

# Irish Teachers' Journal

Volume 5, Number 1  
December 2017

## **Irish Teachers' Journal**

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## ≡ Editorial ≡

The INTO is delighted to publish the fifth volume of the *Irish Teachers' Journal*, bringing teachers' thinking and research to a broad educational readership. The publication of the journal enables teachers to present the findings of their research and to discuss their current thinking on educational issues.

The INTO is both a trade union and a professional organisation for teachers – for primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland, and for nursery, primary and post-primary teachers in Northern Ireland. The *Irish Teachers' Journal* presents the Organisation with an opportunity to highlight teachers' professional contribution to ongoing learning and development at all levels of education.

Change is a constant in education. A new framework has been developed for the junior cycle at post-primary level. Changes in individual subjects are being gradually introduced, along with changes in assessment. The senior cycle is likely to be reviewed in the coming years. At primary level, a new language curriculum is being introduced. A revised mathematics curriculum is under development. During the last year we have also seen consultations on curriculum structure and time allocations for the various subjects and areas within the curriculum. This consultation process will inform future curriculum developments at primary level. The challenge is how to support teachers through such processes of change. One of the most valuable supports for teachers is professional time – time to engage in professional reading, time to have professional conversations and discussions with colleagues and time and space to step away from the intensity of teaching to engage in critical and constructive reflection.

Teaching is a complex activity in a constantly changing world. At policy level, teachers' learning and development is beginning to garner more attention. The Teaching Council is continuing to develop its framework for teacher professional development, *Cosán*, having consulted with the teaching profession and other education stakeholders. The INTO had long called for a framework for teacher professional development. In this context, *Cosán*, reflecting the Teaching Council's initial work on developing such a framework, is an opportunity to ensure teacher professional development and learning is encouraged, supported and resourced. It was disappointing to see the allowances for obtaining additional qualifications taken away as part of the recessionary cutbacks. The social, cultural and economic contexts in which teachers operate continue to change at a rapid pace highlighting the need for professional development and learning for all teachers throughout their careers.

The INTO issued an open invitation to teachers to submit articles for consideration for the journal. Articles worthy of consideration were sent to external experts for review. The reviewers offered constructive feedback to the authors, who were then invited to resubmit their articles. Professor Emer Smyth of the Economic and Social Research Institute was invited to write the guest article. Her article, co-written with Amanda Quail, on discipline policy in primary schools, draws on data from the longitudinal study, *Growing Up in Ireland*

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(GUI). GUI is a large-scale survey of nine-year-old children sampled within primary schools in Ireland. The study provides a rich data source that has led to a number of reports about children's experiences in Ireland. This article on discipline policy in primary schools uses information collected from school principals as part of the first wave of the GUI study of nine-year-olds, to explore the frequency with which different forms of discipline are used in primary schools and the extent to which the approach varies across schools, particularly in relation to the effects on behaviour policy according to gender and socio-economic disadvantage, as well as differences in leadership styles. This guest article contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the approach to discipline taken by individual schools, a dimension of discipline policy that has not received much attention to date.

In addition to the guest article, this edition of the journal features four articles written by primary teachers and two articles written by teachers at third level. Each article addresses an issue of relevance to education in Ireland today. The articles written by primary teachers focus on the topics of leadership, professional development, and mathematics teaching, touching on topical issues currently being considered at primary level. The two articles written by our third level contributors bring us into the reflection space.

Leadership in schools regularly attracts attention in education policy spheres. Enda Hickey explores the concept of distributed leadership from school leaders' perspectives. He considers the value of this model of leadership for school principals, but also identifies challenges that such an approach poses for schools. In his article, he outlines ways of considering leadership, and explains the concept of distributed leadership, which has tended to dominate recent discourse on the subject. He also offers a critique of the concept, particularly as it relates to its practical interpretation. He suggests that other leadership perspectives are often seen as analogous with the concept of distributed leadership which can lead to confusion. He concludes by arguing that distributed leadership can be a valuable tool for considering leadership if used in a judicious and analytical way.

The first of two articles on teacher professional development looks at the Finnish model of professional development for primary teachers and considers potential lessons for Ireland. Virginia Guiden and Michael Brennan outline what professional development is available for teachers in Ireland, before describing professional development for primary teachers in Finland. Finnish primary teachers engage in both compulsory and voluntary professional development, which can either be formal or informal. According to Guiden and Brennan, Finnish primary teachers engage in three days of compulsory professional development each year, usually organised by the local municipality, for which they are fully paid. Teachers, separately, fund their own voluntary participation in professional development. Most voluntary professional development is provided by Universities, polytechnics and a state owned, but not state funded organisation called OPEKO, which obtains its funding through the selling of services. Virginia Guiden was based in a University teacher-training primary school, where she carried out her research through questionnaires and interviews with teachers. Guiden and Brennan outline the findings of their research in this article, and offer recommendations pertinent to the Irish context, by drawing on the experiences of Finnish primary teachers.

The second article on this theme is a small-scale study of the views and experiences of primary teachers in a rural area in Cork. Kathleen Foley issued questionnaires to teachers in four primary schools and conducted interviews with a senior member of staff in all four schools. It is not surprising that teachers are of the view that professional development should be flexible and more targeted to their needs. The article outlines current perspectives on professional development in Ireland, including the Teaching Council's framework *Cosán*, the concept of professional learning communities, and the focus on reflection and collaboration. Noting international developments, Kathleen mentions the practice in Finland. The article concludes with a number of recommendations in relation to improving current approaches to professional development in Ireland, based on the views and experiences of teachers in the four rural schools in Cork that participated in the study.

Mathematics teaching has attracted policy attention in Ireland since the publication of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* in 2011 and the development of 'Project Maths' at post-primary level. This article, by Áine Rooney, focuses on the lesson study approach to teacher professional development in the context of developing awareness of purpose in mathematical teaching of geometry across the transition from primary to post-primary school. As part of her research, Áine Rooney explored the changes in geometric task properties as implemented by students in both a primary and a post-primary school, following a lesson study approach by the teachers at both levels. This study offers an insight in to the lesson study approach, identifies some of challenges pertaining to the teaching of geometry as part of the mathematics curriculum, and draws attention to the need to ensure continuity between primary and post-primary mathematics.

Marie Whelton's article considers the themes of teaching and learning as reflected in six different poems from the Irish poetic tradition of pre-1900. The poems selected for this article offer interesting insights of relevance to teachers today, bringing together the disciplines of Irish literature and education. Cuireann sé áthas orainn alt eile le Marie Whelton a fhoilsiú. Ag tarraingt ar fhilíocht na nGael roimh 1900, tugann an t-alt seo léargas don léitheoir ar an dteagasc agus ar an bhfoghlaim mar a léirítear sna dánta iad. Sé dhán atá roghnaithe ag an údar, agus is ábhar spéise d'oidí agus d'oideachasóirí an lae inniu an méid atá le sonrú sna dánta faoi chúrsaí teagaisc agus foghlama. Éiríonn le Marie Whelton disciplín na litríochta Gaeilge agus disciplín an oideachais a thabhairt le chéile go cumasach agus ar bhealach taitneamhach san alt seo.

Our final article in this edition of the *Irish Teachers' Journal* is written by Pádraig Hogan, who challenges conceptions of education that are fundamentally selective or paternalistic. This article is timely given the focus at policy level on concepts such as pluralism in education. Pádraig Hogan argues that education is a practice in its own right, and that education has inherent obligations to cater to the full plurality of humanity. He refers to the work of eminent philosophers and highlights the distinctive role of practitioners in protecting, upholding and developing the inherent goals of education as practice. This article provides an opportunity to teachers and educationalists to reflect on and consider understandings of our particular tradition of education in Ireland.

Articles in this journal reflect the opinions and views of the authors, and not those of the INTO. All authors have provided stimulating ideas and perspectives on education of

interest to the teaching profession. The INTO is delighted to be at the forefront of providing opportunities to teachers to share research and ideas with colleagues and with the wider education community through this publication. This sharing is in the best traditions of teachers and of the INTO over the 150 years (1868-2018) of our history. Teachers' commitment to ongoing engagement in professional learning and development through research reflects well on the teaching profession in Ireland. It is the hope of the INTO that many more teachers will engage in and share their research in the coming years. The INTO would like to thank all authors for contributing articles to this edition of the *Irish Teachers' Journal*.

DEIRBHILE NIC CRAITH, EDITOR



## Author Notes

### Emer Smyth and Amanda Quail

Emer Smyth is a Research Professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Amanda Quail is the Survey and Data Manager on the *Growing Up in Ireland* team at the ESRI.

### Dr Enda Hickey

Dr Enda Hickey is principal of the Holy Family Junior School in Portlaoise, Co Laois, and adjunct associate professor to the School of Education in UCD. He was awarded the INTO bursary for his PhD research which explored the role of the principal in developing school ethos. This work investigated how globalising, marketising and neo-liberal forces affect the educational landscape and how schools and school leaders respond to these.

### Virginia Guiden and Michael Brennan

Virginia Guiden (M.Ed.) is a primary school teacher, with 15 years' teaching experience. She completed her M.Ed. in Trinity College, Dublin, in 2008, during which she collected the primary data for this study as a visiting student to Jyväskylä University, Finland. She continued her professional development by completing a Post-Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership from NUI Maynooth in 2010.

Dr Michael Brennan is a Postdoctoral Researcher at University College Dublin. Michael has engaged in teaching of university students at all degree levels. His current research focus seeks to identify and map the tree stock in urban gardens, and he engages with several schools to gather these data.

### Kathleen Foley

Kathleen Foley is a primary teacher with 18 years' experience, currently teaching in Scoil Náisiúnta an Chroí Naofa, Glounthaune, Co Cork. She has a postgraduate diploma in Educational Leadership (Tóraíocht) from NUI, Maynooth, and a first class honours Masters in Education from CLEO/University of Hull. Her article is based on her final dissertation.

### Áine Rooney

Áine Rooney is a teacher in St Raphaela's Primary School, Stillorgan, Co Dublin. Áine holds a BA (Hons) from UCD and an MA from the School of Creative Arts, DIT. She completed a Higher Diploma in Education (Primary Teaching) with Froebel College of Education, TCD, in 2011 and was awarded the Vere Foster Medal for that year. From 2014-2016, Áine engaged with the Mathematics Education Unit, Institute of Education DCU, as a member of a research group of primary and post-primary teachers focussing on the teaching and learning of mathematics under the 3U National Initiative in STEM Education and Practice (N-STEP). Áine is currently completing a Master of Teaching (Maths Education) in the Institute of Education, DCU. Before becoming a teacher, Áine enjoyed a career in the design industry serving on the Board of Design Ireland from 2000-2011 and as Chairperson of the Design Ireland Skillnet from 2000-2006.

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**Dr Marie Whelton**

Is léachtóir le Gaeilge í An Dr Marie Whelton in Institiúid Oideachais Marino. Údar Teagmháil agus Tnúthán: Staidéar ar an Apastróf i bhFilíocht na Nua-Ghaeilge (2008) agus Nuair a Stadann an Ceol: Úrscéal don Fhoghlaimoir Fásta (2013, 2015). I gcomhar le hAodán Mac Suibhne scríobh sí trí leabhar do mhúinteoirí bunscoile: *Cóir Ghaoithe: Cúrsa Ullmhúcháin don Scrúdú Le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge* (2006); *Í A Labhairt: Cúrsa Gaeilge Idirmheánach do Mhúinteoirí Bunscoile* (2008) agus *Sruth na Maoile: Ábhar Tacaíochta d'Oiriúnú Le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge* (2009).

**Dr Pádraig Hogan**

Dr Pádraig Hogan is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. He has a keen research interest in what makes educational environments really fertile. From 2003 to 2017 he led the research and development programme 'Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century' (TL21). To date he has published over 100 research items. His most recent book is *The New Significance of Learning: Imagination's Heartwork*.



distinctions in relation to the type of behaviour, with boys having much higher levels of externalising ('acting out') behaviour problems, while rates of internalising problems do not vary significantly by gender (Kristoffersen and Smith, 2013). Levels of misbehaviour are also found to be higher for students from working-class backgrounds, lone parent and low income households (Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Segal, 2008; Smith, 2006). A number of studies has indicated the effect of school composition on disciplinary climate, even controlling for individual social background. In the US context, schools with higher proportions of students from economically disadvantaged families have more disruptive behaviour, all else being equal (Arum and Velez, 2012). Research has also indicated the impact of ethnic and/or immigrant composition, with high minority schools having more disciplinary problems (Arum et al., 2012; Kelly, 2010).

The consequences of student misbehaviour are found to be significant for both students and schools. Young people with less troublesome behaviour make more academic progress and are more engaged in secondary school (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012). Those with higher rates of misbehaviour are more likely to drop out of full-time education and, even when they remain in school, tend to under-perform academically (Finn et al., 2008; Himmelfarb et al., 2014; Kristoffersen and Smith, 2013). School-based misbehaviour is also found to be predictive of later delinquency and crime (Smith, 2006). At the school level, higher rates of misbehaviour are found to disrupt teaching and learning, thus resulting in lower levels of achievement for the student body as a whole (Arum and Velez, 2012).

While there is general consensus about the consequences of misbehaviour, more controversy is evident about the reasons underlying these differences in misbehaviour rates. Much of this debate has centred on whether breaking the school rules and being disruptive in class can be construed as a form of 'resistance' and, if so, how the meaning of such resistance should be interpreted. Perhaps the most widely-known account of resistance is Willis's (1977) depiction of the way in which working-class boys rebel against school authority but, in so doing, reproduce their own disadvantaged status. However, in an empirical application of resistance theory, Davies (1995) finds that misbehaviour explains little of the social class differential in outcomes, instead accounting for much more of the gender differential in school under-achievement. Nolan (2011) argues that oppositional behaviour is not necessarily a wholesale rejection of schooling since students understand the need for qualifications to access employment but still want some way of gaining control over their environment. Similarly, Raby and Dimetrick (2007) suggest that (at least some forms of) rule-breaking may reflect an attempt to cope with school structures rather than resistance. Disruptive behaviour may thus be related more to the properties of specific classroom situations rather than to class or race per se (McFarland, 2001).

A number of studies has focused on the way in which school practices can reduce or exacerbate student misbehaviour. Perceived teacher support and a more general sense of school belonging among students have been found to be associated with lower levels of misconduct (Demanet, Van Houtte, 2012a; Smith, 2006). On closer inspection, it has been found that teachers are more supportive where they see students as more 'teachable', indicating a complex relationship between assumptions about the student body and levels of misbehaviour (Demanent, Van Houtte, 2012b). Students who perceive school authority

as legitimate are found to be less disruptive in class (Way, 2011). Research indicates a complex interaction between school strictness and the perceived fairness of school rules. Students are more willing to disobey rules as schools become stricter when they see the school disciplinary climate as unfair. In contrast within 'fair' schools, increasing strictness is moderately associated with greater rule compliance among students (Arum, 2003). Having greater attachment to peers, especially in a context where students believe that going against school norms increases their status, is linked to higher levels of misbehaviour (Bru, 2006; Demanet, Van Houtte, 2012b). Teachers themselves often attribute student misbehaviour to factors outside the control of the school, principally a lack of parental support or poor parenting skills (Weaving and Aston, 2013). However, studies have shown lower levels of teacher-reported misbehaviour in contexts where they feel supported by their school and feel confident in dealing with discipline (Wilkin et al., 2006).

It has been argued that the student voice is largely absent from input into school discipline policy (McCluskey, 2014). When interviewed, young people see a close connection between discipline and the quality of teacher-student relations, highlighting the need for teachers to treat them with respect (Haroum and O'Hanlon, 1997; Kilpatrick, 2001; Osler, 2000; Reid et al., 2010). A dominant feature of student perspectives is an awareness of the inconsistent application of school rules by teachers, resulting in unfair treatment of (some) students (Kilpatrick, 2001; Raby, 2008; Reid et al., 2010).

In spite of this body of research, however, there has been relatively little attention given to the way in which approaches to discipline may vary systematically across individual schools. Case study and ethnographic research provides some justification for expecting such variation. In case studies of four English state schools, Ball et al. (2012) point to the way in which policy enactment reflects the situated context of the school, including the nature of student intake. Thus, behaviour policy is a collective enterprise, mediated by the place (the individual school) and the policy actors in that site (see also Ball et al., 2011). School rules thus enshrine certain values, shaping and constraining how different actors (principals, teachers) respond to incidents of misbehaviour (Irby, 2013), as well as reflecting dynamics of power between adults and children/young people (Devine, 2002). Within schools, teacher perceptions of the 'good pupil' may rely on gender, class and racial stereotypes, thus contributing to a construction of race, class and gender differences through discipline strategies (Davies, 1984; Morris, 2005; Raby, 2005; Riddell, 1992).

Much of the focus of this research has been on student gender but a small-scale qualitative study by Optlaka and Atias (2007) suggests the leadership style of principals may itself be gendered, especially in relation to discipline policy. In particular, women principals in this study focused on the involvement of pupils and parents in drawing up school rules while male principals were more likely to focus on hierarchy and control (see also Riddell et al., 2010 on the impact of teacher gender). Responses to incidents of misbehaviour were also gendered, with male principals tending to emphasise sanctions while female principals stressed care and understanding the roots of the problem.

Research on the implementation of school rules also points to the potential for variation between, as well as within, schools. A survey of schools in Northern Ireland pointed to variation in how detention was employed, being used to cover a range of incidents from

minor misdemeanours to fighting; similarly, the reasons given for student suspension varied across schools (Kilpatrick, 2001). In one Scottish study, the likelihood of being excluded from school was found to be higher for those with higher levels of misconduct, but the relationship was not strong, indicating that other factors were also at play (Smith, 2006). A number of studies have pointed to the differential enforcement of school rules for different categories of students. Boys tend to be highly over-represented among those excluded from school (Mc Cluskey, 2008). Other studies have shown higher suspension and exclusion rates among ethnic minority students and those with disabilities (especially emotional-behavioural difficulties) (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Skiba et al., 1997; Krezmien et al., 2006). While many of these studies are descriptive in nature, making it hard to disentangle cause and effect, Petras et al. (2011) find that, even controlling for early levels of disruptive behaviour, African-American students from low income households are disproportionately at risk of school exclusion (for similar findings, see Skiba et al., 2012).

Case study research on the construction of school rules in conjunction with research on the application of school rules would therefore suggest that different kinds of schools are likely to vary in the kinds of disciplinary measures they employ, an issue that is explored in the remainder of this article.

## **Data and methodology**

The article draws on the first wave of the *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) study, a large-scale survey of nine-year-old children sampled within primary schools in Ireland. The GUI study is an extremely rich data source, incorporating school principal, teacher, parent and child questionnaires. Questionnaire data were supplemented by information on reading and mathematics test score performance.

The sample design for the nine-year-old cohort in *Growing Up in Ireland* was based on a two-stage selection process in which the school was the primary sampling unit with the children within schools being the secondary units. Using a sample design based on the primary school system had a number of advantages: it provided a virtually comprehensive frame of nine-year-old children in Ireland; it allowed for direct access to the children's principal and teachers (who were key study informants); and it facilitated the self-completion of academic assessment tests in a group setting. At the school level, a response rate of 80% was achieved, with a random sample of 857 primary schools recruited into the sample. In schools which had 40 or fewer nine-year-old children, all children were included in the sample; in schools with more than 40 children, a random sample of 40 children was taken for inclusion in the sample. At the level of the household (i.e. the eligible child selected within the school), 59% of target families participated in the study, with a total achieved sample size of 8,578. Data were re-weighted to ensure that they are representative of the population of all nine-year-olds resident in Ireland at the time of the survey.

There were two main components to the fieldwork: school-based and household-based. School-based fieldwork involved a self-completion questionnaire for the school principal and two self-completion questionnaires for the child's teacher. The principal's questionnaire recorded school-level details on school characteristics including size, challenges, disciplinary

measures, ethos etc., along with some personal details about the principal. The teacher-on-self questionnaire recorded class-level details such as class size, curriculum, teaching methods etc. and some personal details about teachers themselves. The teacher-on-child questionnaire recorded child-level details on the child's temperament, academic performance, school preparedness and peer relationships. Teachers were asked to complete one teacher-on-child questionnaire for each sample child that they taught. The final parts of the school-based fieldwork were the academic assessment tests (nationally standardised reading and maths tests) and a short self-concept questionnaire that all children were asked to complete in a group setting facilitated by an interviewer. The informants in the household-based component of the fieldwork were the nine-year-old child, their primary caregiver (defined as the person who provides most care to the child – in most cases, the child's mother) and, if resident in the household, the spouse or partner of the child's primary caregiver (usually, but not always, the child's father). This multi-informant model gives very rich information from a number of sources.

This article takes advantage of the multi-level nature of GUI (wave 1) data on the nine-year-old cohort, using information collected from principals on the frequency with which different forms of discipline are used in the school. It addresses the following questions:

- (1) To what extent do primary schools with different profiles of students (in terms of gender and social background) use different kinds of disciplinary measures?
- (2) Do these differences reflect actual variation in student misbehaviour?

