage in reflective practice that is insightful and energising.

Teachers who adopt a “film industry model” find that the process works successfully and they develop organisational and technical skills to manage it effectively. They combine methods already familiar to them with this new approach to achieve their goals. Teamwork in the classroom is an important feature of this model. Children enjoy this process and fit quickly into their allocated roles. Teacher and class decision-making are usually managed by discussion and consensus building.

The production phase is a natural progression that follows from the film literacy elements of the project. This stimulates ideas in class and children then move to the development of their own ideas producing storyboards and scripts to structure and refine their thoughts. There is strong evidence of a cyclical learning process. The learning that takes place in the initial viewing and film literacy stages is applied in the ideas development stage. This is then re-applied in the production phase, culminating in the editing process. The learning that occurs during editing is then taken forward as the teacher and class embark on their next production.

The production process is also the most problematic for teachers. Teamwork in classes enhances learning for pupils. However, classroom management issues arise in operating this approach. Different teams within the class work on different aspects of the production. This leads to sequencing problems in terms of workload. For example, ‘editing teams’ do not get closely involved until the latter stages of the production. Teachers solve this by allocating multiple roles in order that class members are continuously involved. A team teaching approach helps alleviate these problems for some schools, where classes split at specific times with some production team members working on for example, camera rehearsals with one teacher, and other pupils working on routine class work in a separate room with another teacher.

FÍS acts a vehicle for the pedagogic application of ICT in class. The introduction of the Schools IT 2000 initiative has stimulated debate concerning best practice in classroom in the use of ICTs. The current strategy is focussed on the development of sound pedagogic applications for the use if ICT in the curriculum. FÍS and the use of digital video in class is eminently suitable as an approach.

FÍS challenges traditional teaching roles. This is apparent in much of the data gathered. Quite simply, “tried and trusted” methods do not work. Teachers have had to re-think much of their teaching practice when applying FÍS in class. The step from the traditional “provider of knowledge” to “facilitator of learning” was small for some, a giant leap for others.

Benefits for the children

What, according to the research – and in summary – were the benefits for the children participating in the FÍS project? From the observations of the children's activities, together with the dialogues engaged in with the pupils, teachers and other stakeholders significant learning enhancement can be identified under the following seven headings:

(i) Task-focused team work

Pupils gradually learned that in order to be effective in realising an end product it was essential that each team member be clear about his or her responsibilities. Children learned to be accountable to the team and to see their role as having an important part in the overall project.

(ii) Motivation

Film is a compelling medium and film making appeals highly to the creative drive of children. It combines the magic of moving images with the power of technology. It introduces children to the skills and secrets of selecting, sequencing, staging and shooting digital camerawork for the screen. It has the advantage of having a clear outcome and a desirable goal to steadily work towards. Above all, it links perfectly into the interests and experiences of children – and it is fun.

(iii) Self-esteem building

In teachers' responses, the most frequent comment on the effects of the project on children's learning is the development of self-esteem and confidence. Children who sometimes felt defeated by the standard requirements of the curriculum and who may have achieved little in the way of academic attainment were heartened to find that there was a route to success in the medium of film-making. Children with a wide range of abilities and disabilities found an appropriate level of participation in this project. Behaviour difficulties were, in a number of recorded instances, noticeably moderated by the child's successful participation in the project. Children who found their self-esteem improving in the course of the FÍS project were better disposed towards school and more willing to put effort into other areas of learning. They also discovered how interrelated and overlapping many areas of the curriculum were and how connected they were to the skills of film making.

(iv) Language development

Importantly, the visual nature of the FÍS project also helped children who have learning difficulties with text-based and auditory processing methods. Children with dyslexia participated fully and successfully in the project. Children with moderate general learning difficulties in a

special school utilised the technology to improve their oral language skills. In many instances teachers reported that FÍS worked well with the English curriculum, especially in the area of creative writing. Children also developed techniques in scriptwriting and the editing and redrafting of written work.

(v) Sequencing and logical thinking

Teacher A claimed that one of the major benefits of the project was the ability of FÍS to impact on the children's creativity in a structured way. In doing so it helped develop a variety of specific and generic skills, such as problem-solving, planning, sequencing and discovery methods. These skills came together in the process of planning and producing a short film. Teacher B working with third class pupils drew up a contract with the class to produce a film by a specified date; the pupils worked out a schedule within this agreed deadline. Ideas for a film subject were discussed and outlined and put through a feasibility test by the children. Most ideas were rejected as being impractical. When ideas were based around locations in the immediate vicinity of the school the project began to take shape in a concrete fashion. The children outlined a plot for a modern-day adaptation of the Cinderella story called "Cinderella's Big Toe". With the film idea as their goal, the children sequenced and planned the tasks necessary to translate the project into reality. The teacher observed the process in action and offered counsel and suggestions only when necessary. The editing process challenged children in the development of higher-order thinking skills. The great benefit of editing for student filmmakers is that it provides opportunities for exercising tremendous amounts of critical thinking.

(vi) Positive pupil/teacher engagement

The FÍS project provided numerous opportunities for enabling a new kind of working relationship between teacher and pupil. As teacher and pupils shared the common excitement of seeing their ideas come together, a relaxed, trusting, easy, friendly engagement pervaded the classroom and many teachers commented how their role as teacher became less "centre-stage" and more as a sideline facilitator. This did not mean that a directive instructional approach was not sometimes required. When this was required, it was frequently observed that children were more attentive, focused and interested. The relationship between pupil and teacher was sometimes expressed in terms of mutual achievement and enjoyment. One teacher described it in these terms:

I suppose they got confidence, a sense of achievement and enjoyment … and of course I suppose hopefully a springboard to doing other creative things in their life. I remember going to a lecture by Brendan Kennelly and he said "expression is the enemy of depression"… and I always think that to myself … I really do think that if you do express yourself and if children are able to express themselves in any way and adults, if we can express ourselves with them … it is a very good thing.