A number of measures of type of school are used to look at variation in student behaviour and disciplinary practice. School social mix is measured using an external proxy for concentrated disadvantage, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) status, which represents schools that are targeted for receipt of additional funding due to their social profile. There are three categories of disadvantaged schools, making up a total of 23% of primary schools: Urban Band 1, Urban Band 2 schools and Rural DEIS schools. Urban Band 1 schools have higher concentrations of disadvantage than Urban Band 2 schools, and thus receive greater resources. Private schools act as a further proxy for the school social mix. A small number of students, just over 1%, attend private primary schools, which charge fees and are not subject to regulation by the Department of Education and Skills. A further measure of school selectivity relates to whether it is over-subscribed, that is, whether it receives more applications than available places and is thus in a position to specify criteria for enrolment. Single-sex schools remain an important feature of the Irish educational landscape, making up 12% of primary schools. To allow for the potential effect of school gender mix on student behaviour, the analysis distinguishes single-sex boys' and single-sex girls' schools from co-educational schools. Although inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream education has been the dominant focus of policy in Ireland in recent years, special schools make up a small proportion (4%) of primary schools. Previous research has shown that Irish language medium schools have a distinctive profile in terms of within- and out-of-school activities (McCoy et al., 2012a, 2012b). To allow for potential influences on student behaviour, the analyses distinguish Gaeltacht schools (Irish medium

schools in designated Irish-speaking areas) and Gaelscoileanna (Irish medium schools in other areas). Because previous research has pointed to potential differences in leadership style between male and female principals (Oplaka and Atias, 2007), the gender of the principal is included in the analysis.

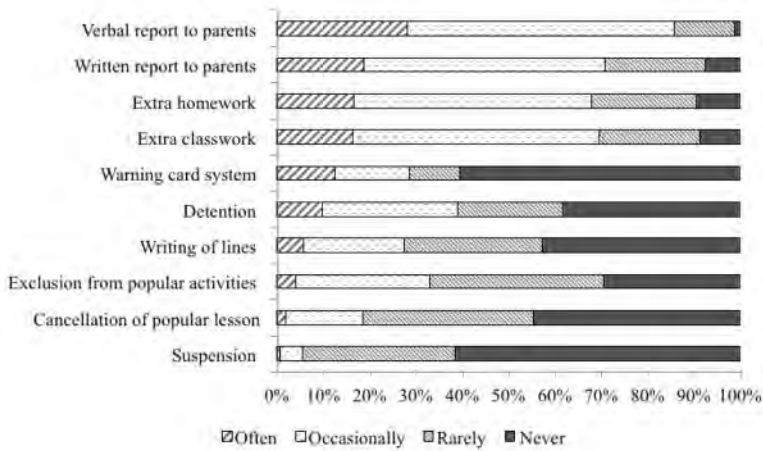
In the principal questionnaire, principal teachers were asked about the frequency (with response categories of 'often', 'occasionally', 'rarely' and 'never') with which the school used different forms of disciplinary measures, including a verbal report to parents, a written report to parents, assigning extra class work, assigning extra homework, requiring students to write lines, use of a warning card system, exclusion from activities, cancellation of popular lessons (such as art or PE), detention, suspension and (permanent) exclusion. Principals were given a pre-specified list of measures so it may be that the analysis therefore emphasises more responsive and even punitive measures. At the same time, the survey allowed principals to specify 'other' approaches used. The only other measure cited with any frequency was the use of a reward system so it would appear that the approaches discussed here are broadly reflective of the kinds of measures commonly used in Irish primary schools. The aim of the article is to explore the potential impact of type of school on the use of disciplinary measures. In order to control for the actual level of problems in the school, principals were asked about the proportion of students who would have 'such literacy, numeracy, or emotional-behavioural difficulties as to adversely impact on their educational development'. The prevalence of emotional-behavioural difficulties, as reported by the principal, is used to take account of the level of disciplinary problems in the school.

### **School responses to student misbehaviour**

The GUI study collected detailed information from school principals on the frequency with which they used different measures to address student misbehaviour. Figure 1 shows that the vast majority (86%) of schools often or occasionally use verbal reports to parents while the majority (70%) also use written reports to parents. The majority of schools also frequently or occasionally employ extra homework or extra classwork as punishment. A minority of schools use other measures such as exclusion from popular activities (such as sports), cancellation of popular lessons (such as art or PE), writing lines or a warning card system. Detention, which could be regarded as a more serious measure, is used frequently or occasionally by 39% of primary schools. Suspension (temporary exclusion) is less frequently used, but has been used on at least some occasions by 38% of schools (Figure 1). Only a tiny number of schools (4%) report ever having used permanent exclusion (expulsion); because of the small number, this measure is not discussed in the remainder of the article.



Figure 1: Frequency of use of different forms of disciplinary measures, as reported by primary school principals.



Analyses were conducted on whether different types of school used more disciplinary measures overall and on the types of measures they used. The measures were summed to give an overall index of the number and frequency of use of different behaviour policies; this index had a reliability of 0.717, which is seen as a satisfactory level for analysis purposes. As might be expected, schools where the principal reports a higher prevalence of emotional/behavioural difficulties among students in the school use disciplinary measures to a greater extent. However, contrary to this overall pattern, special schools are found to be less likely to use disciplinary measures than mainstream primary schools, taking account of their prevalence of emotional-behavioural difficulties. DEIS Urban Band 1 and 2 schools are found to use a larger range of measures and to use these more frequently than other schools (Table 1). This variation by school social mix holds even controlling for the prevalence of behavioural difficulties in the school. Private schools do not differ from other schools in their overall use of disciplinary measures while over-subscribed schools use somewhat more disciplinary measures than other schools. The use of disciplinary measures varies significantly by the gender mix of the school, being greatest in boys' schools and least in girls' schools. As with social mix, the effect of gender mix holds even taking account of the prevalence of behavioural difficulties in the school. Gaeltacht schools report less use of disciplinary measures but there is no difference between gaelscoileanna and English-medium schools. There is no systematic variation in the overall use of disciplinary measures by the gender of the principal.

Table 1: Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model of frequency of use of disciplinary measures (school level)

	Scale
Constant	1.988
Prevalence of emotional/ behavioural difficulties in school:	
<10%	0.114**
10-25%	0.171**
>25%	0.230**
(Ref: None)	
DEIS status:	
Urban Band 1	0.305***
Urban Band 2	0.152*
Rural	-0.078
(Ref.: Non-DEIS)	
Gender mix:	
Single-sex boys	0.186***
Single-sex girls	-0.251***
(Ref: Coeducational)	
Private school	0.032
Special school	-0.249*
Language medium:	
Gaelscoil	0.064
Gaeltacht	-0.193*
(Ref: English medium)	
Over-subscribed school	0.057±
Male principal	0.046
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.144

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , ±  $p < .10$ .

In sum, not surprisingly, schools whose student intake has greater behavioural difficulties tend to use more disciplinary measures. However, other factors play a part since, all else being equal, the disciplinary approach appears to reflect the gender and social mix of the student body, with greater use of measures in urban disadvantaged and boys' schools. Conversely, special schools, which have a higher prevalence of behavioural difficulties are less likely than other schools to use disciplinary measures. School type and prevalence of behavioural problems account for only a small percentage (14%) of the variation in the use of disciplinary measures, indicating considerable discretion at the school level in formulating a behaviour policy (see Ball et al., 2012, on the way in which policy implementation reflects school history and culture).

The analysis so far has looked at a summary measure of disciplinary measures. However, it is possible that schools may differ not only in the number and frequency of use of measures but in the types of policies implemented. Table 2 presents a series of multi-level ordinal logistic regression models showing the factors influencing the frequency of use of more commonly implemented measures, namely, giving extra class work as punishment, giving extra homework as punishment, writing lines, verbal reports to the child's parents, and written reports to the child's parents. Written and verbal reports to parents are used more frequently in schools with a greater prevalence of behavioural difficulties but the use of extra class work, homework or writing lines does not differ systematically by level of difficulties. All else being equal, special schools are more likely to use verbal reports to parents but are less likely to use the other forms of punishment. Even controlling for prevalence of difficulties, reports to parents, both verbal and written, are used more frequently in urban disadvantaged, especially Band 1, schools. Private schools do not differ from other schools in their use of these more commonly implemented measures. However, over-subscribed schools are more likely than other schools to use reports to parents, both written and verbal. All of the different measures are used more frequently in boys' schools than in coeducational or girls' schools. Girls' schools are particularly unlikely to use extra class work or writing lines as punishment. Gaelscoileanna are more likely than other schools to use verbal or written reports to parents, perhaps reflecting greater parental involvement in these schools. Schools with a male principal are more likely to use three different forms of punishment (class work, homework and lines) but are less likely to use verbal reports to parents than other schools, even controlling for school type.

*Table 2: Ordinal regression models: frequency of extra class work, extra homework, lines, verbal report to parents, and written report to parents.*

	Extra class work	Extra homework	Writing lines	Verbal report to parents	Written report to parents
Threshold:					
Never	-2.018***	-1.928***	-0.115	-3.676***	-1.892***
Rarely	-0.379±	-0.330±	1.257***	-1.023***	-0.178
Occasionally	2.189***	2.101***	3.216***	1.978***	2.327***
DEIS status:					
Urban Band 1	0.432	-0.020	0.551±	1.295***	1.052***
Urban Band 2	0.615*	0.149	0.174	0.917**	0.738*
Rural (Ref: Non-DEIS)	0.021	-0.103	-0.022	-0.324	0.025
Gender mix:					
Single-sex boys	0.529*	0.605**	0.526*	0.653**	0.623**
Single-sex girls (Ref: Coeducational)	-0.549*	-0.406	-0.479±	-0.230	-0.238
Private school	-0.534	0.120	-21.124	1.081	0.964
Special school	-1.372**	-1.903***	-1.954**	0.928±	0.725

Language medium:					
Gaelscoil	0.427	0.411	-0.091	1.242***	0.848**
Gaeltacht	-0.602	-0.510	-1.063*	-0.732±	-0.510
(Ref: English medium)					
Over-subscribed school	-0.036	0.133	-0.091	0.655***	0.509***
Male principal	0.355*	0.310*	0.384**	-0.243±	0.002
Prevalence of emotional/ behavioural difficulties in school:					
<10%	0.222	0.202	0.135	0.652**	0.373±
10-25%	0.511±	0.555*	-0.213	0.799**	0.450±
>25%	-0.052	0.023	0.474	0.726±	0.898±
(Ref: None)					
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.067	0.064	0.077	0.138	0.094

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , ±  $p < .10$ .

Some forms of disciplinary measure were used less frequently in primary schools than others (see Figure 1). For the less frequently used measures, we distinguish between those schools who have ‘never’ used them and those who have ‘often’/‘occasionally’/‘rarely’ used them. Table 3 shows the factors influencing ever using these measures. There is a linear relationship between the prevalence of behavioural difficulties and the likelihood of using detention, exclusion from activities and a warning card system, with the highest levels of usage found among schools where more than a quarter of pupils have behavioural difficulties. There is little systematic relationship between the level of difficulties and the use of lesson cancellation. For suspension, the most severe punishment in the specified list, the contrast is between schools with no behavioural difficulties and all others, with no indication that suspension is more likely to be used in ‘high prevalence’ than in ‘low to medium prevalence’ schools. Special schools are less likely to use the different disciplinary measures, with the exception of suspension rates, the use of which does not differ significantly lower from that in mainstream schools. Irish medium schools do not vary markedly from English medium schools in their use of disciplinary measures, although Gaelscoileanna are significantly less likely than other schools to use detention.

Even controlling for prevalence of difficulties, the kinds of disciplinary measures used vary significantly by school gender and social mix. Girls’ schools are markedly less likely to use any of these measures than co-educational schools (with the exception of a warning card system where the difference is negative but non-significant). For instance, girls’ schools are only a third as likely as co-educational schools to use suspension, all else being equal. Boys’ schools are significantly more likely than co-educational schools to use suspension and, to some extent, detention. Interestingly, both urban disadvantaged schools and private schools are more likely to use suspension than other school types. Urban Band 1 schools are also more likely to use a warning card system and the cancellation of popular lessons. Over-subscribed schools are more likely to use suspension but less likely to use detention or a warning card system.

Analyses presented above indicate that male principals do not use a broader range of disciplinary measures than their female counterparts. However, gender differences are found in relation to the type of measure used. Schools with male principals are more likely to use more punitive measures, namely, detention and suspension. Schools with male principals are 1.7 times more likely to use suspension, and 1.4 times more likely to use detention, than schools of similar composition which have female principals. Although there is clear variation in the use of disciplinary measures by social composition, gender mix and principal gender, it is worth noting that school type explains only a small proportion of variation in the measures used, indicating significant variation in practice among schools with similar characteristics.

*Table 3: Logistic regression models: ever use suspension, detention, exclusion from activities, cancellation of lessons, and warning card system.*

	Suspension	Detention	Exclusion from activities	Cancellation of lessons	Warning card system
Constant	-3.213	-0.022	0.521	0.024	-1.800
DEIS status:					
Urban Band 1	1.826***	0.341	0.054	0.644±	0.843*
Urban Band 2	1.344**	-0.020	-0.277	-0.187	0.256
Rural (Ref: Non-DEIS)	-0.149	0.031	-0.386	-0.269	-0.311
Gender mix:					
Single-sex boys	0.992***	0.519±	0.322	0.264	0.324
Single-sex girls (Ref: Coeducational)	-1.074***	-1.174***	-0.671*	-0.422±	-0.233
Private school	1.891±	-1.475	0.812	0.274	-0.875
Special school	0.383	-1.718*	-1.700*	-1.226±	-1.049
Language medium:					
Gaelscoil	0.588	-1.100**	0.040	0.112	-0.050
Gaeltacht (Ref: English medium)	-0.825	-0.227	0.099	-0.003	-0.529
Over-subscribed school	0.492**	-0.371*	-0.188	-0.173	0.411*
Male principal	0.536**	0.329*	0.024	-0.228	0.046
Prevalence of emotional/ behavioural difficulties in school:					
<10%	2.172***	0.639*	0.504±	0.485±	1.171**
10-25%	2.358***	0.734*	0.603	-0.038	1.647***
>25% (Ref: None)	1.838*	1.031±	1.695*	0.857	2.306***
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.233	0.128	0.044	0.036	0.102

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , ±  $p < .10$ .

## **Conclusions**

There is now a large body of research on the profile of students who engage in misbehaviour and on the consequences of that conduct for their educational outcomes (see, for example, Segal, 2008; Finn et al., 2008). A number of studies have shown how the prevalence of behavioural difficulties varies by type of school, being higher in more disadvantaged or special schools (Arum and Velez, 2012; Smith, 2006). Perhaps surprisingly, however, there has been much less attention paid to the way in which school responses to discipline problems vary across different school settings. Case study research points to the way in which policy is enacted at the school level, reflecting the school's student intake, historical legacy and overall climate (Ball et al., 2012). However, there has been a lack of research which investigates whether discipline policy and practice vary systematically across schools and the extent to which this variation reflects school characteristics and/or the approaches of individual schools. This article sets out to address this gap in knowledge by using the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, a large-scale nationally representative study of children, parents, and primary school principals in Ireland.

Primary schools are found to vary in the prevalence of behavioural difficulties among their students but this does not relate to the disciplinary measures used in a straightforward way. There appears to be considerable discretion at the individual school level regarding the approach taken. However, certain school characteristics are found to play a part. In particular, behaviour policy appears to reflect the gender and social mix of the student body, highlighting the potential impact of gendered and classed expectations regarding student behaviour. Boys' schools are more likely to use a range of disciplinary measures and to use them more frequently; in particular, they are much more likely than other school types to use suspension. Conversely, girls' schools are less likely to use certain disciplinary measures, especially the more punitive measures of detention and suspension. The fact that these differences hold controlling for the perceived prevalence of emotional/behavioural difficulties indicates the role of gendered expectations in constructing appropriate disciplinary measures. Previous research has suggested that male and female principals adopt different leadership styles, especially in relation to discipline policy (Optlaka and Atias, 2007). Using a large-scale nationally representative survey, this article shows that the gender of the school principal is significantly related to the discipline approaches used, with greater use of suspension, detention and extra work/lines as punishment in schools with male principals. This pattern occurs despite the fact that levels of misconduct are no higher in schools led by male principals (analyses not shown here). As well as having less usage of the more serious forms of punishment, female principals are more likely to use communication (in the form of verbal reports) with parents to resolve disciplinary problems. Thus, assumptions around how to deal with student behaviour reflect not only the gender composition of the student body but also the gender of the school principal.

The relationship between school social mix and discipline practices is complex, with more punitive measures found at both ends of the social spectrum. Urban disadvantaged schools<sup>1</sup> have higher levels of behavioural difficulties but, even taking this into account, they are more likely to use a range of disciplinary measures, especially verbal and written reports to parents and student suspension. Private schools are more likely than state-funded schools to use suspension as are over-subscribed schools which are more selective in their intake. The latter group of schools is also more likely to use verbal and written reports to parents to deal with discipline problems. What accounts for these seemingly contradictory findings? The pattern of greater use of suspension in urban disadvantaged schools appears to echo some of the recent studies on the use of a 'zero tolerance' approach in US high schools (see Irby, 2013), with the assumption that more disadvantaged groups require more 'control' in the school setting. At the same time, in the Irish context, these disadvantaged schools appear proactive in involving parents when behaviour becomes problematic, thus reflecting a strong policy focus on parental involvement as a way of improving disadvantaged schools (Department of Education and Science, 2005). The pattern for private and over-subscribed schools is perhaps harder to explain. Given a considerable amount of discretion on the part of parents in the Irish context as to which primary school their child attends, it may be that strict discipline policies are seen as a way of 'marketing' the schools as providing a high quality education. Parental involvement (in discipline measures) may also be greater in schools where parents have made a very active choice of school, namely, over-subscribed schools (which have more applicants than places) and Irish medium schools (which generally require a strong commitment on the part of parents to Irish language and culture).

There is tentative evidence that other logistical factors may be at play in deciding upon discipline policy. Schools that draw on students from a broader catchment area, namely, Irish medium schools, special schools and over-subscribed schools, are significantly less likely to use detention as a form of punishment than other schools. It is likely that the dispersed nature of the student population in these schools makes it less practical (or perhaps less acceptable to parents) to disrupt travel arrangements by requiring students to stay after school.

The article presents clear evidence that school disciplinary measures vary significantly by student composition in terms of gender and social background. These findings provide important evidence for schools in reflecting on their discipline policies and whether certain assumptions are embodied in the approach they take. It is evident, however, that a good deal of the variation is left unexplained by these structural factors. This appears consistent with case study research which indicates the way in which policy implementation reflects a variety of factors, including, among other factors, the historical legacy of the school and the profile of the teaching staff (see Ball et al., 2012).

1 The lack of difference between rural disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged schools in levels of misconduct is consistent with other research on the lack of difference between these two school types in educational outcomes (see McCoy et al., 2014).

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# Distributed leadership

≡ ENDA HICKEY ≡

## Abstract

This paper examines distributed leadership from a school leader's perspective and attempts to identify the value of adopting this conceptualisation in thinking about leadership in Irish schools. In doing so, it also considers some of the potential problems that it can pose for schools and the expectations made of their leaders. This paper aims, then, to equip school leaders with a means to critically assess one of the pre-eminent leadership concepts; one which works to describe and define their work. It addresses some of the misconceptions around distributed leadership and concludes that distributed leadership can be a valuable tool for considering leadership if used in a judicious and analytical way.

*Keywords:* **distributed leadership, principal autonomy, school structures, school culture**

\*\*\*\*\*

## Introduction

The concept of distributed leadership has become, in many ways, the dominant modern way of thinking about and even describing leadership. For this reason, it is vital that schools and school leaders understand and critique what is involved and what is at stake when leadership is conceptualised in this way. It is particularly pressing and important in the current Irish context. The recently published DES (Department of Education and Skills) primary circular 'Leadership and Management in Primary Schools' (DES, 2017) works to define and assign the roles and responsibilities of Irish school leaders and, in doing so, makes both explicit and implicit reference to distributed leadership. The most recent quality framework to precede it, *Looking at Our Schools* (DES, 2016), does the same and it is no wonder why. Distributed leadership is attractive and valuable insofar as it sees leadership as an emergent property and works to counter the often overly heroic understandings of leadership. However, educational leaders (and studies of educational leadership) must be careful not to ignore the many difficulties with the concept, particularly those around how the overarching goals of political and governance structures (these issues are delineated below), can often limit the range and scope of what leadership can achieve and who can participate in it. This paper, through an examination of the current educational context in light of the extant literature, aims to question whether a truly distributed leadership can exist within the reality of the Irish system. Despite the fact that we often describe the role of the Irish principal as relatively autonomous, the system is habitually centrally controlled through a raft of regulation and accountability mechanisms which can work to constrain agency in schools.

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Questioning this reality will go some distance towards empowering school leaders in analysing critically and appraising the conceptualisations of leadership which work to describe and define their work. This paper will, then, first seek to locate this concept of distributed leadership within the broader educational context and landscape and explain its popularity and recognition. It subsequently seeks to examine its value to school leaders as an analytical concept and to explain how it can be used to think about, and potentially to improve, practice. It will then explore some of the difficulties with the concept, especially in relation to how leadership and management, and power and authority, can operate within the reality of our schools. Finally, it aims to challenge the reader to consider leadership as a contextually sensitive practice, responsive and susceptible to factors arising from the interactions of leaders, followers and their individual circumstances.