(vii) Appreciation of roles and co-operation; leadership and responsibility

Many levels of co-operation, collaboration and team-working were recorded and observed. In one ambitious undertaking, children in a mixed gender North Dublin senior primary school elected to film an adaptation of a story in their English reader inspired by the presence of a district courthouse in the immediate locality. The children had sourced and borrowed barristers' gowns and Garda uniforms for the filming, and actors and crew rehearsed extensively on location before the time allocated to the film "shoot" so that time for filming could be maximised on the day. On completion of the filming the children viewed the footage and made decisions about the editing. Editing took considerable time due to the amount of footage to be digitised. The final cut was screened at a premiere in the school attended by parents, teachers, pupils and the local community. It was an outstanding example of initiative, co-operation, responsibility and celebration.

What appears to be evident from our investigation of the FÍS project is that the process of film making in the classroom combines elements of activity-based learning and co-operative work in a way that makes many of the aims of the curriculum come alive. All projects, however worthy, inevitably fall short of the original vision. FÍS challenges the inevitability of this dictum. It promises hard work in the doing while leaving the magic of the process undimmed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations that should be addressed by policy-makers, educational managers, curriculum developers, teachers and teacher educators in order to extend the benefits emerging from FÍS across the broader school system.

1. **Moving image literacy - film and digital video in the primary classroom**
   The benefits of moving image literacy are apparent in this study, particularly in the way it engages pupils with limited reading literacy. There is a need to

consider a co-ordinated approach to the inclusion of moving image literacy on a wider scale in the primary school curriculum. Consideration should be given to using it in an integrated approach to support the curriculum in all areas. Moving image literacy should be considered in both the "reading" and "writing" sense of literacy. Practical approaches to teaching and learning with DV cameras and editing equipment should form part of the initiative.

2. **Curriculum development and planning**
   Consideration should be given as to how curriculum implementation is applied and delivered in the primary classroom. This study shows that teachers are already finding difficulty in delivering an extremely crowded curriculum. Sufficient space needs to be created if teachers are to enliven the curriculum and explore new areas in their teaching.

3. **Development of resources - human, logistical and material**
   This study has highlighted the benefits of teacher professional development. Moving image literacy cannot be introduced to the primary classroom without appropriate resources. These include a co-ordinated approach to teacher professional development, and the provision of sufficient resources and equipment.

4. **Methodologies and pedagogy**
   This study has shown that suitable methods are being developed for the teaching of moving image literacy. Consideration should be given to the development of further models of classroom teaching in this area. As part of this initiative, teachers working in moving image literacy and DV should be encouraged and supported in conducting research into their own classroom practice.

5. **Teacher professional development**
   In order to implement the recommendations above there is need to devise in-service and pre-service training of teachers that incorporates moving image literacy and the technologies associated with its production.

6. **Further research**
   There is need for further research in classrooms by teacher practitioners supported by moving image research specialists. This will help inform education policy development in this area. Studies based on digital video editing (DVE) raise questions concerning pupil grouping, the most appropriate methods for introducing editing software, the social roles of pupils, and the aesthetics of editing. There is also a need to broaden this research to include pedagogical approaches to the production and pre-production elements of DV.

CONCLUSION

It seems clear from this evaluation that FÍS has been a most worthwhile project both in terms of the learning achieved and the potential impact on the curriculum. Moreover it managed to achieve this in a manner which can be both replicated and extended in a cost-effective way.

FÍS offers a curriculum project which has unique attributes. It brings together interesting and innovative approaches to the utilisation of Information & Communication Technologies. It provides a vehicle for project-centred learning, subject integration, team teaching and collaborative and co-operative learning. In so doing it offers a way to deliver some of the key areas and processes of the revised curriculum. It is innovative and technologically challenging but at the same time based within the parameters of the curriculum and therefore capable of delivering specific learning objectives of both cognitive and qualitative types.

The extension of FÍS will require an investment in equipment (but this should be modest in that most schools have, or are likely to obtain, a video camera, t.v. and video recorder, and editing software is becoming cheaper and more user friendly) and a more substantial cost in training. However it is clear from this evaluation that such training is a vital part of the success of the initiative and yields benefits across the work of the teacher and across the curriculum. The balance of such training in the future might lean somewhat more towards pedagogy and curriculum integration with somewhat less emphasis on technical skills particularly in editing. Training should also emphasise plans, projects, ideas and so on to open possibilities for teachers to integrate FÍS with the daily delivery of a variety of subjects rather than set piece or once-off projects, however spectacular the artefacts produced.

Finally, this evaluation has also indicated that FÍS may be of special value to children with special needs or those who are less academically inclined. The range and level of activities which are encompassed by the project were extraordinarily flexible, allowing opportunities for self-direction, empowerment and the growth of self-esteem, and providing roles and tasks for all pupils. Most importantly FÍS grabbed the interest of pupils by introducing to the curriculum the medium which is most central to their era and experiences.

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Michael Flanagan

BRAVE NEW WORLD - MEDIA, IDENTITY AND THE CHANGING CULTURE OF CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT: Driven by unprecedented affluence and technological innovation, the culture of Irish childhood has undergone significant change in the last decade. Many of the old certainties that governed Irish national life have been undermined and society is attempting to define itself in the light of new and very different social and economic conditions. One of the most crucial results of this development is that modern children, though far better off in many ways, now exist in an era dominated by new and rapidly changing media formats, where personal identity and self-knowledge are no longer achieved in a traditional, local setting. This erosion of such time-honoured values has resulted in higher rates of substance abuse, suicide, depression and negativity among Irish youth. These are all symptoms of a search for meaning, a desire for balance in a consumer driven and increasingly materialistic society. This paper asks how our schools (particularly those that serve the disadvantaged community) might reconcile the often-conflicting demands of modern popular culture and an effective system of education. Calling for reflection on this issue, it also addresses the question of how best to equip our children to deal with the many unpalatable social and cultural realities of the brave new world that is the Ireland of the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION: A CHANGING IRELAND

In 1889 Fr Peter Yorke, a close friend of Father O'Growney, delivered a lecture in San Francisco. Supporting the prevalent insular attitude that featured strongly in conservative nationalism's cultural policy at time, he asserted that the outside world, the modern, the metropolitan, was a source of corruption and a cultural infection. Looking for a solution to the perceived moral dangers of this modern world he declared 'If they could tow Ireland out into the Atlantic and free it entirely from English and continental influences that such a measure would not be too much to restore to Ireland her diminishing nationality.'[1] As we now know such a simplistic solution is not possible: international popular culture is all-pervasive, never more than a flick of a switch away.