## **Ways of considering leadership**

### **The broader context**

Before examining distributed leadership in particular, it is important to consider how leadership in general is conceptualised, and particularly how it is conceptualised by school leaders. This first section of the paper will do this, by situating distributed leadership within this broader context of leadership and will argue that its normative and representational capacity can be both a strength and a weakness. It is important to understand this as one of the main criticisms levelled against educational leadership research is that, often, it is only tangentially related to how leaders actually impact on their schools (e.g. Robinson, 2006; Salazar, 2013); that while the processes of influence (and the values underpinning them) are regularly considered in generic leadership studies and debate, these generally ignore what the focus of that influence is or, indeed, what it should be. In other words, the political and social realities which influence schools on a daily basis are often overlooked and disconnected from the general abstractedness of educational leadership theory. This is something that most schools will experience; how the reality of teachers' and principals' working lives are often dictated by the urgent pressures of their situations and may have little resemblance to the idealised prescriptions of leadership which exist in theory. This paper argues that school leaders (and studies of school leadership) would be remiss in ignoring the societal, traditional and cultural structures in which schools operate. It is crucial, then, not to disregard, underestimate or misunderstand these contextual elements because leadership practice itself cannot be separated from its socio-cultural context (Spillane et al., 2004).

### **Categories of leadership**

It is increasingly difficult to identify the main conceptualisations of leadership at any one time or, indeed, to tell the difference between them. This is exacerbated by the fact that new categories and classifications are constantly being created, with many of them migrating from business leadership studies (Thomson, 2011). Generally speaking, the relatively established, standard models of leadership might be broadly classified as instructional, transformational and transformative. What might appear as an ostensible diversity in leadership styles can be tempered by more critical considerations which could contend that,

although they provide clear normative frameworks through which to think about leadership, there are often indistinct or even synonymous. Concepts such as shared leadership, teacher leadership and democratic leadership are often conflated and confused. The distinctions between these standard categories can be seen as somewhat artificial, and the reality is that many leaders will embody some, most or all of these approaches in their work. This questioning of the standard peculiarities of leadership styles emanates from a slow-dawning recognition of an increasing tendency, propelled by prevailing global and international pressures, towards constructing leadership frameworks which are progressively more analogous (Mac Ruairc, 2010). An uncritical acceptance of leadership models could overlook the fact that there “is now a vast leadership industry out there of truly staggering proportions”, in which many groups, including businesses, governments, academics and school systems, have a “huge material vested interest” (Gronn, 2003, p. 269).

Accepting, then, that individual leaders exercise aspects of various models of leadership at different times allows a broader understanding of the potential of those leaders. Principal teachers in this and other jurisdictions know only too well that the pressures and tensions generated by the constant tussle between management and leadership requirements demand a mixture of models where the traditionally conceived hierarchical model needs to co-exist with a more general approach to shared leadership. In fact, research around transformational and instructional leadership, which are often seen as the two pre-eminent models of leadership, suggests that employing one model in isolation is a general weakness and an impediment to leadership (Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin and Collarbone, 2003; McCleskey, 2014). Essentially then, a more expansive view of leadership is useful in examining the complexity of the way schools are led and the demands made of the many leaders in those schools. Various models of leadership are required in order to consider the management of schools (the daily routines and structures) on the one hand and the leadership of schools (culture, staff development and shared problem solving) on the other. This contextual sensitivity allows a consideration of who it is who leads the school, the effects of that leadership on the school, and of the moral characteristics and values supporting and sustaining that leadership (Greenfield, 2004; Shapiro and Gross, 2013). It is also worth remembering that those in the school are often not the dominant forces of leadership, that the instrument of authority and the locus of influence may lie outside of the school entirely (Gronn, 2008). Any consideration of leadership, then, must be situated within this more expansive understanding of leadership and be related to other differentiated models of leadership.

### **Distributing leadership**

While it is certainly the case that there are many fundamental misconceptions of distributed leadership (Harris, 2016), part of the appeal of the distributed leadership framework, which is the main focus of this paper, stems from what might be called its normative and representational power (Spillane and Harris, 2008). In other words, it has the conceptual capacity to incorporate adequately the contemporary demand for the dispersal of responsibility and authority whilst integrating easily with many existing leadership models. While this integration is not entirely unambiguous in light of debate around whether distributed leadership is a subset of other leadership models, or whether other models are

in fact a subset of distributed leadership, more clarity is possible when the distributed framework is viewed instead as an arrangement of frequently divergent ideas regarding how people interact in leadership (Harris, 2013; Spillane, 2005).

Importantly, distributed leadership allows for an understanding of the significance of management in leadership (Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Gronn, 2000; Spillane et al., 2007) in providing the type of day-to-day organisational stability usually associated with transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is often criticised as overly managerialistic, in that it is less concerned with motivations, beliefs cultures and visions than with the allocation of resources, the monitoring of goals and the exercise of authority. However, there is a growing recognition that management is an essential, unnecessarily maligned component of leadership, which provides the stability and legitimacy for leadership to take place, whether to bring about or prevent change in the school (Gronn, 2008; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999; Spillane et al., 2004). On the other hand, transformational leadership generally refers to the ways in which principals help to shape the contextual factors of the school which allow the school to change systemically, focussing on first and second-order changes rather than almost exclusively on core technology (Silins, 1994); it is concerned with values, meanings and beliefs. This notion of allegiance to the core goals of the school can be developed further by suggesting that authority and influence, in the transformational leadership model, need not necessarily lie with the principal. Instead they are consensually conferred on any member in the organisation capable of inspiring commitment to those goals (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999). However, researchers frequently overlook the fact that such work must happen in tandem with management/transactional characteristics, which provide stability to the organisation. These features might include “staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activities and community focus” (Ibid). Transformational leadership is seen as focussing less on the instructional aspects of school work and more on the organisation’s capacity to innovate, to decide on its own core purpose and, thereby, support an enduring reform. This holistic conceptualisation is seen as being more faithful to a more modern understanding of leadership, as being “more consistent with evolving trends in educational reform such as empowerment, shared leadership and organisational learning” (Hallinger and Heck, 1998, p. 169). It would also appear to be how the DES currently envisages and defines leadership:

Leadership in a school context, creates a vision for development leading to improvements in outcomes for learners, and is based on shared values and robust evaluation of evidence of current practice and outcomes. In this way leadership is distributed throughout the school as a key support for pupil learning (DES, 2017, p. 4).

The discussion of distributed leadership below understands it as having characteristics in common with other forms of leadership. It is in keeping with a contemporary understanding of leadership but also acknowledges that principals exhibit varying characteristics at different times and situations. The distributed leadership perspective provides a framework for analysing leadership which may or may not be aligned with other models of leadership (Timperley, 2005). The normative strength of the framework allows for an understanding

of leadership as a potent force for harnessing and developing organisational commitment and capacity.

### **Popularity of a distributed perspective**

As outlined above, because of the near ubiquity of distributed leadership as the current conception of leadership, it is important for those in education to understand the reasons for its popularity. Essentially, there are three interrelated reasons for this (Harris and Spillane, 2008). Firstly, it has normative power; in that it accurately reflects the reality of expanding school leadership roles which demand that responsibility and leadership be shared across the school community. This new reality has brought about the beginning of the end to the dominance of the tradition of leaders' traits and behaviours research and is instead focussing attention on the "shifting coalitions of decision-makers" in schools in which "preferences and coalition membership is neither stable nor unified" (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2004, p. 6). In this sense, it is a conceptualisation of leadership very much needed at present (Harris, 2013). Leadership is instead understood as a "continuum of possibilities" teased out through negotiation amongst fellow leaders (Gronn, 2003, p. 427). Furthermore, it is very much now the expectation at policy level in the Irish system, where the DES envisages that the principal "empowers teachers to take on leadership roles and to lead learning, through the effective use of distributed leadership models" (DES, 2016, p. 28).

Secondly, distributed leadership also has representational power (Harris and Spillane, 2008) and so part of the reason for its popularity has most probably to do with the ease with which it can be employed to recategorise conventional theories of leadership (Spillane, 2005) or blend with existing frameworks. As a consequence of the ease with which it is frequently used to describe leadership involving more than one leader or organisational quality, it is important not to synonymise it too readily with vaguely similar constructs such as shared leadership, team leadership or democratic leadership. Distributed leadership is about more than simply acknowledging the role of multiple leaders, and while a distributed perspective may allow for various styles of leadership, they may not necessarily be analogous or congruous. Distributed leadership is not "some sort of monolithic construct... it is merely an emerging set of ideas that frequently diverge from one another" and which deal with leadership practice rather than the individuals involved (Spillane, 2005, p. 144). It is about how people interact and, in doing so, remake their "roles, functions, routines and structures" (Ibid., p. 144). Leadership is the result of this interplay between leaders, followers and their shared situation. It is concerned with the result of this activity, of this interaction and is not simply another name for that activity. Furthermore, leadership is not inherent to any one of these elements individually (Spillane et al., 2004). Rather, each is a prerequisite for leadership.

Thirdly, distributed leadership is gaining empirical power (Harris and Spillane, 2008). There is increasing evidence to demonstrate a "powerful relationship between distributed forms of leadership and organisational change" (Ibid., p. 32), which is not necessarily the same as instructional change. Such a perspective is helping to generate knowledge around how leadership and management operate symbiotically and about the practice of leading and managing. Research using this distributed lens is also contributing to a re-analysis of the traditional understanding of leaders and followers and how the situation in which

they work is a fundamental and central aspect of leadership and management. Finally, it examines the formal and informal organisational structures and how these connect to school improvement.

Related to these reasons for the rise in recognition and regard for distributed leadership as a more useful perspective are criticisms of conventional, prevailing conceptions of leadership. Conceptions based on leader centism and on individually conceived leadership are outdated, built on “biased” and “discredited” understandings of leadership (Gronn, 2002, p. 425). The continued use of leader-followers and leadership-followership dualism prevents an accurate understanding of leadership and consequently an accurate analysis of same (Ibid.). Instead, they can be used to prescribe, rather than describe the way leadership can work in schools.

Importantly, constructs of distributed leadership also mark an attempt to maximise the existing, often under-utilised, internal structures, practices and policies of the school by broadening the distribution of leadership in the school (Maxcy and Nguyen, 2006). Leadership is re-analysed in a way which, ostensibly at least, allows it to be reconfigured and redistributed. This redistribution can take two forms. The first is in numerical action where the aggregated leadership of an organisation is distributed to some, or possibly all, of the members (Gronn, 2002). This is the most common understanding of distributed leadership and is compatible with the aforementioned warning regarding its over-simplification. Importantly, it does not favour or overestimate the activity of any one leader or group of leaders in the school. Rather, it is possible for any member of staff to lead at some opportunity.

The second form of distributed leadership can be described as concertive action (Gronn, 2002). This construction sees the action of leaders in the school as concerted rather than aggregated, where leadership is developed through “spontaneous collaboration”, “intuitive working relations” and “institutionalised practices” (Ibid., p. 430). These stages are understood as being successive phases on a continuum of practice, where the synergy of conjoint agency is experienced, and the capacity and talent of staff members is liberated or enhanced, through their shared, participative involvement in leadership. There is also a synchronising of plans and action, which leads to a development of a sense of membership and a contraction of authority and alienation, which can be accomplished through the formal role structures of the schools or through the informal, personal relationships amongst the staff (Ibid.).

## **The value of distributed leadership (as an analytical concept)**

### **A tool for considering leadership**

The question for principals and teachers, then, is whether this is helpful in any way in the day-to-day management and leadership of schools. The current section of the paper seeks to address this question. The aforementioned, recent policy documents from the DES suggest that this is, for the moment at least, the ‘only show in town.’ The point being argued here is that distributed leadership can serve as a particularly useful analytical tool for school leaders for a number of reasons. Firstly, as a conceptualisation, it is valuable in that it brings together



ideas from the perspectives of networked leadership and leadership as an organisational resource. The combined influence of such theories allows an appreciation of distributed leadership from across very different schools of thought on the purpose and usefulness of effective leadership. This is especially important when considering the demands being made on teachers and principals in schools at present and the explicit expectation to distribute leadership (DES, 2016; 2017). Psychological theories which look to understand and exploit the organisational resources of organisations generally hold that greater commitment of staff will be accessed through their compliance (Hatcher, 2005). Such theories speculate that workplace satisfaction, commitment and efficiency are believed to be increased through greater participation and collaboration on the part of the organisation's team. Theories of distributed cognition, on the other hand, suggest that the complexity and intensity of problems faced by principals is now such that they must harness the knowledge and skills dispersed throughout the school and that this allows those members to exercise influence over the school (Ibid.). Distributed leadership straddles both sides of the fence in this regard. It allows for the analysis of the how of leadership in relation to the leaders, followers and situations which, in turn allows for leadership to be conceptually dispersed while acknowledging that it can take many forms. It means that power can be democratic or autocratic (Spillane, 2005), latent or manifest and can result in either action or inaction (Gronn, 2000). In this most basic sense, power may be distributed across an organisation to such a degree that not all members are even aware of their own influence.

Secondly, while distributed leadership may be employed as an analytical tool or conceptual lens for considering leadership, it has not yet been hijacked by the school-improvement and effectiveness movement. In fact, critics of distributed leadership point to the lack of empirical evidence regarding its impact on student attainment and instructional improvement as a weakness (Harris, 2013; Spillane, 2005). While this limitation is important, it is not crucial. Causal links will follow from descriptive theory building and, in the meantime, distributed leadership should not be seen as another prescription for effective leadership practice.

Related to difficulties with school improvement and effectiveness is an understanding of the distinctiveness of the unique context of individual schools. More narrowly envisaged goals, which are concerned more specifically with academic achievement and are used as instruments to focus and control stakeholder input, tend to be used in more restricted and restrictive leadership traditions. In many ways distributed leadership reflects a departure in organisational research as it acknowledges the values, beliefs and dynamic relationships that inform the lived experiences individual schools.

Thirdly, as is outlined above, the distributed perspective functions as a framework for examining both leadership and management, which is especially helpful in systems which promote managerial approaches. In this regard, there are two aspects to distributed leadership: the leader-plus and the practice aspects (Spillane, Camburn and Pareja; 2007). As regards the former, while the role of the principal as the leader in the school is not undermined, it is allowed that both leadership and management of schools involve many staff, including those who have no formal leadership roles. Currently, the DES would see this as empowering "staff to take on and carry out leadership roles" and promoting the voice of other stakeholders in the school (DES, 2016, p .29). This helps to avoid the "false

assumptions” of what can be described as “exceptionality” and “designer-leadership”, where the capacity of the individual is inflated as a way of manipulating and creating homogenous leadership frameworks (Gronn, 2003, p. 8). The practice aspect refers to the importance of individual dispositions in the day-to-day operation of the school, when restrictions of time and place impinge on choices and judgements; the way in which the urgency of day-to-day practice often inhibits appropriate consideration of the options available to leaders (Spillane et al., 2007). This view of leadership, considering the work of school leaders in terms of their followers and in relation to their situation, allows for a greater understanding of the influence of the principal. A distributed perspective permits a fuller conceptualisation and acknowledges the importance of both leadership and management. The school’s situation and unique context are not, then, external to this consideration but, rather, part of the fundamental elements of leadership.

### **Considering other leaders**

Moreover, research based on the aforementioned false assumptions and on more traditional leadership structures have tended to represent the norm and, by overlooking the distributed forms of leadership, have led to a deficiency in educational research (Harris, 2004). One of the clear strengths of a distributed leadership perspective is that it draws “attention to other individuals, to other actors and their agency” (Sugrue, 2009, p. 366). Consequently, this conceptualisation is strengthened by the recognition of the interactions between leadership practices and the ways in which these are “enacted and embedded in routine” (Ibid., p. 368). Further, the case can also be made that it is a fundamental right of teachers in the education system, and indeed of citizens in a democracy, to participate in, share power with and actively construct the institutions and organisations which shape and govern their lives (Giroux, 1992).

Clarity around what is entailed in a distributed leadership perspective is especially important when investigating leadership and management of schools in a number of different contexts and with different focuses. For the research community, such clarity enables comparisons between studies. For the practitioner community, it allows that such a perspective can change understandings, rather than be sceptically dismissed as another fad or fashion (Spillane and Diamond, 2007a). However, it is worth restating that this clarity does not imply a universal, unassailable definition. A distributed perspective, it is argued here, is an analytical tool that can help schools to think about how they can be led. The point, then, is that the perspective allows for a consideration of leadership and management without the more traditional prescription for effective leadership or management. It is not a blueprint for leadership or management or an attempt to negate the role of the principal by implying that everyone is a leader. It is about thinking about leadership practice with regard to the school’s situation and context and acknowledging that these can change and be changed from both within and without.

## **Difficulties with distributed leadership**

### **Autonomy and participation**

The concept of distributed leadership, then, is plausible and inviting as an analytical concept insofar as it highlights the representation of leadership as an emergent property, counter-balances the heroic leader concept and has empirical validity. It is not, however, without its flaws and these flaws are particularly important and relevant in terms of how this conceptualisation has been embraced by Irish policy (DES, 2016; 2017). Distributed leadership is limited by a number of its inherent characteristics, namely the degree of control and autonomy and the boundaries of participation (Woods, 2004). Studies of leadership and management in general, and on distributed leadership in particular, tend to ignore these difficulties (Lumby, 2013; Thomson, 2011). The former element, the degree of control and autonomy, refers to evidence which suggests that, although leadership may be distributed across an organisation, it may still be constrained by the aims and goals of senior leaders in the organisation. While leadership may be disseminated from more senior levels, the existent hierarchical structures work to maintain a balance between control and the autonomy and the degree to which others are able to participate can often depend on the willingness of leaders to distribute that leadership. Of course, there's nothing new with this problem. It has long been recognised as a barrier to leadership (Hargreaves, 1994). The overarching values and aims of governance structures, of the policies and expectations surrounding schools, can often limit the range of elements in an organisation open to independent scrutiny. The net effect of this restraint is that schools could often find themselves engaging their creativity and resourcefulness in order to accomplish pre-defined and externally imposed goals and targets.

While it might be argued that these issues may have more to do with the methodology than the concept itself, they are problematic limitations nonetheless. Many studies highlight the central role of the distribution of leadership in the principal's day, but they often say little about the purpose of that distribution (whether it is to lead change or manage the status quo) or about minutiae of the interactions and relationships of the main protagonists. While research begins to explain the importance of a distributed leadership, it is limited by the paucity of evidence to show what it looks like in action. This may be due to the fact that school systems have major "structural, cultural and micropolitical barriers" embedded in them which can work to prevent the implementation of such a perspective (Harris, 2004, p.19). These barriers are many and varied but include government policy, historical governance structures and cultural and personal traditions.

### **Constraining structures**

Indeed, the point can also be made that there is a fundamental contradiction between the concept of distributed leadership and the reality of government-controlled school leadership (Hatcher, 2005; Hislop, 2015). While it might be a stretch to say that the Irish system is entirely deterministic, that any alternative action by leaders is impossible, it is important to acknowledge that some of the decisions made by school leaders are determined by others with greater structural influence. The artifacts, the tools used to provide stability and define leadership activity include externally mandated policies and learning technologies which

often work to constrain school leaders and provide scant opportunity for real agency (Ball, 2012). Any claims that such impositions are negotiable by virtue of the fact that leadership works to negotiate and mitigate them does not always allow for the inflexibility of intention on the part of the policy maker. School leaders may have deep reservations regarding DES policies, for example, (enrolment and anti-bullying practices being current manifestations) but local scrutiny and legal structures discourage any real resistance (Hickey, 2016). Critics can argue, then, that conceptions of distributed leadership regularly fail to acknowledge the struggle for control over schooling, the inherently political reality that leadership regularly, if not constantly, is circumscribed by structural authority (Bottery, 2003; Maxcy and Nguyen, 2006).

Another issue is that of boundaries of participation and is concerned with who is permitted to share in leadership (Woods, 2004). While this can be negotiated at various points within the school, it must also be recognised that it can be imposed and that, in education, there are issues concerning the inclusion of stakeholders other than the teaching staff. Distributed leadership can be “discursive and therapeutic”, that is, it encourages contemplation and deliberation and allows people to “feel good” about their contributions and involvement (Ibid., p. 13). But this is not the same as an ethical right to participation and is often dependent on consent from others in authority and demonstrates how distributed leadership might be seen as lacking in its depth and scope.

### **Contextual sensitivity**

Research has also noted that certain theories of leadership can often lack cultural sensitivity. In relation to distributed leadership, the democratic understanding of leadership central to this model may be at odds with culturally inherited structures of socialisation. While referring specifically to Chinese society and its inherent value system based on clearly defined and rigid hierarchies, Evers and Katyal (2008) raise an interesting point as to how comfortable followers are in disrupting the traditional hierarchical structure. Like Ireland, they note that the system of education in Hong Kong was initiated by religious orders; a historical formula to create tension between state and school in areas of autonomy and control. As is also the case in Ireland, a great number of schools are consequently not operated directly by the government, leading to a situation where the highest authority is the school’s board of management/management committee. Historically, denominational schools operated through strict management hierarchies, reinforced by hierarchies in religious orders. It may be difficult, in such cases, to alter inherited traditions. Gronn (2003), too, suggests that schools can become confined to their inherited traditions and values to such a degree that leaders can, at times, lead their organisation to a point it would have reached had the leader not been there.

It is essential that educational scholarship does not depoliticise leadership and become “trapped in vacuous and decontextualised ideas such as ‘transformative leadership’, ‘reculturing’ and ‘distributed leadership’ devoid of any sense of history or context but, rather, allow the development of a culturally sensitive and socially intelligent approach” to the field (Bates, 2008, p. 207). Such concepts of leadership which ignore or misunderstand the importance of religious and community influences as well as governmental and economic

influences lack the sophistication required to properly interrogate the 'why' as well as the 'how'. It is necessary to acknowledge the contribution of the distributed framework to recent leadership research, while also remaining cautious of the tendency to disregard some of the valuable contributions of more traditional leadership frameworks and conceptualisations (Sugrue, 2009). Such a viewpoint guards against viewing particular frameworks as all-encompassing and recognises, instead, the local and global influences which work to shape the discourses and, consequently, the practice of educational leadership (Ibid). Specifically, it takes exception to the outright dismissal of the heroic view of leadership and sees a certain amount of truth in the heroic construction when it is considered in its proper cultural and narrative context and circumstance.

The postmodern demand for improvement and accountability leads the educational research community to develop models of leadership capable of comprehending and assimilating these new responsibilities (Sugrue, 2006). However, there is a world of difference between suggesting that charismatic leadership alone is insufficient for contemporary leadership and that charisma in a leader is inconsequential (Sugrue, 2006). In attempting to conceptualise frameworks of leadership capable of meeting/professing to meet the requirements of managerialistic policies, there has been an inclination to underestimate fashionably the ordinary work of the school leader. Furthermore, this couldn't come at a worse time for school leaders. As the complexity and demands of the job continue to expand "there is a greater need than ever to cultivate the heroic imagination" and to give credit, "ordinary hero status", to people who continue to work within the restrictions of the system (Ibid., p. 368), especially when there is evidence to support the correlation between the professional decisions and personal values of the principal (Sugrue, 2011). The tendency to underrate and under-emphasise the role of the principal is typical "of what happens from a research perspective in seeking to find evidence for the importance of what is under the microscope" (Sugrue, 2009, p. 364).

### **The 'how' and the 'why'**

There are clearly, then, difficulties with the practical interpretation of distributed leadership. The tendency to interchange other leadership perspectives, which are misunderstood as being analogous with distributed leadership, can be confusing and counterproductive. Again, the failure occurs when the focus is on the 'what' and 'how' of leadership, rather than the 'why'. The normative and representational power of distributed leadership may well refer to the current paradigm in educational leadership where teams, rather than individuals, are working unwittingly to restructure and reshape their schools to appease external demands and requirements. While it is important to remember that distributed leadership is not intended as a leadership design or model, it is equally important to acknowledge that it can be utilised to galvanise and legitimise demands made of leadership and leaders.

## Conclusion

A distributed leadership perspective has, in many ways, become the predominant means of conceptualising and describing leadership in education. These characteristics help to counter overly prescriptive, exaggerated or insular understandings of school leadership. The practices and processes of the work of the principal are instead understood as aggregated or concerted action on the part of some or all of the school staff. Such a concept of leadership allows an examination of the 'how' and the 'why' of leadership, particularly because it has not yet become concerned solely with measurable outcomes or instructional improvement. Nor is it a traditional blueprint for leadership. However, it must also be acknowledged that leadership is dependent on both internal and external structural and political constraints. The leadership of staff in the school is dependent on the authority of the principal who is, in turn, constrained by the context in which the school operates.

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# The continuous professional development (CPD) of Finnish primary school teachers – potential lessons to be learned for Ireland

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## Abstract

Continuous professional development (CPD) plays an important role in ensuring ongoing quality teaching. In Ireland, the majority of teachers engage in CPD voluntarily. Compulsory CPD is offered to Irish schools on an ad hoc basis. In Finland, compulsory CPD (VESO training) must be completed annually. This study examines three forms of CPD available to Finnish primary teachers (compulsory training, voluntary training and informal learning), identifies pros and cons of these CPD approaches and discusses potential contributions to the enhancement of CPD for teachers in Ireland. The results suggested that there is value in the compulsory VESO training, though Finnish teachers were sometimes unhappy with the training's structure and content. Hence, they choose voluntary courses which were more in keeping with teachers' individual and school needs. Finnish teachers also recognised the importance of informal learning but expressed dissatisfaction with the frequency of informal learning opportunities. Some recommendations for Irish CPD are suggested by the results, namely; CPD should reflect teachers' personal and school needs, be collaborative in nature and be run when teachers' energy levels are at their highest. Additionally, it is suggested that Irish primary teachers be given financial support when engaging in CPD and participate in some compulsory CPD annually.

*Keywords: CPD, informal learning, Finnish education, quality teaching*



## Introduction

The call for effective continuous professional development (CPD) is increasing in Europe, as the demands on schools and teachers become more complex (Carlo et al., 2013; ETUCE, 2008; Hudson and Zgaga, 2008; OECD, 2005).

Education and training systems are universally regarded as being of critical importance in enabling countries of the European Union to meet and manage (these) changes (Lennon, 1999).

The 'changes' Lennon refers to are of a social, political, economic and cultural nature. Teachers today are expected not only to deliver a curriculum successfully, but also to contend with other outside influences. Teachers are faced with the everyday challenges of instilling

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values of tolerance and respect in their students, helping them cope with social disadvantages and providing them with an understanding of today's information age. Every country wishes to respond more effectively to these social and economic expectations (Carlo et al., 2013; ETUCE, 2008), thus improving the quality of learning within their schools for each student. Teachers are considered the most important resource in schools and are key in achieving high standards of education. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD):

Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends, in large measure, on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality and that all students have access to high quality teaching (2005, p. 7).

### **CPD available to Irish teachers**

CPD is a "lifelong process" (Villegas-Reimers, 2003), which begins with the initial preparation that teachers receive and continues until retirement. The spectrum of provision is categorised by the OECD (1997) as formal (accredited), non-formal (non-accredited and occasional), and informal (non-taught learning activities in all settings). Ireland recognises the need for the development of the continuum between initial and continuous training for our primary teachers (Banks and Smyth, 2011). Formal professional development opportunities are offered through education centres and third level institutions in Ireland. Irish education centres play a crucial role in enabling teachers to adapt to curricular and pedagogical changes. Both formal and non-formal courses are offered to Irish teachers throughout the academic year and during the summer months on a voluntary basis. Courses run during the academic year are usually free of charge, though teachers' travel costs are not covered. A large number of qualified teachers avail of certified courses (Banks and Smyth, 2011) offered during the months of July and August. These certified courses are run for a total of 20 hours over five days, and a small fee is levied on the attending teachers. Teachers are highly motivated to attend these courses as, on completion, they are awarded three extra personal vacation (EPV) days to use the following academic year. Teachers can choose from face-to-face courses around the country or participating in online courses. These online summer courses offer teachers the flexibility to complete the course at their leisure, providing the requisite 20 hours have been logged and they have engaged with other course participants in online forums. In recognition of the importance of CPD to teaching, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) was established in 2010 (Banks and Smyth, 2011) to provide an educational support service to teachers and school leaders. The PDST, which replaced the Primary Curriculum Support Service (PCSP) and the School Development Planning Support, and its team offers both formal and non-formal professional development directly to schools. Despite the many positive steps taken to provide a range of CPD options, teachers' experience of CPD in Ireland can be fragmented and often ad hoc (i.e. dependent on the teacher's own initiative) and CPD itself has been described as narrowly defined, with limited theoretical basis, and implemented in stops and starts rather than in any coherent or sustainable way (Harford, 2010).

## Finland

Finland has secured the enviable position of an “education-tourism hot spot” (Ahtola and Niemi, 2013). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has consistently placed Finland at or near the top of the international education league table, thus sparking worldwide interest in Finnish educational policies (Salmivalli, Poskiparta, Ahtola, and Haataja, 2013; Saxell, 2008). Finnish teachers are both highly educated and highly trained (Ahtola and Niemi, 2013), and there has been international interest in learning from Finland’s education system (Sahlberg, 2011). This study examined one aspect of the Finnish education system, the face-to-face CPD available to primary teachers, which is sub-divided into compulsory CPD, voluntary CPD and informal learning. The study aims to identify the positive and negative aspects of the Finnish approach to CPD and discusses potential contributions to the enhancement of CPD for teachers in Ireland. The article proceeds with a brief overview of CPD mechanisms available to Finnish primary teachers, the research design used in the study, a summary of the finding and concludes with a discussion of the findings and lessons that can be applied to the Irish context.

### Overview of CPD available to Finnish primary teachers

CPD has been described as a means of teachers “recharging themselves professionally” (Day, Sammons, and Stobart, 2007), while Glatthorn (1995, p. 41) states that CPD is “the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically”. Taking both these definitions into account, this study has divided CPD into three areas: formal learning experiences (workshops, training days, seminars, accredited courses etc.); non-formal learning (school-based inquiry learning and professional support); informal learning (reading research publications, discussions with colleagues, sourcing material online, and reflecting on one’s own practice). For the purpose of this study, formal and non-formal learning are split into two further categories; compulsory training, which is defined as “the provision of organised in-service programs designed to foster the growth of groups of teachers” (Glatthorn, 1995) and voluntary training, which is the training that teachers participate in of their own initiative. Additionally, the informal learning opportunities that teachers had ‘on the job’ are taken into account. Descriptions of the three forms of CPD examined in this study as they operate in Finland are provided, as well as a definition of quality teaching and how it may be linked to CPD in Finland. The combination of methods used in the research is outlined and ethical issues are addressed.

### Compulsory VESO training in Finland

The responsibility for provision of compulsory CPD for Finnish primary teachers lies with the employer, which in most cases is the local municipality. One of the available types of formal CPD is known as the Public Service Collective Agreement (VESO), which is free of charge and provided outside of school hours. Teachers receive full salary benefits for the duration of the training period, which is a minimum of three working days per school year (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005). VESO courses are organised by the local municipality

with input from principals (Director of the City Education Department), so the content is tailored to the municipality's schools. Given that each municipality organises their own range of VESO training, there is considerable variation in content (Brandt, 2015) and standard of material provided (Finnish education researcher). School-specific continuing education sessions and education days are the most common forms of VESO training. Being school-specific, training content usually includes curricular topics and current issues affecting teachers. The local municipality is free to organise this training independently or it can be obtained from a university, polytechnic or a private training provider in either case some form of outside expertise delivers the VESO training (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005). Very often a VESO day is used as a training day and held in August just before the schools open. Similarly, schools often spend a VESO day or half-day in May to evaluate school progress to date. There is considerable variation in when and on what type of activity the schools spend the remaining VESO days. VESO training can be provided at the school, district or whole municipality level, with some municipalities organising semi-regular training events where multiple schools or school types (e.g. primary schools, special needs schools, etc.) attend, giving teachers an opportunity to meet, network and exchange information (Director of the City Education Department). For some teachers, VESO training represents the only CPD they engage in (Finnish education researcher).

### **Voluntary training in Finland**

The second form of formal CPD in Finland is voluntary training. A charge is usually associated with this form of training, which teachers must fund themselves. Teachers who participate in self-motivated or voluntary training can seek financial support from their employer to cover some or all of their costs. The local municipality may also grant substitute cover if training is during school hours. A survey conducted by Jakku-Sihvonen and Rusanen (1999) indicates that the primary source of funding for voluntary CPD is the employer. Their survey shows, however, that some teachers (24%) finance voluntary CPD in conjunction with their employer and a small percentage (10%) meet the entirety of the costs themselves. This desire to go above and beyond what is expected of them in professional development could suggest that the compulsory courses i.e. state-funded and VESO training are not meeting teachers' individual needs. Finnish teachers actively seek out more relevant learning situations, with approximately 70% of them financing their own professional development to some degree (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005). A teacher's ability to self-assess learning needs and reflect critically on previous knowledge is central to important adult learning (Mezirow, 1998). The largest providers of voluntary CPD training in Finland are the universities, polytechnics and OPEKO. OPEKO is owned by the state and operates under the National Board of Education. Although OPEKO is state-owned, it is not state funded. Profits are made through the selling of services (OPEKO, 2008). An example of an extensive research project supporting CPD is the *Life as Learning* research project funded by the Academy of Finland and carried out between 2002 and 2006. The project comprised approximately 20 studies and explored the effects of lifelong learning, changes in working life and new learning environments on the teaching profession and on teacher training (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005). These studies indicate that Finnish teachers spend a significant amount

of their own personal time participating in training with 41% of teachers participating in CPD for at least 10 days of their own time (Ahtola and Niemi, 2013; Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005).

### **Informal learning**

The primary focus of this study was on formal learning as part of CPD in Finland, i.e. the voluntary and compulsory courses that were on offer to primary teachers, but also took into account informal learning as part of the nature of continuing education and training. Gear, McIntosh and Squires (1994) emphasise the value and importance of informal learning in their study, *Informal Learning in the Professions*. They suggest the existence of two types of informal learning, 'specific' and 'general' (Gear, McIntosh, and Squires, 1994). In specific informal learning, professionals engage in learning which is of the moment and as a response to certain everyday needs or curiosities that they might have (Gear et al., 1994). More general informal learning is where professionals participate in learning not necessarily to learn something specific but just to keep themselves informed and to avoid becoming isolated in the workplace (Gear et al., 1994). Examples of general informal learning include broadly discussing topical educational issues with colleagues in the staffroom or reading the education section in a newspaper. It is noted, however, that monitoring and recording these types of informal learning is challenging (Gear et al., 1994). Most professionals regard informal learning as part of their day-to-day work and rarely acknowledge it in a formal sense. For the purpose of this study, informal learning is referred to in the questionnaire and interview stages of data collection, to recognise it as part of CPD and to clarify the importance Finnish teachers placed on it.

### **Quality teaching**

Several studies have linked CPD to quality teaching (Day, 2002; Reid, Brain, and Boyes, 2007). The hallmark of quality teaching is that "it fosters understanding and equips learners to apply their learning in new circumstances" (Stones, 2002). It has been suggested that investment in the quality of teachers (for example through provision of CPD) may be related to improvements in student performance (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2012). Similarly, evidence suggests that better qualified teachers may make a difference for student learning i.e. teacher education and development can lead to "improved student outcomes" (O'Sullivan and Nic Craith, 2006). Several studies demonstrated that the recency of training was related to teacher performance (Hanushek, 1971; Kennedy, 1999). Penick and Yager (1983) found that teachers in particular science programmes had higher levels of education and more recent educational experiences than others, even though they were older than the average science teacher. As Murnane (1985) suggests, these findings may indicate that it is not only the knowledge acquired with CPD but that teachers' motivation is correlated to improved student outcomes. The nature of teacher CPD can be collaborative or individual, and this can influence whether or not changes in teaching and learning occur. Cordingley et al. (2005) compare the impact of individual and collaborative CPD on teaching and learning. Their review found good evidence that collaborative CPD can sway teacher or pupil change, while individually orientated CPD presented weaker evidence for such pupil change. In summary,

there is good evidence to suggest that quality teaching, and hence improved student outcomes, can be positively influenced by CPD which is recent, collaborative and is combined with external expertise (Cordingley, Bell, Thomason, and Firth, 2005).

## **Research design**

### **Overview**

One of the authors (Virginia Guiden) was based in Jyväskylä University teacher training primary school for the duration of the study, and directly observed Finnish teachers at work. Having one of the researchers 'on the ground' was advantageous in two main ways. Firstly, important contacts were established which facilitated the recruitment of teachers and key personnel to the study. Secondly, these contacts assisted in the translation of the study questionnaire into Finnish, so that the meaning of the question was preserved. In terms of data collection, this study used the concept of triangulation, or a combination of methods, where a selection of data sources are used to explore a single idea or refine a research question (Marshall and Rossman, 2014). The study began by using questionnaires, completed by Finnish primary teachers, to gain insight into the lived experience of the compulsory VESO training, voluntary CPD and informal learning mechanisms present in Finnish primary schools. These questionnaires identified topics for further exploration, which involved structured interviews with a sample of the Finnish primary teachers who had completed the questionnaire. The results of these structured interviews highlighted areas of concern that teachers had with the compulsory VESO training. These areas of concern were then further explored through semi-structured interviews with key personnel, specifically the Director of City Education Department, the Director of OPEKO (National Centre for Professional Development in Finland), a primary school principal and a Finnish education researcher.

### **School and teacher selection**

Five primary schools were selected to participate in the study, located in the university city of Jyväskylä in southern Finland. Schools were selected that had at least 12 staff. Special schools, Swedish speaking schools, teacher-training schools and fee-paying schools were not included in the sample, as this study aimed to explore usual cases in a typical environment with no extremes. Teacher questionnaires were provided in both Finnish and English to encourage a higher rate of return. Piloting of the questionnaire was conducted in the Jyväskylä University Teacher Training Primary School. Once piloting was complete, the selected schools were contacted by post and all agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaires were hand-delivered to the participating teachers (n=90), with each questionnaire being accompanied by a short introductory letter (in Finnish). Teachers completed the questionnaires in their own time and then returned them to the researchers. Of the questionnaires that were returned, eight primary school teachers indicated that they were interested in being interviewed further. A sample of six of these teachers (hereafter referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.) was selected taking into account age group, gender and experience. These six teachers were then interviewed using structured interviews. The question wording and sequence were predetermined, with all teachers being asked identical

questions within the structured interviews.

### Semi-structured interviews with key personnel

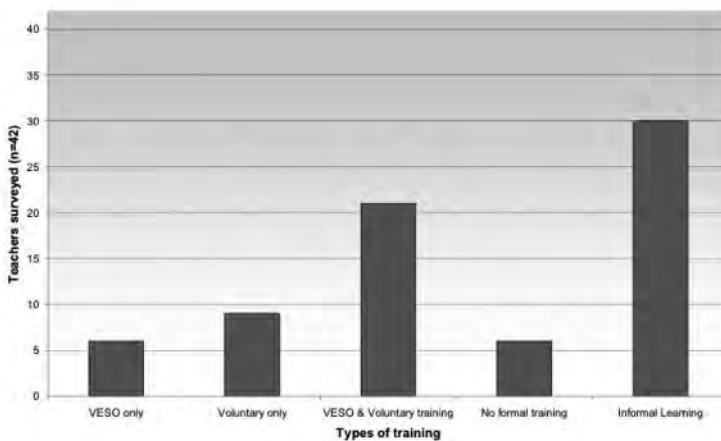
Semi-structured interviews were used with Finnish directors, a principal and a Finnish education researcher. Areas of concern teachers had with the VESO training identified within the structured interviews were explored at this stage. The issues to be covered were outlined and specified in advance. All interview schedules were piloted, with a number of English-speaking class teachers and tutors.

## The findings

### Questionnaires

Of the 90 questionnaires delivered to participating teachers, 42 were returned (47% response rate). The questionnaires provided the initial examination of CPD for Finnish primary teachers. Overall, the majority of respondents (36 out of a possible 42) have taken part in some form of formal CPD either on a voluntary or compulsory basis (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Type of CPD engaged in by Finnish teachers



### VESO TRAINING

Twenty-seven teachers participated in VESO training (64%). The majority of teachers rated 'content' as the most important aspect of VESO training. At the time of data collection, physics and chemistry were being introduced in Finnish primary schools and thus there was a large demand for training relevant to teaching these subjects. This also resonates with findings from a survey conducted in Finland from 1996-1998 (Jakku-Sihvonen and Rusanen, 1999). Teachers who were offered hands-on, practical courses felt that they obtained a higher level of improvement in the quality of their teaching. Eight teachers (19%) felt that 'meeting others' is the most important aspect of a VESO course because, for some teachers, VESO offers a networking and informal learning opportunity. However, nine teachers (21%) had negative attitudes towards VESO training, due to the format (lectures/seminars) and content

(topics perceived to not meet teachers' needs). One respondent stated that, despite VESO being organised by municipalities with input from school principals, the content of VESO courses should be negotiated with teachers.

#### **VOLUNTARY TRAINING**

Thirty-six teachers took part in voluntary training. As with VESO training, curricular subjects are the most popular option in voluntary training. Six teachers (14%) rated 'meeting others' as the most important aspect of a voluntary course. Twelve respondents (28%) stated that voluntary courses have smaller groups and better instructors compared to VESO training. Five respondents (11%) argued that voluntary courses offer more practical techniques compared to VESO training courses and which were more relevant and meaningful to them. Some respondents also felt that participants are offered more opportunities for group work and discussion in voluntary courses, compared to VESO training.

#### **INFORMAL LEARNING**

Thirty teachers (71%) engaged in informal learning during their school day. However, 16 of these teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the frequency of opportunities for informal learning in their school, while all teachers recognised informal learning as an integral part of CPD.