Irish society today is dramatically different from the one we may associate with traditional perspectives of this country. At no time has the process of change been more striking than in the last ten to fifteen years. There has been a remarkably rapid emergence out of a period of sustained stagnation in Ireland's economy and this has created an unprecedented amount of wealth for the people of this country.

The current generation of young people know little about the old certainties that once governed Irish political life. Modern Irish youth are far removed from the traditional limitations - economic, social, and sexual that were such a feature of the experience of previous generations. Central to any understanding of Ireland in the past was the concept of the relationship between Church and State. This now has changed and a new form of Irish society has evolved. The spirit of the age has had a bearing on the attitudes of a more educated population. This was acknowledged not so long ago when the Vatican published a 100-page booklet on the subject of the challenge of New Age doctrines to traditional beliefs. 'People feel that the Christian religion no longer offers them - or perhaps never gave them - something they really need.' The booklet, intended to help churchmen respond to what the Pope sees as one of the greatest threats to Christianity in the third millennium is peppered with references to "the magical mystery tour", feng shui and the musical *Hair*. It provides an alphabetical list of references including karma, rebirthing, transcendental meditation yoga and zen. The booklet goes on to say that New Age philosophies have grown in popularity because of the "spiritual hunger of contemporary men and women" who feel dissatisfied with established religion, institutions and science.[2]

It may be worthwhile to cast our minds back to a more simple time, an era when the Church did, in fact, appear to have the answers that the Irish people required. Brian Fallon maintains that the post-Famine Irish Catholic Church, in common with Scottish and Welsh Calvinism, had developed as an antidote to the poverty and degradation of the mass of the population in the mid-19th century. This was a period when evangelical religion proved to be virtually the only force which could lift demoralised human beings to some level of self-discipline and self-respect.[3] As material wealth has increased in this country so too has the power

of the church decreased. Community values have changed – the bonds, which were necessary under the more deprived conditions of the past, are no longer required. Children are now growing up in a more fragmented, more atomised society than was the case in the past. Among the factors that contribute to this state of cultural flux are an ever-increasing emphasis on technology, heightened levels of consumerism and a revolutionary change in society's attitude to teenage drinking and early sexual activity.

TECHNOLOGY

Some of the changes which have recently taken place have been perhaps more challenging for adults, especially older adults, than the young. The electronic revolution has had an impact on virtually all areas of everyday life. Devices and facilities such as, mobile phones and the internet have begun to subvert traditional conceptions of space and place, and to transform patterns of social interaction. The worlds of leisure and of learning have been particularly affected, and the implications are profound for education, at all levels. In a society saturated with consumer technologies, how are we spending our time? In his book *High Tech, High Touch – Technology and the Accelerated Search for Meaning* John Naisbitt discusses this issue. We live in our cars, talk on the phone, write e-mail, watch TV, work on the computer, listen to music, stay tuned, stay connected, stay wired, stay ahead.

Consumer technologies that make us accessible at all times to all others alter our sense of time and well-being. Cell phones fit in our pocket, Palm Pilots in our hand, beepers on our belt. The fax machine and e-mail have collapsed "response time," and along with the mobile phone, these technologies make us available twenty-four hours a day, like a convenience store.[4]

Young people are living in a world saturated with information. Everywhere they look, every time they listen, someone is trying their very best to snag their attention. Their neurones are being bombarded by marketing messages, badgered by adverts, stalked by product placement. Every week sees another new magazine, supplement, cable channel or radio station. Then there are e-mails, web-sites, text messages and those DVDs with special extra bits you didn't see the first time. We drown in data and often, in an attempt to make sense of it all, we seek more information.

This stress on material value, image and artificially created standards of well-being creates in its turn an emptiness and sense of moral malaise which goes on to produce high rates of substance abuse and the other well-know features of a dysfunctional society.

New technology has become an increasingly intrusive presence on the landscape of traditional childhood. Many ancient childhood skipping steps, chants and games are now no longer passed from one generation of children to the next.

The mysterious seasons of playground rituals are vanishing. Once dead, they will never return.[5]

In 2004 Kevin Myers described this modern phenomenon as 'A civilisation perishing before our eyes.' It is a little considered civilisation, he said - known to a few anthropologists, and a good many teachers, who have usually wondered about it without being able to penetrate it too closely. For, like an anemone's tentacles, it ceases to exist when closely examined. But it is a civilisation nonetheless: the civilisation of children.

This was a civilisation that was made possible by adult authority and adult protection, yet it was nonetheless a separate civilisation, with a structure and a culture of its own, in which even the weakest and most inept could play a part. Moreover, the girls were guardians to dance-forms which probably went back many hundreds of years. Each city in Ireland and Britain probably had dialect forms of these shipping-dances and their accompanying songs; and in the twinkling of a silicon chip, they have just about vanished.[6]

Children today have access to a world which most of us know nothing about. We have created no morality nor any cultural tools to cope with it. Almost every child now has a mobile phone and therefore almost every child can access to pornography. Children are undergoing childhoods which their parents did not live through in any way at all. There has been a blurring of the boundaries which once maintained childhood as a sacred place.