#### **Interviews**

Four main themes emerged from the findings of the interviews: views of interviewees in relation to VESO training; the motivation of teachers to participate in voluntary training; teachers' opinions on the value of informal learning in CPD; and whether teachers believe there is a link between CPD and quality of teaching.

#### **VIEWS HELD BY PARTICIPANTS REGARDING VESO TRAINING**

The findings of the questionnaire suggested that the level of participation in VESO training had dropped from 88% (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005) to almost 65% at the time the interview was conducted. As with the questionnaire results, it was found that teachers were unhappy with VESO training being run outside of school hours and in large seminar groups. Teachers stated that when VESO training was held in small groups, and teachers could choose their VESO course, they believed there were benefits to be achieved. However, when VESO training consisted of large lecture-style events, teachers often found the content of VESO courses "theoretical" (Teacher 3), "quite useless" (Teacher 1) and "boring" (Teacher 2). The principal agreed that teachers were not always happy with the content of VESO courses. Similarly, the director of education remarked, "we have not always been successful". However, they stressed that large VESO training events were an opportunity for teachers of the same subject or speciality (e.g. special needs) to meet and network. The director of education noted that dialogue with representatives from the teachers' union, principals, and administrators could bring about improvements in content. Finally, VESO training was especially valuable to the 30% of teachers who otherwise would not participate in any formal training (Finnish education researcher).



**MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN VOLUNTARY TRAINING BY FINNISH TEACHERS**

The findings from the interviews with the teachers revealed that voluntary courses tended to have smaller groups, in contrast to large seminar groups typical of VESO training. As a consequence, training facilitators had more time to interact with participants (Teacher 1). Teachers were highly motivated when they took part in courses of particular interest and meaning to them (Director of OPEKO). Furthermore, teachers with similar needs and interests could learn from one another, facilitating collaborative learning and discourse, which can aid adults in the learning process.

**TEACHERS' OPINIONS ON THE VALUE OF INFORMAL LEARNING IN CPD**

Teachers agreed that informal learning is an integral and valuable part of CPD. Teacher 3 commented on how "enriching" it was to exchange ideas between colleagues. Teacher 4 stated, "...it's a lot more valuable than any course you could take part in because it happens all the time". This notion that CPD is an ongoing process echoes the observation made by the director of OPEKO. Dissatisfaction was expressed with the frequency of opportunities to complete informal learning. The Finnish education researcher interviewed agreed that this form of CPD should be given as much recognition as formal training and adequate time for teachers to engage in it.

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE LINK BETWEEN CPD AND QUALITY OF TEACHING**

The final issue explored in the interviews related to quality of teaching. All six teachers, the two directors, Finnish education researcher and principal agreed that there is a link between CPD and quality of teaching. Two teachers believed VESO courses could provide teachers with "techniques" (Teacher 1) and "ideas" (Teacher 1) to improve their teaching. However, the remaining four could not identify consistently improvements in the quality of their teaching due to VESO training. All teachers agreed that voluntary training consistently provided teachers with concrete ideas which they can take straight into the classroom, in contrast to VESO training. The teachers reported that ideas and skills acquired in voluntary courses stay with them longer, compared to VESO, because they were more motivated when learning them (Teacher 2). This is in concurrence with the literature which suggests that teachers who are enthusiastic and motivated while learning can influence the quality of their teaching which, in turn, influences student performance (Geldenhuis and Oosthuizen, 2015; Kauppinen, Kainulainen, Hökkä, and Vähäsantanen, 2017; Murnane, 1985; Shieh, 2012).

**Limitations of the study**

The sample secured for the study involved teachers who had participated in compulsory and voluntary training. It was not possible to secure interviews with teachers who had opted not to attend VESO training. VESO training is a compulsory part of a Finnish teacher's contract. Teachers who, therefore, were in breach of their contracts were unwilling to participate, even when their anonymity was assured. The geographic location of the study is another consideration, as teachers in Jyväskylä (a relatively large Finnish city) may have had easier access to voluntary CPD programmes compared to their rural counterparts. Such easier access would presumably influence the opinions of these teachers regarding the relative

strengths and weaknesses of voluntary CPD (which might be hard to access) versus VESO training (which the municipality must provide). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that teachers in rural Finnish schools have more limited access to CPD opportunities (Kaloja and Pietarinen, 2002). While inclusion of rural schools in this study would have been desirable, this was not possible in the time frame available. Lastly, the study focussed solely on the face-to-face CPD offered to Finnish primary teachers in Jyväskylä. While online CPD is becoming a popular option for teachers, it was again not feasible to incorporate this aspect of CPD into the study in the time frame available.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

This paper describes an empirical local study of the CPD provision and uptake in a Finnish city. The study aimed to identify the positive and negative aspects of the Finnish approach to CPD and identify potential contributions to the enhancement of CPD for teachers in Ireland (Arнове, 2003).

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommendations for Irish policy makers to improve CPD practice in Ireland:

1. In order to motivate teachers to participate in ongoing CPD, this study found that CPD courses should reflect their personal needs and the needs of the school. In both VESO and voluntary training, teachers favoured courses with a direct applicability to their school setting. VESO training is co-created annually by the municipality and their schools and, as such is tailored to these schools' and teachers' needs (Director of the City Education Department, Finnish principal, Finnish education researcher). This annual, local-level co-creation allows each municipality and their schools to assess their CPD needs on a regular basis and respond flexibly. In Ireland, CPD needs are assessed at the school level by principals and their staff, with considerable variation between schools regarding the level of assessment conducted. Additionally, there is limited communication between schools and CPD providers. The PDST, while providing a large range of very useful CPD training, have their priorities guided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Taking lessons from the Finnish VESO system, there is a case to be made for improved dialogue between schools and their local education centre in terms of the CPD needs of the locality. This would support the findings of the INTO's 2005 'Professional Development Needs Analysis' questionnaire which found that almost 60% of the respondents stressed that acquiring new, practical skills would enable them to become satisfied teachers (O'Sullivan and Nic Craith, 2006). Schools could engage in their own CPD needs assessment (possibly as part of the now suspended school self-evaluation process) and feed this information to their local education centre to inform the type of CPD available in the following school year.
2. We note parallels between the common way VESO training is used (planning day in August before school opens, year evaluation day in May, remainder used in disparate

ways), with emerging trends in the application of Croke Park hours. The INTO ([www.into.ie/ROI/FAQs/CrokeParkHoursFAQs/](http://www.into.ie/ROI/FAQs/CrokeParkHoursFAQs/)) reports that “many members have expressed the view that they wish to have the option to attend school for one full day prior to the commencement of the school year for pupils”. Given this emerging parallel in the use of compulsory time to be spent on training in both countries, there may be a case for the retention of at least some Croke Park hours (e.g. August planning days) beyond the terms of the Haddington Road Agreement (current public service stability agreements), though resistance to such measures could be expected.

3. In Finland, compulsory CPD is currently conducted outside of school hours. Finnish teachers reported in the study they are often lethargic and unmotivated when participating in VESO training directly after a school day. In contrast, they reported better engagement with the VESO training when this was held on Saturdays as their energy levels were higher. Additionally, Finnish teachers reported good engagement with voluntary training that was held during school hours, again when their energy levels were high. This sentiment was echoed in the INTO survey (O’Sullivan and Nic Craith, 2006) by a small proportion of respondents who indicated compulsory CPD would only be effective if it was during school hours. However, closing Irish schools for CPD purposes has been described as “highly disruptive” and an “erosion of teaching time” (Ciaran Sugrue, 2004; Sugrue, Morgan, Devine, and Raftery, 2001). In light of this, and taking lessons from VESO training, policy makers should be open to the option of running CPD, or using Croke Park hours, on Saturdays when energy levels could be expected to be higher.
4. Finnish schools are allocated a budget (Finnish principal) to finance teachers’ participation in voluntary CPD. The financial aid Irish teachers receive for voluntary CPD is currently at the school’s discretion. The results of the INTO survey in 2005 indicated that 73% of teachers felt the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland (DES) should fund fully the costs incurred as a result of school needs-related voluntary CPD. A little more than half, 54%, believed the DES should cover all costs associated with voluntary CPD related to personal needs. A significant number of respondents in the INTO survey noted that the boards of management in schools should also contribute to the costs of teachers’ voluntary CPD. It is recommended that approved voluntary CPD be fully funded by the DES. As is the case in Finland, a budget should be allocated to schools to enable a certain number of teachers each year to engage in voluntary CPD. This budget would allow for substitute cover and the associated personal costs incurred by the teacher. Teachers who wish to enhance and develop their skills on a personal and professional level should be given assistance to do this (Coolahan, 2003).
5. Despite not being popular among Finnish teachers, VESO has a number of strengths, it is regular, collaboratively generated, brings in external expertise and is compulsory. The compulsory nature of VESO ensures that those who would not ordinarily participate in any form of CPD (approximately 30% of teachers, Finnish education researcher) engage in some level of upskilling. In the Irish context, given that a sizable proportion of teachers (~23%) do not engage in any CPD (Banks and Smyth, 2011), compulsory CPD could be considered. As noted in recommendation 1, any compulsory CPD should be the result

of improved dialogue between schools and local-level CPD providers, so that efforts are made for such compulsory CPD to be tailored to the needs of these schools and teachers (like VESO training). Hopefully, such a process of co-creation would mitigate resistance due to external compulsion. Some support for compulsory CPD exists, the INTO survey (O'Sullivan and Nic Craith, 2006), found 66% of respondents felt that CPD should be compulsory for all teachers, in relation to national programmes and school needs-related training. Compulsory CPD would ensure that all teachers are prepared for the ongoing changes in education. Compulsory CPD can promote consistency of knowledge amongst staff in significant areas (O'Sullivan and Nic Craith, 2006). In 2007/08 there were just two compulsory seminars provided to teachers; 'Child Protection Guidelines' and 'Standardised Testing' (PCSP, 2008). Additionally, only certain teachers were required to attend these courses, the designated liaison person (DLP) for child protection and teachers who were administering tests this year. Thus, only a small number of the teaching population were required to engage in CPD. It is welcome that the strategy for the implementation of the new Primary Language Curriculum includes compulsory training for all staff (PDST, 2016). The introduction of the revised Primary Language Curriculum in 2015 has also provided another opportunity for whole school professional development for all teachers provided by the PDST.

6. Finnish teachers stressed the value of informal learning. They expressed concern at the lack of opportunities for this aspect of CPD in their schools. The authors propose that informal learning be recognised and given an important place in Irish schools, as has been suggested in other studies (Banks and Smyth, 2011).

## **Implications**

While teachers in Finland have access to a plethora of voluntary CPD options, as do teachers in Ireland, key differences between countries are that Finnish schools hold dedicated funding for voluntary CPD and the teachers are required to engage in compulsory CPD in the form of VESO training.

## **COMPULSORY TRAINING**

When discussing the implications of introducing compulsory CPD in Ireland, we must note that Croke Park hours could be considered as facilitating compulsory CPD. As noted earlier, some schools have used some of these hours in ways similar to common VESO practices, in the form of pre-commencement planning days. However, since Croke Park hours can be used for a variety of non-class activities including supervision and administrative work ([www.into.ie](http://www.into.ie)), there is scope to discuss the implications of introduction of formal compulsory CPD to the Irish system beyond the compulsory CPD associated with the revisions in curricula. Successful compulsory CPD needs to be conducted when teacher motivation levels are high, causing minimal disruption to students and schools. It is suggested that, as in Finland, compulsory CPD could be held on Saturdays. An obvious implication is that teachers are likely to resist working on weekends. As a way to address this, teachers could be only required to attend one Saturday a year and be given full salary benefits as an incentive.

Compulsory training must also be provided in consultation with teachers. Ideally, schools would be in regular dialogue with the local education centre to co-create tailored CPD material. One of the failings of the VESO system is that teachers felt that content was not always relevant to their circumstance. If compulsory CPD were to be introduced in Ireland, teachers should have mechanisms (e.g. school level CPD needs assessment) to exercise active influence over CPD courses and content, as teachers are more likely to engage with CPD when matches their specific individual and school needs (McMillan, McConnell, and O'Sullivan, 2016).

#### **VOLUNTARY TRAINING**

Voluntary CPD in Ireland is well established, though issues are that it is frequently at teachers' expense and takes place outside school hours (e.g. during the summer break). In contrast, Finnish teachers can avail of a school-held dedicated CPD budget to engage in CPD during school hours. The Finnish situation is remarkably similar to the INTO's stance on what Irish CPD should be and they argue "that teachers should be facilitated to attend seminars or courses on behalf of the school through the provision of substitute cover, and at no cost to the teacher" and that "CPD to address teachers' own personal needs could take place in both school time and teachers' own time with incentives provided to teachers to engage in such CPD..." (INTO, 2014). The DES, the competent government authority, has a responsibility to give schools more freedom and resources to engage in CPD. This implies that schools would have the independence and budget to release and cover teachers to attend CPD, for reasons beyond in-service curriculum training. The school could then choose courses suited to their needs and aspirations.

#### **INFORMAL TRAINING**

Informal learning is central to CPD (Eraut, 2008; Gear et al., 1994). The teachers, directors, principal and Finnish education researcher who were interviewed in the study, were all in agreement that informal learning is an important aspect of CPD. According to Finnish teachers, conversation and engagement with fellow colleagues are some of the most important aspects of informal learning. In Ireland, this form of CPD is recognised but poorly researched (Banks and Smyth, 2011). Further research into informal learning and how it affects the quality of a teacher's work will be required in the future.

#### **Conclusion**

Education has the challenge of not only imparting information to future generations but producing well-rounded citizens (O'Sullivan and Nic Craith, 2006). Teachers play a crucial role in the social and economic wellbeing of society (Department of Education and Skills, 2011; OECD, 2005) and therefore require and deserve quality CPD. Suitably trained teachers who regularly upskill demonstrate enhanced teaching ability (Earley and Porritt, 2010). Work quality is affected by the degree to which teachers invest in themselves and in their education. This is of benefit to the child's learning. The CPD of teachers is a lifelong process and its value in schools and society needs to be prioritised (Banks and Smyth, 2011). Teachers need to remain socially literate over time as they are shaping a society constantly in flux. We have

argued that in examining Finland's CPD practices, lessons may be learned that could improve CPD policy here in Ireland. In order to ensure that changes in policy are translated into improved practice, CPD must be constantly reviewed and given the required level of support. CPD can mediate the interaction between the teacher and the social and natural environment, thus CPD will help teachers to remain receptive to a changing society and deal with the uncertainties and challenges that accompany change.

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improvement and importantly, further children's education. An analysis of the literature regarding the history of CPD was carried out, so as to provide context, and models of current CPD practices from around the world and in Ireland were examined.

The principal research questions which this study aimed to answer were:

- ⌘ What are the staffs' current understanding and expectations of CPD and their motivation towards it?
- ⌘ Is the CPD undertaken by staff members implemented in the classroom or otherwise put into practice? Why? Why not?
- ⌘ What are the perceptions of the teachers towards the current models of CPD?
- ⌘ What are the perceptions of the teachers towards other models, including collaborative models, of CPD?

### **The historical background of CPD in education**

CPD amongst primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland, or what was more commonly known in the past as, "in-service education", has been in place since the foundation of the state (Coolahan, 2004, pp. 3-4). In 1922, as a result of the revival of the Irish language, primary teachers needed to learn Irish as it became part of the curriculum. Consequently, many teachers undertook summer in-service courses to become more proficient in the language. Under Rule 58 of the 1965 *Rules for National Schools* (Department of Education) teachers were allowed to take extra personal vacation (EPV) if they attended an approved summer course. This shows that in-service was part of the culture of the time, that teachers were encouraged to up-skill and they were rewarded in doing so. This rule is still in effect today. When the 1971 *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (Department of Education) was introduced, there were in-service courses over a three year period for primary teachers to support its implementation (INTO, 1999, p. 11). The *White Paper on Educational Development* in 1980 (Government of Ireland), advocated that the delivery of in-service should be "a matter of priority in certain areas of new developments" (Hyland and Milne, 1992, p. 368). The 1990s in Ireland saw more reform in teacher education with the Government's 1992 *Green Paper on Education* and 1995 *White Paper on Education* both endorsing a "greatly expanded in-service teacher education" (Coolahan, 2004, pp. 3-10). In 1999, the Primary School Curriculum (Department of Education and Science) was launched. To implement it successfully, whole school planning became a recurrent part of the school life and "approximately 27.5 days of school closure were sanctioned" (Inspectorate, 2005, p. 3) over four years.

The development of CPD in Ireland has been biased towards system-based reform (mainly the implementation of new curricula) and fragmented as teachers undertake various summer courses to earn EPV. According to Coolahan, the need for a national policy and plan for CPD was pertinent for "initial professional training is altogether inadequate for a career which can extend for forty years" (2002, p. 26).

## Current perspectives on CPD

### The Teaching Council and CPD

In 2006, the Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis with its primary aim to be “the professional standards body for teaching that promotes and regulates the profession”. Within *The Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers* is a section on teachers’ professional development in which it states teachers should:

take personal responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice by... availing of opportunities for career-long professional development (Teaching Council, 2012, p. 9).

As the Teaching Council now had responsibility for supporting CPD, they began a consultation process to develop a framework for CPD. Phase one of this process was completed and a draft framework report was published in 2015. After a further consultative phase, *Cosán* was published in 2016. It is presently undergoing a development phase to ensure its viability and impact.

*Cosán* aims to be a flexible structure of CPD for teachers (ibid., p. 7) and formally acknowledges the myriad of learning opportunities that teachers undertake (ibid., p. 8). Teachers’ learning can be viewed as having many dimensions and the Teaching Council outlines the following as the four key ones:

- ⌘ formal/informal;
- ⌘ personal/professional;
- ⌘ collaborative/individual;
- ⌘ school-based/external to the school or workplace (ibid., p. 11).

That *Cosán* acknowledges that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive (ibid.) means an array of learning experiences can be embraced by teachers and the needs of teachers met. This is reiterated in the statement “Sustained opportunities to reflect on the processes of learning, teaching and assessment are seen as central to ensuring quality in the development of a profession that is responsive to emerging needs, and to school improvement. The best systems would appear to tend increasingly towards more teacher-led and less provider-driven CPD, allowing considerable teacher autonomy as regards choice” (ibid., p. 4).

### Reflection, collaboration and building professional learning communities

For professional learning development to really have an impact, teachers need to engage in reflective practices. The OECD recognises the potential of teachers challenging their own teaching conventions by reflecting on their practices “Through an examination of basic and often implicit assumptions about teaching and learning, a deeper understanding of educational processes and outcomes is gained” (2012a, p. 35). These concepts are reflected by the Teaching Council, when they state that teachers need to “reflect critically on their teaching and their learning, and the relationship between them” (2016, p. 22).

A critical area within CPD, which has been prioritised in Ireland (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 7) and by the OECD (2014), is how relevant is the CPD undertaken to the teacher’s

professional reality. As the rate of change in schools is now unprecedented (Teaching Council, 2011, pp. 10-11), it is imperative that the upskilling undertaken by the teacher would be fit for purpose “it must become part of the daily work life of educators. Accordingly, the potential of workplace learning needs to be explored more fully” (INTO, 2010, p. 29). This was reiterated by the General Teaching Council of Scotland who declared that “focusing on collegial and collaborative activities and models of learning which are more embedded, sustained and relevant have a greater and more positive impact than the more traditional ‘one-shot’ workshop or ‘course-led’ models” (Education Scotland, 2014, p. 4). This is reflected in the TALIS report “In view of the benefits of collaborative practice for classroom teaching and teachers’ professional learning, Member States should recognise and promote collaborative practice, both within and beyond school” (OECD, 2014, p. 7). Reflective practices, in conjunction with collaborative activities, are seen by the OECD to be key features of teachers continually improving their practices (2012a, pp. 34-35).

A term often used to encompass a collaborative, learning culture is ‘professional learning communities’. Hargreaves defines these as “communities of professionals caring for and working to improve student learning together, by engaging in continuous collective learning of their own” (Hord and Sommers, 2008, pp. iv-vi). Harris and Jones further champion this model of CPD because teachers have ownership of the practices and ideas and it is possible for the process to be a catalyst for change that can show dividends especially if the learning needs of students are kept at the core (2010, p. 174). Developing professional learning communities or collaborative cultures is not a simple process. Teachers must stop acting as individuals and work in conjunction with their colleagues for the common shared purpose of improving students’ learning (Fullan, 2011, p. 4; Harris and Jones, 2010, p. 174). Time must be found and structures developed to further progress this approach (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009). There needs to be a strong leader who will support the staff and facilitate the idea of distributed leadership (Harris and Spillane, 2008) and according the 1998 Education Act it is the responsibility of principals to create “a school environment... which promotes the professional development of the teachers” (Government of Ireland). Despite these drawbacks, the powerful effects of professional learning communities are significant and have been advocated by the Teaching Council within *Cosán* (2016, p. 9).

### **Review of international practices of CPD**

The views of the Teaching Council and the INTO regarding CPD needing to be collaborative and impactful are reflective of international practices on CPD. For instance, in Scotland, the model of CPD that teachers follow to remain registered is a rigorous, planned process. The CPD chosen is directly relevant and meaningful to the individual teacher who engages in critically reflective dialogue with colleagues about their professional learning (GTCS, 2017).

In England, teachers do not have to undergo CPD to remain registered but they are regularly inspected to ensure their teaching is competent. It is a belief of the teachers’ union, The Association of Teachers and Lecturers asserts that the accountability of teachers is “excessive” (2009) and that CPD “driven by national priorities” is hindering teachers’ development.

In Northern Ireland, while CPD is not mandatory to remain registered with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), it is expected of teachers. The GTCNI also maintains that an attribute of teachers' professionalism is that "teachers, while reflecting on and evaluating their professional context, use acquired professional judgement to select the most appropriate options from a repertoire of teaching strategies and, in the process of teaching, refine and add to their professional knowledge" (2011, p. 11). It is also expected that teachers would work in collaboration with colleagues, engage in professional dialogue and be reflective in nature (*ibid.*, p. 9). This autonomous model of CPD allows teachers to take responsibility and be proactive about their CPD needs and points to a system that is relevant.

Finland has been presented as a paradigm of excellence in education (OECD, 2010, p. 118). CPD for teachers in Finland is obligatory and for each teacher there is at least three days of mandatory CPD annually, yet they undertake on average seven days (*ibid.*, p. 126). This system of CPD is not formal or structured (Taylor, 2015, p. 4), but is based upon the high level of trust and autonomy afforded to the teaching profession in Finland (OECD, 2010, p. 127), which mirrors the GTCNI's position. This professionalism is indicated in teachers' abilities to enquire, reflect and carry out cycles of action research so as to improve teaching practices so as to support teacher development (*ibid.*, p. 244).

Japan is another country praised for its academic success (OECD, 2012, p. 17). Unlike Finland, its model of CPD for teachers is more formal (Williams, 2013) and much of it is framed around the use of 'lesson studies'. This model involves a group of teachers recognising a common challenge in their teaching practices. To surmount this, a model lesson is developed collaboratively and one teacher puts it into practice while his/her colleagues observe. Afterwards, a debriefing session involves the group of teachers making further improvements on the lesson (Doig and Groves, 2011, pp. 79-80). This paradigm is reflective, collaborative and focuses on the needs of the teachers and pupils. It is a bottom-up approach, as recommended by many experts including the OECD (2012a), and allows for professional autonomy while also being relevant, accessible and impactful – all values and principles underpinning the Teaching Council's proposals in *Cosán* (2016, pp. 6-9).

As seen from the examples above, there are many variations among the models of CPD employed by different countries. Yet there seems to be a consensus towards a model that respects and recognises the professionalism of teachers, pays heed to the needs of individual schools, has impact and incorporates reflection and collaboration.

### **CPD in Ireland today**

Eminent writers on education, such as Fullan, Hargreaves and Harris, concur with the theory that continuing professional development is most effective when it is focused on the needs of the schools, teachers and its pupils and is carried out in collaboration with colleagues and peers i.e. collective capacity. This has been done in Ireland on a small scale through the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Established in 2010, this programme's main objective was to promote the professional development of newly qualified teachers systematically during their induction year and lay the foundations for their future professional development (NIPT, 2016). Since 2014, a new induction programme, 'Droichead' has been developed by the Teaching Council. According

to them, “A key part of this process is an NQT’s engagement with more experienced colleagues, and reflection on the professional conversations that take place on their own professional learning and practice” (2017, p. 5). Support for this model is reinforced by the OECD who state that “Creating a structure that allows experienced teachers to work with novice teachers and that acknowledges their expertise will ultimately strengthen the overall organisation, including retaining good practitioners in the classroom” (2005, p. 121).

The current model of continuing professional development in Ireland, generally consists of teachers going to workshops or partaking in online courses. These programmes tend to be external of school and a one size fits all practice. Research over the last two decades has pointed to the ineffectiveness of these models (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, February 2009). Fullan considers this a flawed system, especially if it has little bearing on the actuality of the teacher’s context or doesn’t have any impact on school improvement (2007, p. 35).

### **Present study**

As seen from the literature review, a myriad of teacher CPD models is in use around the world, some more commended than others. This research paper aims to discover if the current model of CPD in Ireland meets primary teachers’ needs and expectations. It seeks to detect if this CPD model is relevant to the reality of each teacher’s professional and personal circumstances and if it impacts on their teaching. In the following pages, the findings of the questionnaires are explored, in conjunction with the responses drawn from the interviews and are contextualised in light of the above literature review.

### **School and teacher backgrounds**

The four primary schools that took part in the present research are all located in rural East Cork, are co-educational and under the patronage of a Catholic Diocese. For the academic year 2015-2016, the school populations ranged in size from 187-436 pupils and the teaching staff allocations ranged from 12-30 members. In total, 75% of those who completed the questionnaire were female while 25% were male, which is consistent with national norms (CSO, 2013). There are varying levels of experience of the respondents, as reflected in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Years of teaching experience*

0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years
5%	43%	24%	5%	24%
22%	44%	11%	22%	0%
19%	38%	19%	10%	14%
10%	20%	30%	10%	20%

## Methodology

For the purposes of this study, the primary research instrument utilised was questionnaires of the teaching staffs of the four schools. There were 81 questionnaires distributed and the response rate was very high at 75%, thus the findings offer a good reflection of the opinions of a cross section of primary teachers in East Cork. After an initial analysis of the results, there was a follow up interview with a senior member of staff of each of the schools so as to probe for reasons why certain school staff answered in a specific way. As a result of using the multi-method approach, the findings were both qualitative and quantitative. The relevant ethical procedures were followed throughout this research. Due consideration was also given to triangulation, validity and reliability so that the chosen research instruments would be precise and suitable.

## Research questions and study findings

All 61 respondents answered 11 of the 12 key questions, while 45 completed Question Seven. Note that, in the figures and tables presented here, the percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal point for ease of analysis.

The first three questions on the questionnaire aimed to answer the first research question: "What are the staffs' current understanding and expectations of CPD and their motivation towards it?"

The results of these questions are presented and analysed as follows.

Question 1 asked the teachers to choose how they would define CPD and the results are seen in Figure 1. The teachers of the four schools have a positive view of what CPD is as only one respondent chose option e. A slight majority, 31% (n=19) perceive it to be career-long learning (option b). This reflects the Irish Teaching Council's definition on "lifelong teacher learning" (2016, p. 5). This outlook was supported by one interviewee who stated: "It is an imperative part of being a good teacher. I can't emphasise how strongly I agree with this statement". Option d. regarding CPD being part of a reflective practice was chosen by 30% (n=18). The fact that almost one third of teachers chose this option would suggest that a large component of the staffs already self-evaluate their teaching practices. This is in line with the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2012, p. 8) and *Cosán* (2016, p. 21). This was reiterated by an interviewee who voiced her opinion that option d., in conjunction with option b., were both relevant as "we're on a cycle (in our teaching careers) and thus we need to reflect often. We need to look to our successes and weaknesses in teaching and modify our practices accordingly".

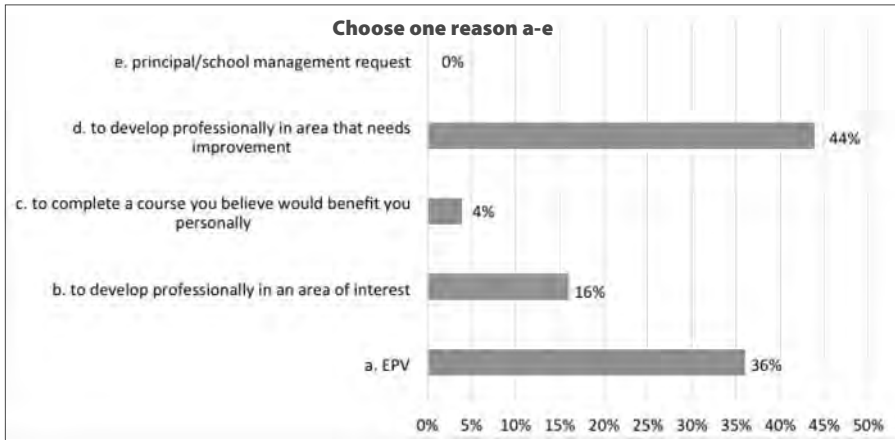
Figure 1: Definitions of CPD



Question 2 was a ranking order question to determine the reasons CPD was undertaken by the surveyed teachers. The results are portrayed in Figure 2. It is noteworthy that an overall 36% (n=21) of respondents stated that their main reason for undertaking CPD was because of the entitlement to EPV (extra personal vacation). This system can be fragmented as teachers undertake various courses at the beginning of summer, when it is least likely to have impact on their teaching practices. This system is criticised by Fullan (2007, p. 35) and Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009). One interviewee stated that, in her opinion, completing CPD for EPV days was “the reality”, while developing oneself professionally, either in an area of interest or for improvement, were “good intentions”. No one chose a request from school management as the main reason for undertaking CPD. This may illustrate that school leadership is not taking action on areas that merit improvement, such as, encouraging some staff members to commence a course so as to fill gaps in the school’s practice as advocated by the *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines* (Inspectorate, 2012, p. 9). Also of note, in the Teaching Council’s framework, *Cosán* they advocate a balance between the personal and professional dimensions of teachers’ learning (2016, p. 11), yet only 5% (n=3) of those who completed the questionnaire considered taking on a course to develop themselves personally.

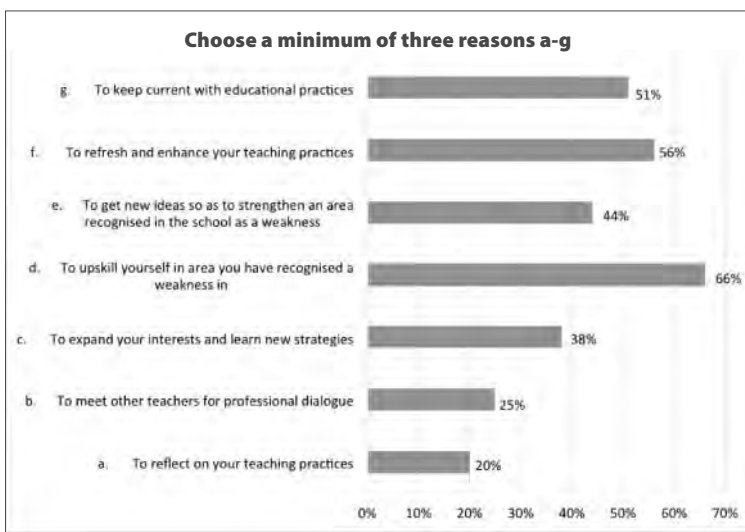


Figure 2: Main reasons for undertaking CPD



Question 3 probed teachers' views on why CPD should be undertaken and Figure 3 represents the results. A majority, 66% (n=40), of the teachers chose reason d. This finding is in line with the Teaching Council's view that teachers should have some autonomy over their CPD and that they "would identify, from their own practice, examples of their teaching that will help them to determine the impact on practice" (2016, p. 20). It was of note that 44% (n=27) deemed it important to upskill within an area that the school has recognised as a weakness (choice e.), yet, as indicated in the findings to the previous question, it seems that it is the teachers who take the lead here and not the school management. This desire to undertake CPD so as to improve at school level is line with international practices such as in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2014, p. 7).

Figure 3: Reasons one should undertake CPD



From the findings of questions 1-3, the first research question has been answered:

- ⌘ 61% (n=37) of respondents understand CPD to be either career long learning or that it helps to reflect on professional practice and to improve gaps identified.
- ⌘ An overall 44% (n=27) of the staff of these schools are motivated to undertake CPD to develop themselves professionally in an area they feel needs improvement and 36% (n=21) complete a CPD course for EPV.
- ⌘ While 66% (n=40) of respondents expect CPD to upskill them in an area recognised to be a weakness, 56% (n=34) believe it should refresh and enhance one's teaching practices.

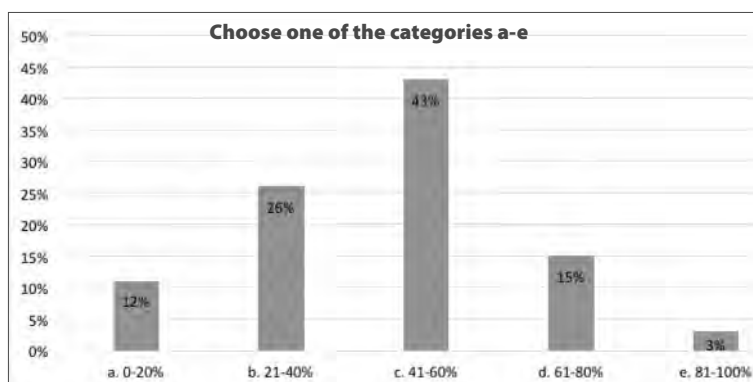
Questions 4 and 5 of the questionnaire attempted to answer the second research question: "Is the CPD undertaken by staff members implemented in the classroom or otherwise put into practice? Why/Why not?"

The following is a summary of these findings.

Question 4 asked the teachers to choose a category that would reflect the estimated amount of the skills and knowledge they acquired from CPD that was subsequently put into practice. The results are represented in Figure 4.

Only 18% (n=11) of respondents, utilise more than 60% of the courses they undertook. This can be viewed as a measure of the impact of the courses on the realities of the classrooms. This is a weakness identified by Fullan, "educators going to workshops and conferences, and taking courses bears little relationship to classroom and school improvement" (2011, p. 2). They are attempting to overcome this in Scotland by focusing on the impact of CPD (Education Scotland, 2014). Interestingly, when these statistics were analysed further according to schools, the majority of teachers in School B opted for d. (to upskill yourself in areas you have recognised a weakness in): 61-80%. The teacher from School B was asked to explain this discrepancy. She elucidated that as a school, the staff know in early May what classes they will be teaching the following year. The staff generally choose a summer course accordingly to complement this, so that they begin September with new ideas that they will more likely implement. This marries well with the Teaching Council's "vision of teachers as professionals who take ownership of their professional development and steer the course of their own learning journeys" (2015, p. 5).

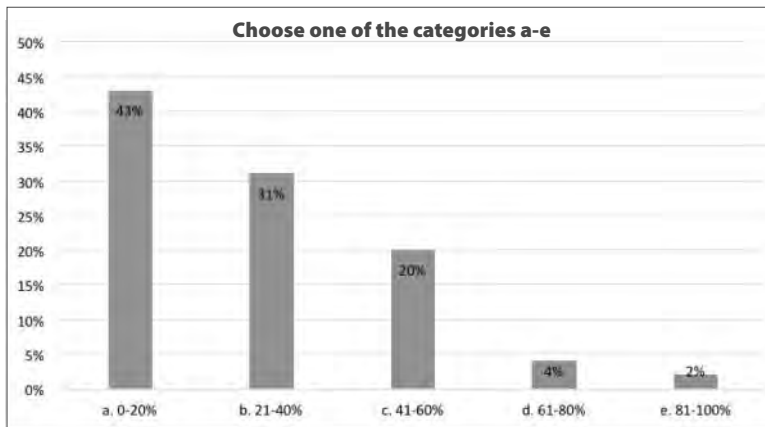
Figure 4: Amount of skills and knowledge put into practice



Question 5 asked the respondents to estimate how much of the courses they undertook did they share with colleagues. This question was to discern if there were strong professional learning communities within the schools. The results can be seen in Figure 5.

Only 26% (n=16) of respondents shared 40% or more of what they have learned. It is of note that this finding contrasts with the responses to Question 4 where 89% (n=54) of respondents declared that they have utilised at least 20% of a course they took on. This would point to a general lack of professional dialogue and collaboration amongst the schools. This was supported by interview, when one staff member stated that she commenced the CPD “with the best intentions in the world but as the vast majority of CPD undertaken is at the beginning of summer, it’s the totally wrong time of the year as colleagues are not seen for another eight weeks so there is no chance for professional dialogue”. This finding would point to the importance of having a professional culture within the school which is collaborative, as attested to by the OECD (2014, p. 7) and Fullan (2007, p. 36).

Figure 5: Amount of course detail shared with colleagues



From the examination of the results to questions 4 and 5, the research question regarding the impact of CPD on teachers’ actual practices shared has been satisfied:

- ⌘ A sizeable number of 61% (n=37) of the teachers put 41% or more of the skills and/or knowledge gained from undertaking CPD into practice.
- ⌘ 43% (n=26) of teachers shared 20% or less of the courses they undertook with their colleagues. This significant finding points towards a lack of strong professional learning communities within the schools.

The third research question was: “What are the perceptions of the teachers towards the current models of CPD?”

This was addressed in the questionnaire by questions 6, 7, 8 and 10. A summary of these findings is as follows.

Question 6 required the teachers to decide if the CPD they undertook met their professional needs. The responses were: 39% (n=24) answered yes, 8% (n=5) no and 53% (n=32) believed it met it to an extent.

The findings here correlated with the four interviews during which all participants agreed that the CPD they undertook did not fully meet their professional needs. All four stated that they had gaps in their skills, practices or knowledge that the current model of CPD is not completely fulfilling, though it is going some way. This is linked to the Teaching Council’s view that one of the core values that underpins their framework on career-long learning is relevance: “CPD which is relevant to both their needs and those of their pupils, having regard to their sector, career stage and... subjects” (2016, p. 7).

Question 7 was an open question that requested teachers to give an opinion on how CPD might be improved. 74% (n=45) completed this question. In response, ten stated that it would be desirable if CPD could be whole school based or collaborative to meet the needs of the school and teachers, and thus be more relevant and impactful. This reflects views of the OECD’s (2014, p. 7). Nineteen had a desire for CPD to be “less theory based and more hands on, i.e. putting it into practice in day to day teaching”. This was also a point discussed during the interviews with three out of the four interviewees stating that there is a pertinent need to “see how it works, how it can be set up. I want case studies because I want to implement it”. This view again reflects the works of Fullan (2007, 2011). Seven expressed a desire for more time and/or support to implement the course. This point concurs with the OECD who stated that “adequate time and follow-up support” (2005, p. 95) are necessary for “effective professional development” (ibid.).

Question 8 was a semantic differential scale to ascertain the teachers’ perceptions of CPD. A list of adjectives were given and participants were asked to mark on the scale how they perceived CPD so as to gain an insight into their disposition towards CPD. These results are portrayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Staff perceptions towards CPD in general

	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	
Boring	0%	2%	11%	56%	31%	Interesting
Waste of time	0%	5%	13%	43%	39%	Worthwhile
Easy	7%	21%	41%	26%	5%	Difficult
Has no bearing on my professional outlook	0%	2%	14%	43%	41%	Informs me professionally
Irrelevant to Classroom Practices	2%	3%	20%	39%	36%	Relevant to my practices
Optional	3%	8%	11%	41%	36%	Necessary
Demoralising	0%	0%	21%	52%	28%	Reinvigorating
	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	

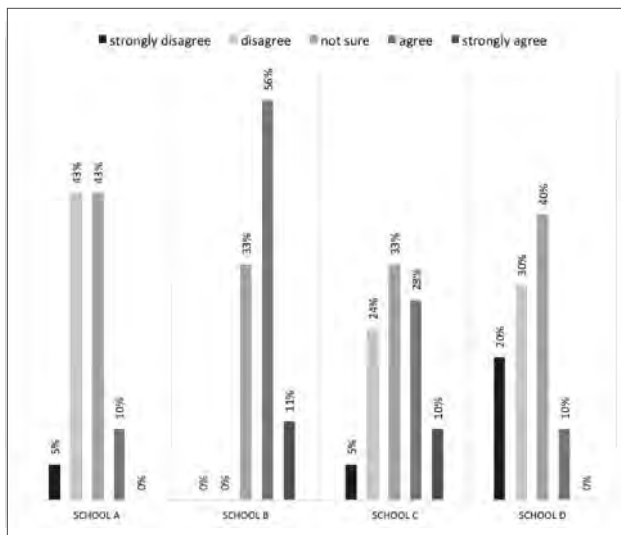
The findings of this study indicate that only 39% (n=24) of teachers believed that the CPD they undertook met their professional needs, while 53% (n=32) believe it goes some

way towards meeting their professional needs. The opinion that courses meet their CPD needs to some extent may be because teachers have the onus to select courses they deem suitable for them. The importance of teachers' autonomy over their professional learning is affirmed by the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (2011, p. 11) and Teaching Council (2016, p. 6). Interestingly, while CPD is not yet mandatory, 77% (n= 47) indicated that they believed it was necessary or very necessary. Overall, it can be seen from these results that the surveyed teachers have a positive attitude towards CPD.

Question 10 asked the teachers: "Do you agree with the statement: Within this school, the NQT programme has promoted whole school development.?"

The results were analysed from each schools' viewpoint and can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Does the NQT programme promote whole school development?



As can be seen, there is some variation between the schools' responses. One reason for this could be that School B is the only school to partake in the 'Droichead' programme. This programme focuses more on the school community being supportive of the newly qualified teacher (NQT) and involves a mixture of mentoring, observation and feedback and professional conversations at school level (Teaching Council, 2017) at school level.

Another reason for the wide variation in responses could be the years of experience of the staff. Both Schools A and D have the teaching staff with the longest service with 29% and 30% respectively having over 15 years' teaching experience, as seen in Table 1. In contrast, in School B, 66% of staff have less than ten years' experience and the vast majority of these teachers would have gone through an induction process.