BLURRING OF BOUNDARIES

Social and cultural boundaries distinguishing youth from childhood on the one hand and adulthood on the other, which have never been rigidly fixed in any case, are being blurred further under the pressure of current media influences. In physical terms children are continuing to develop faster and earlier; and in the post-industrial age of information technology they often have readier access to certain types of knowledge than many adults, without necessarily having had the opportunity to develop the capacity for critical and responsible use of that knowledge. At the same time, the acquisition of full 'social adulthood' is in many cases being delayed as young people stay in the education system longer, or for financial reasons find it difficult to develop a sense of an objective state of full autonomy or independence.

In train with these changes, the boundaries between "youth culture'- in terms, for instance, of leisure pursuits, music, dress-and the cultural artifacts and expressions associated with both childhood and adulthood, have also become more fluid. To take a very obvious example, "pop music" is now both performed by and enjoyed by a much wider age span than was the case twenty years ago.

For proof of the blurring of traditional boundaries between old and young, parent and child, look no further than our changing consumer habits. Converging

tastes and lifestyles have brought adults into the so-called 'youth market' – clothing, expensive electronic technology and entertainment systems such as the Playstation all exercise an appeal that transcends the generation barrier.

Changing parenting approaches have also played a role. More disposable income, longer working hours, less leisure time and growing safety fears have created a heady, emotional cocktail with a hint of guilt. Hence, many parents today feel under pressure to make the most of the limited time they spend with their children. Others believe that by participating more directly in their children's activities they can protect them from potential dangers. And still more are discovering that through indulging their kids they can indulge themselves.[7]

Doctors have reported a sharp rise in what is termed 'tweenie blues", with children as young as ten being treated for depression. One leading psychiatrist has warned the country is on the brink of an "epidemic" of self-harm among young girls. The doctors attribute increased depression among ten to fourteen year-olds to premature sexualisation, increased pressure to conform to popular images, a rise in schoolyard bullying and marital breakdown.[8]

"The boundaries between the adult and the child's world have shifted dramatically and children aren't as protected from the harsher sides of life as they once were," maintains Marie Murray, the director of psychology at St Vincent's hospital in Dublin. She said there was an epidemic of self-harm among young girls, while the phenomenon had also increased in pre-teen males.

"There was a time when it was thought that children were immune to the effects of depression, but these trends are hugely worrying because of the terrible pain involved," said Murray. She went on to say that the classic schoolyard push had transformed into a more sophisticated type of "torture".

Professor Carol Fitzpatrick, of the Mater hospital in Dublin, said that bullying remained one of the underlying causes of self-harm, which ranged from self-inflicted scratches or bums to bulimia or anorexia.

The incidence of overdoses, including paracetamol, and asthma drugs and antidepressants, was also on the increase among children. "They are crying out for help," Fitzpatrick told Medicine Weekly, a medical journal. "It is an indication that they are in serious trouble from their own emotional point of view."

Children as young as five are being treated for inflicting injury on themselves. Earlier this year, the National Parasuicide Registry reported that 201 children aged between ten and fourteen- 45 boys and 156 girls-were treated in Irish hospitals for attempted suicide.[9]

INDIVIDUALISM AND CONSUMERISM

Throughout the "developed" world this increasing emphasis on, and growing expectation of, lifestyle choice, is in keeping with a broader cultural trend towards individualism. This is presenting significant challenges to traditional conceptions

of 'community', and to ways of living and working which were based on such conceptions. It is also in keeping with a culture of *consumerism:* people, and particularly perhaps the young, are encouraged to see themselves as making autonomous, individual decisions about what to buy, what to wear what to listen to, what to read or watch, where to spend leisure time, what types of relationship to have, and so on. Ironically of course, such a consumerist culture depends for its survival not on a genuine autonomy on the part of the public but rather on a high degree of passivity and conformity. In a world that is increasingly a vast marketplace, consumerism in itself is probably irreversible, but 'critical consumption' can be encouraged and enhanced by effective educational programmes; and schools can have a particularly important role to play in this regard if they can reach out to young people in a way that is as meaningful and attractive to them as the commercial alternatives. The Department of Education's new SPHE curriculum documents contains an outline of the manner in which teachers can encourage such a reflective attitude to modern media influences in the lives of the young.[10]

The writer Daniel Boorstien uses the expression 'pseudo events' when describing the fascination modern society has artificially created mass occasions.[11] There is an argument that our preoccupation with the cult of celebrity has become one such 'pseudo event', in effect, a new religion. We can all be high priests in the new cult. 'Pop Idol' or 'Euro Star' will elevate you if you think you can sing and dance. If you cant, it does not really matter – 'No Talent Required' will supply you with your fifteen minutes. If you are really desperate there is always the hothouse of emotional manipulation that is 'Big Brother'.

Once again to refer to Boorstien's theory of 'pseudo events', we should address the question of what now unites people. In the absence of the traditional role of the church, what now gives meaning to our lives in this increasingly fragmented and atomised world?

In a published collection entitled *Why Not-Building a Better Ireland* (originating in the 2003 Magill Summer School) thirty contributions on the theme of "modern Ireland" by politicians, academics and journalists address some of the issues of modern Irish life. The papers themselves are often provocative in content. Several contributors take a "doomsday" view of modern Ireland, reflected in the declaration on the back cover: "In spite of unprecedented prosperity and affluence, violence stalks the streets. In every part of the country drugs and alcohol are a threat to the social fabric."

In this vein, Joe Mulholland observes in the foreword: "Underlying everything is the feeling that, in the Ireland of the 21st century, the social fabric has broken down. In the absence of old traditional values, customs and religious beliefs, there is a gaping void into which are pouring 'me-feinism', irresponsibility, depression, loneliness, suicides." Other contributions are similar in tone. Bishop Willie Walsh argues that the loss of trust in Church and State has caused social fragmentation, leading to an "aggressive individualism".[12]

In the form of the counter-cultural school, the educational commentator Patrick Bassett[13] presents an interesting strategy whereby teachers might combat Bishop Walsh's 'aggressive materialism' in Irish society.