When the interviewees were asked for their opinion on this question, there were similar varying views as two disagreed, one was unsure and one agreed. The two who disagreed stated that the support is there for the NQT but that there is no platform or structure for

them to share initiatives, as one interviewee commented, “The focus is on them gaining but not for us as a staff to gain from them”.

As can be discerned from the results to these four questions, the research question “What are the perceptions of the teachers towards the current models of CPD?” were answered as follows:

- ⌘ The findings of this study indicated that only 39% of teachers believe that the CPD they undertake meets their professional needs completely. Yet, at the same time, they have a positive attitude towards CPD, as can be seen from Question 8’s results.
- ⌘ Teachers believed the current model of CPD could be improved by being more practical, becoming more collaborative and school-based and allowing more time to utilise and embed new practices.
- ⌘ The teachers of the study were asked if they felt the induction programme for newly qualified teachers benefits schools as whole community learning organisations. The results were varied and could be explained by the years’ experience of the respondents and the uptake of specific programmes within schools.

The final research question which this study aimed to answer through questions 9, 11 and 12 was:

- ⌘ What are the perceptions of the teachers towards other models of CPD?

Question 9 asked respondents to tick as many types of CPD as they wish, that they believe best fits their professional needs. Again, these results were analysed on a school basis and the results are presented in Table 3.

*Table 3: Models of CPD that best fit professional needs*

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Activities that provide opportunities to reflect on own practice	48%	22%	38%	10%
Action Research in the school (i.e. a cycle of implementing a new programme, evaluating after time, modifying and running it again)	52%	22%	43%	40%
Support for national policy implementation	38%	67%	38%	50%
In-school small working groups developing lessons/ plans/ policies	48%	22%	48%	40%
In-school whole staff development facilitated by a colleague	57%	44%	48%	20%
In-school whole staff development facilitated by an outsider	81%	100%	67%	70%
Academically accredited courses	52%	11%	43%	20%
Online courses	62%	78%	62%	60%
Workshops in education centre	90%	78%	86%	80%

As can be seen in Table 3, a wide variety of CPD is appreciated by the teachers of the four schools. There is agreement for the top three preferred models of CPD that the teachers believe best fit their professional needs. These are workshops in education centres, in-school whole staff development facilitated by an outsider and online courses. Reasons for why certain schools slightly favour one model over another can be discerned from the profiles of the staff of the schools. For example, School B has no teacher with over 20 years' experience, and a deduction could be made that they are the most ICT proficient and more likely to have young families which makes the option of online courses so appealing (78% n=7 chose it as a preferred model). On the other hand, School A has the largest amount of teachers with more than 20 years' experience, at 24%, and within this school 90% (n=19) of respondents chose 'workshops in education centres' as their preferred model of CPD. From this, it can be surmised that given that they are older they may prefer the traditional method of face to face courses and are less likely to have childcare as a factor for attending such courses. This was supported during the interviews when two respondents said that for them, childcare was a factor for not attending workshops. As the staffs of the schools are of varying experiences, as seen previously in Table 1, it can be assumed that their professional and personal needs differ widely. The CPD framework, *Cosán* is cognisant of this:

The teaching profession is not a homogeneous group and the framework for teachers' learning takes account of "teachers' individual career patterns, their priorities and their stage in life", as well as teachers' values, emotions, motivation and professional confidence (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 8).

Similar to Question 8, Question 11 was a semantic differential scale. It asked teachers to rate where they believed the balance fell within the main four dimensions of teachers' learning that the Teaching Council promotes in *Cosán* (2016, p. 11). The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Balance in dimensions of teachers' learning

	2	1	0	1	2	
Formal	7%	38%	39%	16%	0%	Informal
Personal	0%	5%	44%	41%	10%	Professional
Collaborative	20%	26%	46%	5%	3%	Individual
School-Based	15%	23%	51%	11%	0%	External to School
	2	1	0	1	2	

From Table 4, it can be seen that the majority of the teaching staffs of the four schools primarily chose option '0', which indicates that they broadly agree with the Teaching Council's viewpoint that each of these contrasting aspects are a balance within teachers' learning (2016, p. 11). Yet, in each of the dimensions there was an obvious leaning towards one side. 45% (n=27) of the teachers in these four schools would like CPD to be more formal, which is in contrast with the system of CPD in Finland where it is not structured (Taylor,

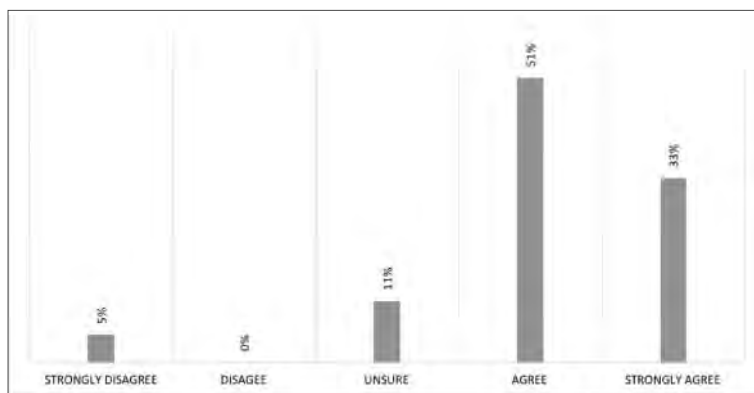
2015, p. 4). This bodes well for *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016), as its success is dependent on teachers engaging with it. All together, 46% (n=28) would like it to be more collaborative, which endorses the theories of collaborative learning (Fullan 2007, 2011; OECD 2012a) and professional learning communities (OECD 2012a; Harris and Jones 2010; Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009). In addition, 38% (n=23) would like to see it more school-based and this outlook is supported by Fullan (2007, 2011).

In Question 12 teachers were asked to read and respond to a statement from the INTO's submission to the Teaching Council regarding a future model of CPD for teachers:

There should be a variety of models of CPD available to teachers. Models of CPD should also reflect the fact that teachers are at different stages in their career; that CPD is integral part of practice; that reflection and inquiry supports the development of evidence-informed practice; and that collaboration and collegiality promote peer-learning in the context of practice. A national framework of CPD for teachers should include a variety of models, such as summer courses, evening courses, weekend courses/seminars, academically accredited courses such as certificates, diplomas, master and doctorate degrees and online and blended courses as well as participation in collaborative learning/research projects (2014, p. 6).

Their responses are collated in Figure 7 and as can be seen, the interviewees concurred with this statement. Those who were interviewed also concurred and one stated that this viewpoint 'offered the ideal'.

Figure 7: Responses to INTO's submission regarding future models of CPD



The final research question, “What are the perceptions of the teachers towards other models, including collaborative models, of CPD?” has been answered:

- ⌘ While an overall 85% (n=52) of the respondents appreciate workshops in education centres and 64% (n=39) value the ease of online courses, there is an evident desire for more in-school based courses that would target the relevant needs of the individual schools specifically, as seen in the findings to Question 9.



- ⌘ 46% (n=28) would like CPD to be more collaborative, 45% (n=27) want it to be more formal, while 51% (n=31) would prefer it to be more professional and 38% (n=23) would like to see it more school-based.
- ⌘ The results of Question 12 would point to the respondents of this study appreciating a variety of models of CPD to allow for flexibility for their respective professional and personal circumstances.

## Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrated that the respondents in the four primary schools of this study are interested and engaged in CPD but would like to see improvements implemented. The evidence would suggest that these primary schools would benefit from various initiatives so as to put in place a more effective model of CPD. These include:

- ⌘ CPD should more targeted to the needs of the individual teacher and school, as indicated by the results to the questionnaire. Schools might undertake a staff audit on their CPD needs. The school plan should include a clearly defined provision for CPD for the staff so that it is continuous and developmental.
- ⌘ A provision should be made for staff to collaborate on a targeted area of CPD, as stated in the questionnaire responses. A follow-on framework should also be developed so that prescribed time is set aside during which the group could continue to support each other in putting theory into practice in the context of the school. This is to ensure that the CPD undertaken has an impact within the school.
- ⌘ There is a need for opportunities to be created for staff to disseminate and discuss various CPD courses undertaken and a suitable time could be during Croke Park hours. This platform would also provide opportunities to share best practice and for teachers with an area of expertise to impart their skills. This could be done collaboratively, so as to build professional confidence and trust amongst the staff. It could be based on the models already used in schools for newly qualified teachers.
- ⌘ There were requests in the responses to the questionnaire for a change to the system of only awarding EPV for completing a summer course, although this is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills. A new, more flexible system might be implemented that would also award EPV to CPD courses undertaken during the academic year that enhances professional practices.
- ⌘ As *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016) goes through its developmental phase, consideration needs to be given to an eventual structure or model that is flexible. It needs to incorporate balance and choice to fit the personal and professional circumstances of the individual at the time.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate various models of CPD and ascertain teacher perceptions towards these in four East Cork primary schools. It also sought to ascertain how the uptake, acquisition and use of skills developed through CPD can enhance not only a

teacher's skills and professional development but also a school's overall improvement and importantly, further children's education. Ultimately, strategies to strengthen the current practice of CPD were sought. While this research is small-scale and must be taken as indicators of certain trends, it offers new insights to the debate on teacher CPD in Ireland.

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# Developing awareness of purpose in mathematical teaching of geometry across primary and post-primary school transitions through lesson study

≡ ÁINE ROONEY ≡

## Abstract

This paper focuses on what a lesson study cycle revealed about students' understanding of what it is to 'do mathematics' within the curriculum content strand of shape and space in both primary and post-primary school settings. The process of lesson study allows teachers augment their mathematical and pedagogical skills for teaching the mathematics curriculum by refining their goals throughout the process and focussing on what and how children learn mathematics. This paper explores changes in geometric task properties as implemented by the students in both a primary and post-primary school. The capacity for building mathematical thinking and reasoning, when focussing on geometric tasks as set up by teachers, is considered. The first part of the paper provides evidence for the rationale behind electing to study the mathematical content strand of shape and space. The second section addresses the task features and cognitive demands as the lesson passed through the lesson cycle from post-primary to primary students. Finally, factors that facilitated or impeded the effectiveness of the task in question and implications of these for future teaching of mathematics across transitions are considered.

*Keywords:* **Geometry, lesson study, transitions, mathematics education, shape and space**



## Background

The call for effective continuous professional development (CPD) is increasing in Europe, as the demands on schools and teachers become more complex (Carlo et al., 2013; ETUCE, 2008; Hudson and Zgaga, 2008; OECD, 2005).

The need for professional pre- and in-service mathematics teacher development that focusses on children's engagement in mathematics and their responses to mathematical ideas is recognised internationally (Dooley, Dunphy, and Shiel, 2014). There is widespread recognition of the practice of lesson study as an established practice for school-based professional development that encourages reflective collaborate participation to improve mathematical outcomes (Lewis and Tsuchida, 1998; Ní Shúilleabháin, 2015).

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A group of four Irish teachers<sup>1</sup> (one primary and three post-primary) engaged in a cycle of lesson study following a collaborative process of World Cafés in 2014, an initiative of the 3U's National Initiative in STEM Education and Practice (N-STEP). The aim of N-STEP is to increase interest in, and the effectiveness of science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and practice ([www.3U.ie](http://www.3U.ie)). 3U comprises St. Patrick's College DCU, NUI Maynooth and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). Phase I of this research undertaken by the Mathematics Education Unit, St Patrick's College DCU, focussed on transitions between primary and post-primary mathematics specifically through lesson study.

The research group addressed the challenges teachers and students face in transitioning from primary to post-primary mathematics, specifically in the areas of fractions and shape and space, through the practice of lesson study over the following two years. The teachers jointly planned, observed, analysed, and refined classroom lessons called 'research lessons' enabling teachers to look at students engaging in mathematics and to develop lessons across transitions (Lewis and Tsuchida, 1998).

It is critically important that there is a continuity in children's learning as they transfer from primary to post-primary school (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). In the past, research in Ireland found that a significant number of first year students do not see a natural follow-on from the primary curriculum to that at post-primary level and the majority see the teaching methods used as quite different, with a significant minority of students finding a 'mismatch' in the standards of mathematics between primary and post-primary level specifically (Smith, McCoy, and Darmody, 2004). The newly implemented Project Maths strands in post-primary mathematics curriculum are now similar to primary with regard to learning outcomes. There is, however, a lack of awareness between teachers at primary and post-primary of the mathematics content and skills in both curricula (Ní Shúilleabháin, 2015).

This paper is underpinned by a view of mathematics as outlined in the first of two recent NCCA research reports (Dunphy, Dooley, and Shiel, 2014) as :

A view of mathematics espoused by Hersh (1997). That is, mathematics as 'a human activity, a social phenomenon, part of human culture, historically evolved, and intelligible only in a social context (p. xi). Mathematics is viewed not only as useful and as a way of thinking, seeing and organising the world, but also as aesthetic and worthy of pursuit in its own right (Zevenbergen, Dole, and Wright, 2004). All children are viewed as having an ability to solve mathematical problems, make sense of the world using mathematics, and communicate their mathematical thinking (p. 8).

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In Ireland, there is an ever increasing awareness of the significance of mathematics in the lives of people, in the economy and in society in general (Dooley et al., 2014). However, national and international test results, such as those reported for example by the OECD's Programme for International Student Attainment (PISA), benchmarking Irish results with the skills and competencies measured with others in 72 countries, have raised concerns about the levels of Irish students' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving (Dunphy et al., 2014; Smith and McCoy, 2011). To address the disappointing performance of students in Ireland in international assessments of mathematics, the Government responded with the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011), setting targets to improve numeracy as an urgent national priority for the Irish educational system.

This paper focuses on what the lesson study cycle revealed about students' understanding of what it is to 'do mathematics' within the context of a lesson on shape and space in both primary and post-primary school settings (Aysel et al., 2016). The process of lesson study allows teachers augment their mathematical and pedagogical skills for teaching the mathematics curriculum by refining their goals throughout the process and focussing on what and how children learn mathematics (Corcoran and Pepperell, 2011).

This paper explores changes in geometric task properties as implemented by the students in both a primary and post-primary-school. The capacity for building mathematical thinking and reasoning when focussing on geometric tasks as set up by teachers as outlined by Stein, Grover and Henningsen (1996) is considered. The first part of the paper provides evidence for the rationale behind electing to study the mathematical content strand of shape and space. The second section addresses the task features and cognitive demands as the lesson passed through the lesson cycle from post-primary to primary students. Finally, factors that facilitated or impeded the effectiveness of the task in question and implications of these for future teaching of mathematics across transitions are considered.

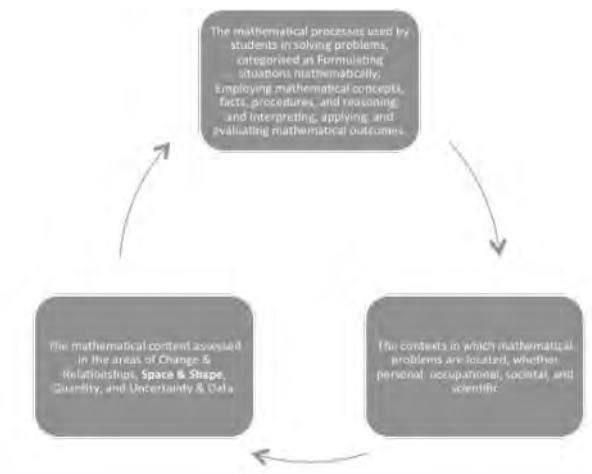
## **Rationale**

In 2012, PISA (OECD, 2014) defined mathematical literacy as:

an individual's capacity to formulate, employ and interpret mathematics in a variety of contexts (p. 25).

The inter-related aspects of mathematical literacy as outlined by PISA are set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Mathematical literacy based on PISA. (Perkins, Shiel, Merriman, Cosgrove, and Moran, 2013)



As conceptualised in Figure 1, shape and space is identified as one of the strands of mathematical content to be assessed across OECD member countries. At post-primary level, 15 year-old students in Ireland have scored below the OECD average on the space and shape mathematics content as assessed in 2012 and in previous PISA cycles (Perkins et al., 2013).

At primary level in Ireland, research has found that since the introduction of the Primary Mathematics Curriculum (1999), there have been difficulties with implementation, specifically with shape and space where one-third of observed classes were able to name shapes, but were not familiar with their properties; moreover, a decline in performance on shape and space between second and sixth classes was identified (Eivers et al., 2010).

The lesson study group aimed to develop a better understanding of what was important for students to know and be able to do in situations that involve shape and space at upper primary and lower post-primary, so that teaching and learning across the transition from primary to post-primary in mathematics education could be improved. The emphasis was placed on mathematics in a real-world context. The children were asked to design a backdrop for a new interactive computer game. This task was chosen to reflect the growing importance of geometry which is fuelled, to a large extent, by advances in technology which enable the modelling of situations geometrically (Jones and Mooney, 2003).

In previous cycles of lesson study, the group had selected a problem from the *N-Rich* website (nrich.org, 2016). In this instance by constructing and moulding a shape and space problem together, the lesson study group found the process a far richer learning experience for themselves than adopting a lesson designed by others. It was found that the group continuously focussed on the goals to be achieved and how that might be done.

However, the question of why the study of geometry was important beyond being a specialisation in its own right did not form part of the initial discussions within the lesson

study group. There was no reference to this matter until the completion of the lesson study cycle.

## Methodology

The research lessons were initially taught to 25 females in their first year of post-primary school. In its second iteration, the research lessons were taught to 33 female sixth class primary pupils. The preparation phase was two months before the first lesson and one month between the first and second lesson. The curricular areas of geometry and learning experiences that are common across schools at primary and post-primary level syllabi are considered in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Syllabi Overview (NCCA, 1999).



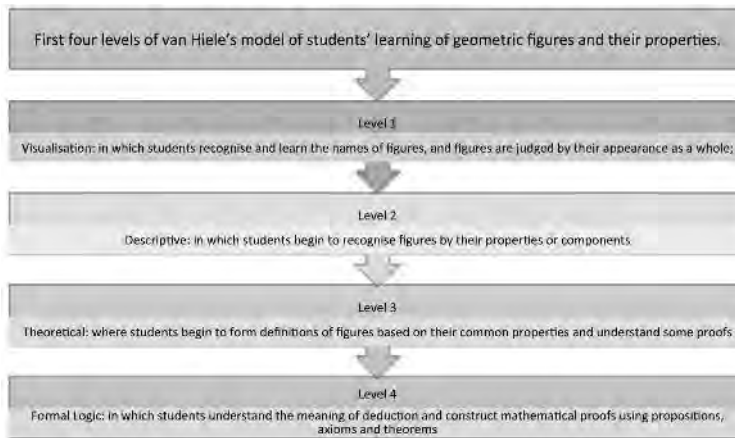
The lesson study group considered these syllabi and what they believed could be achieved within the time frame allowed. The broad goals of the lesson were therefore as follows:

- ◆ Develop students' inquiry skills of deductive reasoning, through participation in inquiry-based activities.
- ◆ Investigate and describe the properties of 2-D and 3-D shapes.
- ◆ Explore the relationship between 2-D and 3-D shapes and space, through observations made during practical work.

The mathematical task as set up by the teacher in the classroom involves both task features and cognitive demands as conceptualised by Stein et al. (1996). Factors influencing the set-up of the task relate to teacher goals, teacher subject knowledge and teacher knowledge of students. The group designed a lesson that sought to extend beyond many passive geometry lessons with an emphasis on the naming and sorting of shapes by properties concentrated upon in schools to more active meaning-making using practical materials to teach geometry more effectively. Consideration was given to students' learning using van Hiele's model outlined in Figure 3.



Figure 3: van Hiele's model (Wang and Kinzel, 2014)



When considering the intended implementation, the task as implemented in the classroom by the students includes both enactment of task features and cognitive processing (Stein et al., 1996). Factors influencing implementation involve many variables such as classroom norms, task conditions, teacher instructional habits and students' learning habits and dispositions. However, the group had no direct knowledge of the students beyond the class profiles. It was not possible to take 'teacher knowledge of students' into consideration when designing the task or identifying where their thinking was located in relation to the levels identified above.

### Research Lesson 1: Task features and cognitive demand

The lesson study is examined firstly focussing on the task features and cognitive demand of Lesson 1. The analysis focusses on the mathematical tasks of constructing shapes and the drawing of a net. The task of constructing a compound 3D shape (of at least two 3D shapes) was set so that the children would use a number of different shapes simultaneously. In doing so they would compare and discuss the shapes in terms of specific, geometric properties and make comparisons between shapes. The brief specified no flat roof so that a mix of shapes would be selected e.g. a pyramid with a regular hexahedron, so that the polygon forming the base of the pyramid would combine with the polygon forming the top face of the regular hexahedron or cube when constructed. The number of vertices of this polygon would determine how many triangular faces would rise up from the edges of the base of the pyramid/top of the hexahedron.