THE COUNTER-CULTURAL SCHOOL

For anyone in the baby boom generation, the term counter-cultural inspires reminiscences of our post-war pasts, replete with anti-establishmentarian grooming dress, behaviour (sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll) and politics (anti-war). From the vanilla-flavoured culture of the 1950s emerged what our elders regarded as a horrific abomination, a generation that seemed to share none of the values of the prevailing adult culture, and in fact one that snubbed its collective nose at those values.

The irony of youth, of course, is that its possessors eventually grow up and mature as the generations replace one another. Witness, for example, the resurrection of lounge music, or the current fascination with the 1980s that has become a recent feature of popular culture. In the American context there has been a noted resurgence of attendance at church and synagogues, the re-emergence of children's museums, and the revival of sanitized family experiences, such as Disney cruises.

What is unusual about our times is that the American culture (and this is true for this country as well) projected in the popular media and popular imagination has become so distorted and grotesque-so reflective of only the more sordid aspects of our collective values and aspirations-that counterculture is something that may be desirable. Indeed, when it comes to education, the best schools (both public and private) are now, ironically, counter-cultural. What the research shows about schools of all types and in all locations is that the best of the lot share two main characteristics: they have exceptional teachers and appropriate moral climates. (The latter, often a product of small schools with communities sharing common values, tends to attract the former, exceptional teachers wishing to teach in such an environment.) What is equally certain is that the school's internal moral climate runs counter to that of the external culture, at least the prevailing popular culture. Such a paradox is manifestly evident, as an examination of the manner in which schools reflect the prevailing cultural norms will indicate.

VALUES OF THE POPULAR CULTURE VALUES IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

With all the spotlights on educational reform, we might just pause and shine a light on ourselves. In a democratic society, schools reflect the character of the culture. Basset contends that if we are unhappy with the character of the culture, we may wish to turn to those schools that are counter-cultural and allow more such schools to come into existence and flourish. As educators, we should reflect on these issues and perhaps work towards the maintenance of community values within our schools. This is particularly relevant in the urban context where the concept of the traditional Irish is most under threat.[13]

The following table has been taken from Basset's article and allowance should be made for the American context of this research.

VALUES OF THE POPULAR CULTURE	VALUES IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS
Rationalizing of dishonesty *(deceits of leaders; meretricious advertising)*	Expecting honorable behavior *(honor codes constraining lying, cheating, stealing)*
Lionizing the individual *(star-worship; limitless greed)*	Proselytizing community *(sacrificing for the team; community service)*
Indulging sexual profligacy *(real scandals and fiery fictions)*	Expecting abstinence *(limits on "PDA": public displays of affection)*
Excusing violence *("rights" of gun owners and moviegoers)*	Eschewing violence *(conflict-resolution training; media literacy)*
Exhibiting vulgarity *(crude language, coarse behaviors, risqué dress)*	Insisting on civility *(confronting incivility, setting standards for demeanor and appearance)*
Winning at all costs *(hazing of opponents; cheating for advantage)*	Fair play *(sportsmanship credo; no-cut policies)*
Conspicuous consumption *(status markers of clothes and cars)*	Environmental stewardship *(modeling good citizenship)*
Cultural tribalism *(asserting one's differences)*	School as community *(finding the commonalities)*

SEXUALITY

Modern Popular Culture impacts on boys and girls in different ways. In dealing with the issue of female sexuality Camille Pagillia refers to what she terms the 'hyper-sexualization' of teenage girls. There is a pervasive eroticisation of discourse in our culture – all across the board, from *Fair City* to *Big Brother*, *Emmerdale* to *Eastenders*, *Friends*, *Sex in the City* and even the previously moral bastion of *Coronation Street.* The society that now surrounds children is one in which nothing is sacred, nothing is private. Sex is ubiquitous, and children cannot escape its pervasive imagery any more than their parents can. From advertising on billboards and TV to fashion and popular culture, they are bombarded with it**.** Performers on *Top of the Pops* sell their wares to pre-teens by peddling an aura of overt sluttishness.

In the same vein, teen girls' magazines like *Sugar* breezily tell their readers, "It's what being a girl is all about" and then bombard them with explicit information about sex. *Sugar's* website, for example, directs girls to another website where they can get "The A-Z of sex".

This process starts increasingly early, too. Like the Jesuits, the high priests of pop culture believe in getting them young, initiating toddlers into accepting as normal and inevitable a certain ubiquitous style of trashy, 'brain-dead' popular culture. Parents themselves have contributed to this. We now have a situation where children feel aggrieved if their "right" to a TV in their bedroom at the age of five and a mobile phone at the age of six is not delivered. Parents have lost the confidence to say no, so children never learn where the boundaries are.

The creation of childhood as a sphere in which innocence had a chance to flourish outside the pressures of the adult world, existing side by side whilst remaining as much as possible untainted by its shadow, was an immense cultural achievement and one we should be trying to preserve rather than shatter.

We have a prevailing economic ideology which commodifies everything the world has to offer, and treats the smallest child not as a unique individual to be cherished and nurtured but only as a potential consumer to be filled up with ever more stuff; a mini-shopper to be netted and caught in the mesh of unfulfillable desires.

Women went to great lengths in the past to attain what was the then accepted norm of beauty.[14] What has happened in modern popular culture is that there has been a downward shift in the age thresh-hold at which this awareness develops. Surgical procedures to enhance physical appearance are now sometimes offered as a reward for doing well in the Leaving Cert. Programmes like *Nip*/*Tuck* have focussed attention on cosmetic surgery as a potential solution to the perceived inadequacies of teen development. You must, after all, have your priorities right!

The pursuit of impossible goals in terms of physical appearance is yet another pressure on both boys and girls as they attempt to negotiate the perilous waters between childhood and adult development. Much has also recently been written on the subject of the over-consumption of alcohol by young people during this transitional period.

DRINK

A leading Irish psychiatrist, Dr Justin Brophy, chairman of the Irish Psychiatric Association and consultant psychiatrist at Newcastle Hospital, Co Wicklow, has criticised the sponsorship of sporting and cultural events by the drinks industry and has said that binge drinking of alcohol among young men, often associated with weekend and festival events, is linked to suicide.[15]

According to Dr Brophy, the pattern of drinking here is mainly binge drinking and this is strongly linked to suicide in young men. He argues that public binge drinking has emerged in the last twenty-five years and is associated with community and tourist festivals, many of which are "culturally shallow, sham occasions created by commercial interest with spurious links to history and location". This has led him to call for government funding for sporting and cultural events to be contingent on the absence of drinks industry sponsorship. 'There are few significant events in Ireland that don't have a branded alcohol product as part of its name,' he says. 'Vintners' interests have driven this phenomenon under the guise of tourism and cultural patronage. Happy hours and all-you-can-drink promotions have been skilfully woven into youth culture. Such events stage-manage mass drunkenness at discount prices attractive to youth with corporate, legal and communal endorsement."

Dr Brophy also told *The Irish Times* that sporting organisations such as the GAA and the IRFU who receive government funding as well as sponsorship from the drinks industry, need to pay attention to their social responsibility. In particular, he singled out the GAA out for mention in this regard. The clustering of suicide weekends suggests that besides the established risk factors for suicide among alcohol misusers, the act of using alcohol *per se* contributes to the suicidal act. Social pressures exert a powerful influence on youth. The identification through manipulative advertising of alcohol with social success carries a magnetic appeal for the vulnerable young.

CONCLUSION

We have replaced the defined security that was childhood with something new and strange. Consume and be happy is the catch-phrase of the age. If you are not happy, help is at hand: alcohol, substance abuse and inappropriate sexual activity will fulfil your need, make you feel whole, loved and wanted.

As educators we can no longer remain blind to the reality of this consumerist society that is insidiously replacing traditional values. The parameters of childhood have changed. Children's culture is now no longer an expression of growth and development within a protected structure.

Irish society is certainly far better off in material terms than was the case in the past. However, behind this facade, there is an inner and less attractive reality in

the process of the modern Irish childhood. Witness the high rates of substance abuse and suicide among Irish young people. Consider the increasing numbers of early teenage pregnancies, many of these girls looking for what they perceive as love and affection, yet only raising their children without a male support and thus perpetuating a cycle of emotional insecurity, the very one of which they themselves were perhaps the victim. Saturated media exposure of celebrity life-styles, impossibly attractive boy-bands, ridiculously slim girl-bands, premature sexualisatison, an overwhelming pressure to consume and conform - all are aspects of the vortex that is now the coming of age process in the western world, one to which Irish boys and girls are constantly exposed through the wonders of modern technology. John O'Keefe has commented on the theme of despair that lies behind the mask of material well-being among the current young generation.[16] Suicide statistics in Ireland make for stark reading, he states. Whilst the figures can do little to reflect the unfathomable grief of those families that are left behind, they are nonetheless a stark reminder of the people we have become. TVs, VCRs and computer games are the new guardians, whilst large cars and frequent holidays reflect current parental notions of doing the best for their children. We live in a society where young people are often viewed as a familial commodity and then we wonder why they fall by the wayside.

In a world dominated by media, it is more difficult than ever for young people to achieve a sense of identity. We are the first two or three generations in history to grow up in a predominantly electronic environment. According to the cultural commentator Kalle Lasn, it is vital for any thinking person to maintain a sense of perspective of the wider implications of this fact. So caught up are we ourselves in the accelerated pace of modern life, this is something we are all too likely to take for granted. It took humans thousands of generations to adapt to living on the land (our 'natural' environment), Lasn continues, so it is reasonable to assume that it will take dozen of generations to adapt to the new electronic mass media environment that is rapidly replacing our 'natural' one. We are, he concludes 'new evolutionary beings, panting for breath on an electronic beach.' [17]

It is the responsibility of educators to reflect on these complex issues and attempt to put in place counter measures, for example Basset's idea of the counter-cultural school, in order to allow children to have the maximum chance of developing to their full potential in this new and rapidly changing modern world.

There has been much comment in educational circles recently on the need to introduce such subjects as science and continental languages at primary level. One may contend that a similar case might be made for a greater emphasis on media studies at this early stage of a child's development. As we have moved away from traditional notions of community (through which much education took place by a process of cultural osmosis) and towards a more independent and atomised form of existence, many of the positive values that distinguished Irish society have become diluted and young people now feel a greater sense of moral malaise than was the case in the past. Reflection and debate should now be our priority, followed by concrete proposals on the best way to assist young people through a period of unprecedented social and cultural transformation.

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OBITUARY

TOMÁS Ó DOMHNALLÁIN (Tom Donlon)
1913-2005

We are saddened to announce to our readers the passing of our first editor, Tomás Ó Domhnalláin (Tom Donlon), in November 2005. Tomás was the primary impulse behind the establishment of *Oideas* in 1968 and edited the first eleven editions. Born in 1913 in Delvin, Co Westmeath, he was reared in Kilskyre, Co. Meath. On taking first place in the first Meath County Council scholarship examination in 1926, he entered St. Finian's College, Mullingar, as a boarder. Graduating as a national teacher from St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra in 1934, he went on to take a BA and HDipEd at UCD. In 1937, he was appointed principal of Athboy NS, Co. Meath and seven years later he became principal of the larger St Mary's N.S, Drogheda. In 1949, he was appointed district inspector of national schools and served in Cavan and Ennis before transfer to Dublin ten years later. In 1963, he was appointed divisional inspector and eventually he became an assistant chief inspector.

In the 1960s, he undertook research on Irish language usage and this resulted in the acclaimed report *Buntús Gaeilge* in 1966 and the popular television series *Buntús Cainte* in 1968. Appointed Director of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta na hEireann *(ITE)* in 1973, his innovative approach and research interests were evident in his founding and editorship of the journal *Teangeolas* which was published until the closure of ITÉ in 2004. In 1978, he retired from the inspectorate and two years later he retired from the directorship of ITE.

As a national teacher in the 1930s and 1940s, Tomás was an active member of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO). His joining the inspectorate did not herald an end to his interest in union affairs and he went on to become a founding member of the Institute of Professional Civil Servants (IPCS) which represented school inspectors and other professionals in the civil service with distinction for over twenty years before being subsumed into IMPACT.

His interest in education and the Irish language was well-known and admired, and on marrying Peggy O'Brien (a civil servant) in 1938 both he and Peggy committed themselves to bringing up their family through the medium of Irish. In all, they had thirteen children, eight daughters and five sons. Two of the children are deceased: young Tomás was killed in the tragic collapse of a hotel floor during an auction in Ennis in 1958, and Colm, former Press Officer of the IDA, died in 2004. Tomas' family echo his commitment to the public service and particularly to Irish education. Some became teachers, one a diplomat and one followed her father into the inspectorate of primary schools. Tomás' daughter, Áine is probably the best known to the education community: until recently she held the chair in education at UCC and is vice-president of the college. But Seán, formerly

Irish Ambassador to the US and Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs, will perhaps be better known to the wider community.

Industrious, with a multitude of interests and possessed of a prodigious memory, Tom Donlon was the essential good companion. Small in stature, but an intellectual giant, his long life touched many others and few could say that their life was not enriched by knowing him. He was a devoted family man and will be sadly missed by his eleven surviving children, his twenty eight grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren. And he will be missed by colleagues who had the privilege of knowing him and enjoying his sparkling company on the launch of *Oideas 50* by Minister for Education and Science, Mr Noel Dempsey, TD, in 2003.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

REVIEW/ LÉIRMHEAS

Rian mo Chos ar Ghaineamh an tSaoil le Tony Bromell, 2006, Cló Iar-Chonnachta, Indreabhán, Conamara. €20.00. 364 leathanach.

Is gannchúiseach iad beathaisnéisí, gan trácht ar dhírbheathaisnéisí, daoine poiblí le blianta anuas, cé is moite de lucht litríochta, b'fhéidir. Agus a laghad díobh ann is amhlaidh is mó a fháilteofar roimh an tuairisc théagartha chuimsitheach seo ó Tony Bromell, oideachasóir, fear pobail, polaiteoir, fear clainne agus go háirithe Luimníoch. Fiú mura n-aithneoidh gach duine an t-ainm nó an aghaidh ar an gclúdach láithreach bonn ní baol go dtarlóidh sin ina chathair dhúchais ná i measc na mílte múinteoir a ghabh trí Choláiste Mhuire gan Smál in imeacht tríocha bliain.

Sa bhliain 1932 a rugadh é, bliain a shamhlaítear le toghadh de Valera ina Thaoiseach, nó ina Uachtarán ar an bhFeidhmeannas Náisiúnta mar a thugtaí air an uair úd. Ní théann sin amú ar an údar; bhí meas as cuimse aige ar an bhfear mór agus ar a pháirtí ó laethanta a óige; ceann de bhuaicphointí a shaoil ná an ócáid nuair a thit an crann air lámh a chroitheadh le Dev agus é fós ina gharsún; blianta ina dhiaidh sin bhí sé ag an mbord mór leis an Saoi in Ollscoil na Gaillimhe. Cé nach raibh aon speilp ar a mhuintir - pláistéir ab ea a athair agus bhí sé gan obair tamall le linn an chogaidh - is mór idir an tuairisc seo ar an gcathair agus an tuairisc dhearóil chráite a thug Frank McCourt, a bhí ag éirí aníos taca an ama chéanna, ina leabhar cáiliúil, Angela's Ashes deich mbliana ó shin. Labhraítear le cion ar an scoil náisiúnta, ar an meánscoil i Sráid Seasnáin agus ar phobal fuinte a raibh meas acu orthu féin, suim sa spórt agus sa chultúr agus cumas ar oibriú i gcomhar lena chéile.

Bhí an t-ádh ar an údar go raibh an-éirim aigne aige agus gur éirigh leis scoláireachtaí agus an chéad áit a bhaint amach ar scoil de réir mar a a shroich sé na mórchéimeanna scolaíochta, ag dul isteach i Scoil Shráid Seasnáin, ag dul chun na hollscoile i nGaillimh agus sa chéim BA féin. Cur síos caoin báúil a thugann sé ar a lucht múinte, gan ach an leid is lú faoi déine a bhain le bráthair amháin ar an meánscoil. D'fhill sé ar a mheánscoil féin ag múineadh Gaeilge agus Matamaitice. As seo amach bheadh sé ina shaoránach dílis gníomhach dá chathair dhúchais. Faighimid cuntas an-suimiúil ar an obair ar scoil, ar chúrsaí cultúir sa chathair, na seónna a chuireadh an mheánscoil ar an stáitse i gcomhar le cumainn eile sa chathair, blianta órga na scoile chomh fada is a bhain le hiománaíocht agus na díospóireachtaí Gaeilge. Chuir an Broiméalach suim i gcúrsaí ceardchumainn, bhí sé gníomhach i gCumann na Meánmhúinteoirí agus leis an dul chun cinn ba dhual dó bhain sé an barr amach agus bhí sé ina uachtarán náisiúnta ó 1966 go 1968.

Ghlac sé páirt ghníomhach sa pholaitíocht áitiúil. Seacht mbliana déag a chaith sé ina bhall de bhardas na cathrach agus bhí sé ina mhéara i 1982-83. Thaitin a thuras ar Mheiriceá go mór leis. Bhí sé ina sheanadóir agus dhein sé iarracht amháin bheith ina Theachta Dála, rud nár éirigh leis. Tá cur síos spéisiúil aige ar an bhfeachtas bríomhar sna seascaidí chun ollscoil a fháil do Luimneach, a raibh sé féin lánpháirteach ann. Bhí sé i ndán dó bheith ina chomhalta de Sheanad na hOllscoile Náisiúnta agus den Údarás um Ardoideachas ar ball. Tugtar cur síos an-sásúil ar gach ról acu.

Dar ndóigh, is de bharr na mblianta sa Choláiste Oideachais, mar léachtóir le Gaeilge ar dtús agus ansin mar Chláraitheoir is fearr a chuimhneofar air. Blianta gníomhacha aige ab ea an tríocha bliain sin, mar ní hamháin go raibh fiche cúram am tsléibhe air sa choláiste ach bhí sé gafa leis an bpolaitíocht ar feadh an ama. Insíonn sé dúinn go mion cé chomh deacair is a bhí sé socruithe a thabhairt chun críche i dtaca leis an gceangal le hOllscoil Luimnigh agus na cainteanna fadálacha agus an feitheamh tuirsiúil le cinní ón Roinn Oideachais agus ó Bhord na hOllscoile. Éinne a bhfuil suim aige i gcluichíocht pholaitíocht na hollscoile, bainfidh sé súlach as an tuairisc seo. Dealraíonn sé gur bhain sé an-taitneamh as na blianta deireanacha sa choláiste. Bhí an ghné Eorpach ag teacht chun cinn i gcúrsaí oideachais agus is iomaí turas thar lear chuig cruinnithe coistí a bhí aige agus bhunaigh sé caradas leis an iliomad oideachasóir ar an mór-roinn.

Sin é an fear poiblí ach tá an cuntas daonna ar a bhean Áine agus a chlann níos pearsanta. Comharsa ab ea Áine ní Thuathaigh, an cailín a phós sé, a raibh baint ag a muintir le scoil rince sa chathair, gnó ar éirigh thar barr leis faoi stiúir Áine le lántacaíocht Tony. Deir sé gur iomaí Satharn agus fiú Domhnach a chaith sé ag tiomáint chuig feiseanna ar fud na tíre mar a mbíodh a bhean i bhfeighil gasraí rinceoirí nó ina moltóir ar chomórtais; ní raibh aon tiomáint aici féin. Ní fhágann sé fuíoll molta uirthi mar chompánach saoil, gona daonnacht, gona muintearas, gona spéis i gcúrsaí cultúrtha, gona cúram i mbun cúrsaí baile nuair a bhíodh sé féin gafa leis an saol poiblí. Is léir go raibh caidreamh agus cairdeas an-bháúil aige lena cheathrar clainne agus tá sé an-mhórálach as a fheabhas a chruthaíodar, iad go léir ina n-oideachasóirí anois, agus na teaghlaigh shona atá acu i gceantar Luimnigh, rud a chuireann go mór lena shuaimhneas féin agus é ag dul anonn sna blianta.

Ach is é an chuid is truamhéalaí agus is goilliúnaí dá scéal ná an tinneas a tháinig aniar aduaidh ar Áine agus a bás a sciob í tar éis cúpla seachtain agus gan í bliain le cois an leathchéid. Mothaímid an phianpháis sa chuntas ar na turasanna uaigneacha ar Bhaile Átha Cliath, ar an bhfaire imníoch cois leapa, ar an éadóchas ag teacht in áit an dóchais, ar dhíscréid fhoirmiúil lucht leighis agus ag deireadh an folús cráite a fhágann bás an chéile is ansa leat. Roinneann sé linn na mothúcháin go léir a shamhlaímid leis an anachain, an dólás, an fhearg linn féin agus fiú le Dia, an cur i gcéill go bhfuil an duine fós ann agus an duibheagán éadóchais nuair a bhíonn orainn aghaidh a thabhairt ar an bhfírinne.

Mar sin gheobhaidh an léitheoir cuntas sásúil pearsanta ar gach ar ghabh an t-údar tríd, idir shó agus anró agus tiocfaidh sé ar an ngreann ina orlaí tríd. Saol an-iomlán, an-ilghnéitheach a bhí aige. Ba mhó aige an Ghaeilge agus an Gaelachas, an creideamh, an saol poiblí, dlúthchairde, gaolta agus mic léinn; dhein sé a dhícheall freastal orthu go léir. Ní shamhlódh éinne an ghangaid leis, ach sceitheann an seirfean agus an gortú amach cúpla uair. Chuir an tEaspag Newman an goimh air, ag glaoch air ar an nguthán agus é ar na stártha, rud nárbh annamh dó, deirtear. Bhí an t-easpag ina phátrún ar an gcoláiste agus gheall sé don Bhroiméalach go bhféachfadh sé chuige go gceapfaí é ina uachtarán. Ach nuair a tháinig an lá ceapadh bean rialta mar ba ghnáth agus fágadh an t-údar ar an trá fholamh. Tá sáiteán aige do chúpla polaiteoir leis, fiú Séamus Brennan, a bhain leis na 'fíréin' féin agus do státseirbhíseach céimiúil i mBaile Átha Cliath. Dar ndóigh tagann an Fianna Fáileach in uachtar i gcónaí agus is leasc leis aon chreidiúint a thabhairt don dream eile úd!

Tá stíl bhreá réidh inste ag an údar; togha na Gaeilge, gan í a bheith róthrom ná róléannta rud a thaitneoidh leis an ngnáthléitheoir. Is deas an mhaise ar an leabhar an dosaen leathanach de ghrianghrafanna i lár baill; tá cuma tharraingteach ar chlúdach an leabhair agus cló an-soléite laistigh. Sciorrann corrbhotún cló ar an eagarthóir is fearr; níl ach fíorbheagán díobh sa leabhar seo. Cuirfidh Luimnígh, múinteoirí, daoine gairmiúla eile a chuir aithne ar an bhfear flaithiúil fáilteach seo, daoine ar suim leo cúrsaí poiblí agus na rúibricí a ghabhann leo agus Gaeilgeoirí i gcoitinne fáilte roimh an mbeathaisnéis bhreá seo.

Eoghan Ó Súilleabháin

Ta an Dr Ó Súilleabháin ina Roinnchigire Scoileanna leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta.

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