The objective was that the students experience growth in their understanding from van Hiele's level 1 thinking (visualisation), through level 2 (descriptive) in which the children can identify and describe the component parts and properties of shapes to level 3 (theoretical), applying what they know and making informal deductions to explain relationships using definitions fluently and learning to construct mathematical proofs (Wang and Kinzel, 2014). The intended task features are outlined below:

*Table 1: Intended task features, Lesson 1*

<b>Task Feature</b>	<b>Cognitive demand</b>
Make, then sketch and name as many 2D 4-sided shapes as possible on worksheet. Define a diagonal.	Naming, classifying and sorting quadrilateral shapes realised through drawing; develop understanding of the diagonal
Draw and name different types of triangles. Complete worksheet on properties of each triangle.	Naming and sorting triangles, properties realised through drawing.
Manipulate the diagonal length of a triangle, observe what happens to the height of the triangle.	Properties realised through measuring and model making, with guidance.
Brainstorm 3D shapes in groups. Share answers and complete question on worksheet.	Figures distinguished in terms of their shapes as a whole; Naming, classifying and sorting shapes, properties realised through drawing.
Teacher leads discussion to compare 2D and 3D shapes, encouraging relevant keywords: face, edge, vertex	Relate and analyse 3D objects in terms of their 2D parts; Naming, classifying and sorting shapes, properties realised through drawing.
Construct 2 different 3D shapes at least 2 stories high.	Composing/decomposing two 3D shapes into one compound shape, logical connections/relationship/comparison between 2D and 3D becoming established through a mixture of practical experimentation and reasoning. Students see the relationship between the properties of a class of shapes.
Draw a bird's eye view.	Mapping and orienting.
Students view other groups work and write a comment on a <i>Post-It</i> about each and place it beside that construction.	Comparing three-dimensional figures, using geometric vocabulary.
<b>Extension</b>	
Draw the net of the shapes that make up their buildings.	Logical connections / relationship between 2D and 3D becoming established through a mixture of practical experimentation and reasoning, mentally manipulating three-dimensional figures, Developing deductive reasoning and theory construction.

### **Enactment by students in Lesson 1**

Students were instructed to consider 2D then 3D shapes through the use of worksheets presented in that order. The majority of children displayed knowledge and vocabulary in respect of specific 2D and 3D shapes on the work sheets however, they were not afforded the opportunity to apply their thinking in any mathematical context to learn mathematical thinking (Pratt, 2002). They did not use this geometrical language to organise their thoughts, resulting in the absence of any new ideas. The worksheets were very prescriptive and did not move students beyond the visual, level 1, with the children offering limited explanations when naming and describing the component parts and properties of shape. As a consequence of Lesson 1, few were operating at van Hiele level 2 or 3 (Wang and Kinzel, 2014).

It was noted that the children used definitions and language in relation to triangles more fluently than quadrilaterals e.g. in relation to angles and degrees. When and how triangles

are introduced in primary school, compared to when and how quadrilaterals are introduced, became a consideration for the research group.

Discussions around the specific geometric properties of the diagonal line were insightful in that the children were unclear about diagonals and through engagement in the lesson began to construct mathematical proof, some operating at van Hiele level 3 with informal deduction attempted in trying to deduce one property from another. However, the definition of a diagonal was not forthcoming and Wang (Wang and Kinzel, 2014) would argue that, for level 3, both fluency in definitions and learning to construct mathematical proof is required.

Construction of 3D shapes did not begin until the last third of the lesson allowing little time for richness or depth of learning to occur. The allocation of instructional time as outlined by Stein et al (1996), therefore, became a consideration for future planning. Students predominantly focussed on cubes and square-based pyramids as illustrated in Figure 4.

*Figure 4: Students' cubes and square based pyramids*



No elevations or nets were drawn. No reflections were written. All construction materials were the same length. The children became focussed on the stability of the structures as the students aimed for height, identifying strategies to reinforce their structure becoming their primary goal as height increased, as illustrated in Figure 5.

*Figure 5: Reinforcing structures*



Some children were observed as being unfamiliar with computer gaming and may have lacked intrinsic motivation from the outset (Pajares and Graham, 1999). Not all the children were observed as being meaningfully engaged during group work.

**Review, task features and cognitive demands: Lesson 2**

The changes agreed upon for Lesson 2 were substantial. The review phase took place over one month and involved a refocussing on goals, with the cognitive demands of the tasks becoming more defined by the group who asked: Had it been necessary to break the lesson down so much for the children? Was it helpful? The lesson study group revisited what the group wanted to achieve. Furthermore, progression from 3D to 2D was considered and agreed, beginning with the construction of compound 3D shapes no more than two storeys high to reduce the focus on stability. The worksheets were eliminated, as they merely provided an activity at the current level of thought at which the children were operating i.e. the naming of shapes which is a feature of many elementary programs (Reys, Lindquist, Lambdin, Smith, and Suydam, 2004) and which is found at level 1 of van Hiele’s model of students’ learning of geometric figures and their properties.

More focus and time would be given to the relationship between 3D shapes and their component 2D parts as identified in drawing of the net of a given 3D shape. It was a deliberate decision to present the task in this way to increase the cognitive demand. The children would be asked to write a description of their shape as constructed in order to focus and assess their geometric language throughout the lesson and to explore the children’s ability to relate 3D objects in terms of their 2D parts (Reys et al., 2004). To achieve these three tasks, the groups were assigned jobs inspired by construction professions. The inclusion of a whole-class interim-evaluation once the first compound shape was successfully made was introduced to give clarity to the children about the tasks and also to stretch the children beyond the construction of cubes and square-based pyramids which had mainly been constructed during the previous lesson. From the start, the fact that a prior knowledge of gaming was not required by the students, was emphasised. The key tasks of Lesson 2 were, therefore, as follows:

*Table 2: Intended task features, Lesson 2*

<b>Task Feature</b>	<b>Cognitive demand</b>
Create a wall of geometric words considered important.	The ability to describe and analyse a 3D object, also to describe and analyse <b>it</b> in terms of its 2D parts, using geometric vocabulary.
Construct the frame of one story + roof (No flat roofs).	Composing/decomposing two 3D shapes into one compound shape, logical connections/relationship/comparison between 2D and 3D becoming established through a mixture of practical experimentation and reasoning. Students see the relationship between the properties of a class of shapes.
Draw the net first and then construct with card for a minimum of one building.	Relating <b>3D</b> object in terms of its 2D parts by analysing the compound 3D shape building spatial visualisation, mentally visualising students’ constructions from different perspectives. Solving problems.
Describe your design explaining what two 3D shapes is your building a composite of and why? What are the connections between your net and your frame.	Reason geometrically to interpret and describe students’ constructions, justifying conjectures about the relationship between the two 3D shapes they have built.

## Enactment by students in Lesson 2

The children immediately began to construct in 2D, relating the 3D problem to its constituent 2D parts from the outset. Time and space for the children to make their own sense of the problem had been planned into Lesson 2, allowing the process of arriving as described by Pratt (2002) to take place with the greater understanding of the role of indeterminacy. When there was silence during this part of the lesson, the teacher allowed this to occur and did not direct conversations that followed. Understanding and valuing silence and not directing the children towards 3D at that point was a feature of the success of the early part of the lesson. While some groups again made relatively simple compound shapes, e.g. a cube with a square-based pyramid on top, others began to consider more sophisticated compound shape as illustrated in Figure 6.

*Figure 6: Children's sophisticated compound shape*



During the lesson, the children successfully moved from working with 2D to 3D shapes, some following the interim evaluation during which the teacher discussed some of the more complete constructions with the whole class. The research group observed how the teacher's instructional cues affected cognition when the teacher clarified the goals using the children's own products. Following this part of the lesson, nets were drawn and constructed and descriptions written before the end of the time allocated by some of the class.

The data in relation to nets was insightful in relation to how students learn and implications for geometry teaching. In learning geometrical concepts, the value of drawing is prevalent in pedagogical approaches, based on assumptions that learning moves from the concrete to the abstract (Manning, 2005). The group had sought to explore the nets drawn as representing what the children were assumed to know, including their cognitive capabilities, spatial awareness and geometric understanding (Thom and McGarvey, 2015). The children were observed as understanding, some with guidance, that nets were flat shapes that could be folded into 3D shapes, however the drawing (as opposed to the identification, cutting out and folding of existing nets) of same was observed as cognitively demanding.

In relation to geometric thinking and drawing, Thom and McGarvey (2015) suggest that drawing is not a matter of confirming an external world by representing it, but a process of thinking a world "as part of and through a specific human perceptual experience in the process of becoming" (p. 468). It is within this context that the nets are now considered with the children's process of thinking becoming evident as illustrated in Figure 6. In this example, the teacher can discuss with the children the process of their thinking as represented in

the two 3D shapes and whether they successfully make a compound shape. The logical connections, relationship and comparison can be discussed through the implementation of this task.

*Figure 7: Net construction during Lesson 2*



As part of that process of thinking, those students who drew a net, were possibly operating at van Hiele's level 3 informal deduction in seeing the relationships between the shapes considered. Problems were experienced in applying van Hiele's model when considering these findings since the model does not explicitly describe student thinking at level 3 (Wang and Kinzel, 2014) and in labelling the lowest level 1, the visual, as visualisation was demanded at all levels targeted (Jones and Mooney, 2003). The second lesson does, however, highlight the potential richness of focussing on the construction of nets during the teaching of geometry lessons.

While the task was accessible to all children, not all experienced the task in the same way, perhaps related to the sub-tasks assigned. A group of self-regulated learners was observed performing high levels of academic work using high cognitive engagement. Other students, even though assigned roles, took less responsibility for their own performance during the lesson, becoming more involved in resource management (e.g. preparing balls of Blue-Tac) leaving much of the analysis to others in the group as outlined by Stein et al (1996). Others were observed as relying completely on the efforts of others. Therefore, even though somewhat engaged and producing a product as part of the group, not every child experienced the same level of cognitive engagement during this lesson.

### **Review and recommendations: Lesson 2**

The lesson study group recommended that teachers should have enough materials for each child to freeplay initially, allowing independent thought and construction early on in the lesson so that, though working with others, respect for each student's individual work would be allowed (Manning, 2005). Driving this recommendation was the observation of children being more able to make conceptual connections after using the materials in Lesson 2.

This freeplay should take place before any roles are given within the group. The success criteria for those roles needs to be considered in the future and emphasis placed on those in role being responsible for and not doing on behalf of the group. In addition, the responsibility of all group members to explain the mathematics, or ask questions if they do not understand, should be clearly emphasised (Boaler, 2009). Following freeplay, all children would be invited

to make one compound shape so that, during the lesson, the children would be challenged to develop from the level of thought at which they were already operating (Reys et al., 2004).

As a group we proposed that exploration of what a net is would be conducted early on in the lesson as a whole class activity so that prior knowledge in relation to same could be activated based on curriculum assumptions when knowledge of the students is unknown. In extending the reach of the lesson, consideration could be given to other geometric properties that children may not discover when constructing models e.g. patterns including, though not limited to, Euler's formula (Reys et al., 2004). However, this was not undertaken during these lessons.

### **Factors facilitating or impeding the task**

Factors that facilitated the task in question were the higher levels of teachers' mathematics content knowledge including both subject matter content and pedagogical content knowledge as outlined by Rowland (2013). As the lesson study cycle progressed and teachers' mathematics content knowledge grew, activities became more specifically directed and focussed allowing the tasks to be achieved to become more clearly defined for the benefit of both the students and the teachers.

Too many tasks in lesson one impeded the lessons' effectiveness with no depth of learning achieved. Allowing students struggle with fewer tasks, as evidenced in Lesson 2, e.g. with children beginning with 2D and feeling lost and confused up to the interim evaluation, allowed the children grow and move beyond level 1 of van Hiele's model. Planning for specifically directed experiences such as those undertaken, and equally importantly, teachers allowing these experiences to happen, was an important facilitating factor to Lesson 2. Teacher habits and dispositions were therefore considered, leading to questioning of the value and widespread over-reliance on worksheets in mathematics teaching in general (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

Likewise, student habits and dispositions had an impact upon each lesson. Some students were observed as frustrated with the materials breaking up their work as illustrated in Figure 8 and becoming focussed on stability (Lesson 1) while others were unfamiliar with group work in mathematics (Lesson 2) which impeded the lesson in which many children became mere resource managers. Lack of collaboration in mathematics lessons has been highlighted as a problem in primary teaching of mathematics (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

*Figure 8: Children's frustration with materials*



The children should be encouraged to change the lengths of the materials during construction or various non-uniform lengths should be provided. Having enough materials for every child to engage individually with the tasks initially is also a recommendation. The less able students, given practical hands on experience could then produce shapes promoting discovery, and the average and more able pupils with time, manipulation and practice will grasp the mainstream geometrical facts and concepts they require for high levels of geometrical thinking (Manning, 2005; Shannon, 2002). Differentiated outcomes could be considered by the teacher when planning this lesson.

Lack of time allowed to children to engage actively with the materials impeded the effectiveness of the task in Lesson 1. The lack of time apportioned to geometry in primary mathematics is acknowledged in the literature (Jones and Mooney, 2003). The physical manipulation of shapes is required to gain a firm understanding of geometrical relationships (Jones and Mooney, 2003; Manning, 2005). In Lesson 2, more time was allocated for the children to be actively engaged in the physical manipulation of shapes and a deeper level of learning was achieved.

### **Implications for future teaching of mathematics across transitions**

At both primary and post-primary levels, it became clear that it is possible to present the children with a seemingly challenging geometric task, allow them struggle through it and apply their geometric knowledge. By teachers allowing and facilitating confusion, children were thereby enabled to develop a much deeper level of understanding.

The importance of the construction of nets was significant. At primary and post-primary level, more time needs to be spent on geometry with hands-on, active learning involving net construction together with construction and manipulation of shapes, rather than activities purely focussed on sorting and classifying, in order to achieve depth of learning.

At post-primary level, knowledge of the primary curriculum content is recommended so that the children's foundational knowledge of geometry upon arrival in post-primary school is understood. Post-primary teachers are currently unsure of students' mathematical knowledge when they arrive from primary (Ní Shúilleabháin, 2015). Likewise primary teachers need to be aware of the post-primary mathematics curriculum (Smith and McCoy, 2011). In geometry specifically, many primary teachers are reluctant to engage in geometry having a degree of uncertainty about the properties of shapes and the various terms used to name sets of shapes, which combine to undermine their confidence in teaching geometry (Haylock, 2001). For meaningful engagement to be made, primary teachers need to understand why geometry is both important in its own right and its importance in laying the foundations for post-primary mathematics as well as science, art and many other subjects. Therefore, information on both curricula should be included for initial and continuing education for primary and post-primary teachers.

Through the transition from primary to post-primary mathematics, students' growth in geometric thinking can be achieved if lesson time is planned for the construction and manipulation of 2D and 3D shapes, developing spatial reasoning for geometry. This should be experienced at both primary and post-primary levels, so that the lacuna in identifying,



developing and supporting a student's capacity for mathematical thinking and reasoning in geometry is addressed.

In relation to awareness of purpose, professional discourse relating to why geometry is important was limited in the early phases of this cycle of lesson study. Interestingly, this was not a question asked until the latter phase of the lesson study cycle. Rather the group focussed on the 'what' to teach and 'how' to teach geometry. The importance of that 'why' question grew when the second lesson was reflected upon as part of this cycle of lesson study. This was an unexpected finding, which has implications for transitions between schools and class levels. Awareness of purpose relates to teachers' mathematics-related beliefs and knowledge which is conceptualised under the foundation dimension of the *Knowledge Quartet*, a framework, based in practice, which proposes a way of thinking about mathematical knowledge in teaching (Tim. Rowland, Huckstep, and Thwaites, 2005). The *Knowledge Quartet* framework focuses on the mathematics of a lesson in action in order to support the development of teachers' mathematical content knowledge and allows for professional development through reflection with others (Turner and Rowland, 2008).

Foundation knowledge is the dimension upon which all the others rest and refers to the teachers' knowledge possessed, informing pedagogical choices and strategies (Corcoran and Pepperell, 2011). This lesson study cycle allowed the teachers gain insights into awareness of purpose for teaching geometry in general and posing rich geometrical tasks in particular. Reflecting upon it further could make a significant contribution to primary teachers having a higher level of engagement with the geometry strand of the syllabus. This would enable a deeper level of understanding be achieved by pupils at post-primary.

In relation to mathematics, teacher professional development, the model of lesson study has increasingly been identified in the literature (Lewis and Tsuchida, 1998; Ní Shúilleabháin, 2015; Sinclair and Bruce, 2015) and through this study as providing promise as a way in which primary teachers can develop deeper content knowledge and powerful lessons. Progression as conceptualised in the van Hiele model of geometric thought in post-primary schools is reliant on students' geometrical experiences and the foundations laid in primary schools. This paper concludes that much work remains to be done in relation to geometry teaching towards building student capacity for mathematical thinking and reasoning.

Finally, how the strands of 2D and 3D shape are introduced at primary level has been identified by the lesson study group as an area to consider investigating further. Some scholars recommend that teachers should blend the study of solid and plane geometry from the outset while others point to the benefits of moving from the solid to the abstract (Manning, 2005; Reys et al., 2004). This is linked to the topic under consideration but outside its scope and could be pursued further in another lesson study cycle.

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# Cuardaigh, Ceistigh, Léigh: Sracshúil ar rogha dánta ó thraidisiún fileata na Gaeilge ar théamaí teagaisc agus foghlama

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## Abstract

Spléachadh ar shé dhán éagsúla ó thraidisiún fileata na Gaeilge roimh an mbliain c.1900 atá sa pháipéar seo. Pléitear le téamaí teagaisc agus foghlama i ngach dán agus áitítear go dtugann na dánta léargas ábhartha a thuilleann aird ó oidí scoile agus ó thaighdeoirí oideachais nua-aimseartha.

This paper gives a cursory glance at six different poems from the Irish-language poetic tradition before c. 1900. Each poem discusses teaching and learning themes. It is argued that the poems offer relevant insights and deserve the attention of both contemporary teachers and education researchers.

*Eochairfhocail:* téamaí teagaisc agus foghlama i bhfilíocht na Gaeilge, téama an oideachais san fhilíocht, insintí liteartha ar an oideachas, stair an oideachais in Éirinn

*Keywords:* teaching and learning themes in Irish-language poetry, the theme of education in poetry, literary narratives of education, the history of education in Ireland

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## Réamhrá

In alt eile a foilsíodh le déanaí san iris seo, rinne mé plé ar an léargas ar chúrsaí oideachais is féidir a dhíorthú ó dhánta ón tréimhse nua-aimseartha, le filí Gaeilge, a bhí ina múinteoirí scoile. Ba mhaith liom, san alt seo, comhthéacs a thabhairt don léargas sin trí iniúchadh gearr a dhéanamh ar ghnéithe de théama an teagaisc agus de théama na foghlama i rogha dánta ón traidisiún fileata roimh an mbliain c.1900. Ar ndóigh, tá nua fhilíocht scríofa i nGaeilge ón mbliain c.1900 ar aghaidh faoi chúrsaí oideachais ag filí iomráiteacha nach raibh ina múinteoirí scoile. Tá eagar curtha ag Máirín Nic Eoin (2010, lgh xxx-xxxi) ar na dánta sin, agus dá bhrí sin, ní gá plé a dhéanamh orthu arís thíos. Ceann de na haidhmeanna atá leis an alt seo ná foinsí agus insintí fileata a bhaineann leis an teagasc agus leis an bhfoghlaim a dhéanamh insroichte agus inaimsithe don ábhar oide, d'oidí scoile agus do thaighdeoirí oideachais i gcoitinne. Tá obair den chineál sin déanta ag scoláirí eile cheana féin. I measc na saothar is tábhachtaí, tá saothair le Fergal McGrath (1979), le Caoimhe Máirtín (Máirtín, 2003), le Máirín Nic Eoin (Nic Eoin, 2010 agus Nic Eoin, 2012) agus le Tom Mullins (Mullins,

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1996). Cé go bhfuiltear ag súil leis go gcuirfidh an páipéar seo le hobair na scoláirí sin, cuirtear san áireamh nach bhfuil sé mar chuspóir ag an alt staidéar cuimsitheach stairiúil a dhéanamh ar gach dán Gaeilge ina bpléitear le cúrsaí oideachais. Is é an cuspóir atá leis an alt ná blaiseadh a thabhairt don léitheoir ar shaibhreas an téama i sé dhán ionadaíocha ó thrí thréimhse liteartha éagsúla d'fhonn a thaispeáint go dtuilleann na dánta go léir aird ó oideachasóirí nua-aimseartha.

### **Tréimhse na Gaeilge moiche: cuardach gníomhach díograiseach don fhírinne**

Is í an liric cháiliúil *Pangur Bán* (Murphy, 1956, lch 2) ón naoú céad an sampla ó thréimhse na Gaeilge moiche a scrúdófar sa chéad chuid seo. Ach sula bhféachfar ar an dán féin, is fiú comhthéacs a thabhairt don anailís trí ghnéithe den chóras oideachais a bhíodh i réim sna mainistreacha (c.500-c.1200) a thabhairt chun cuimhne. Sonraíonn Feargal McGrath (1979, lgh 72-98) nach mbíodh ról coitianta ag na mainistreacha i mbunoideachas páistí ach go mbíodh de nós ag tuismitheoirí páistí a raibh saol na mainistreach i ndán dóibh a chur faoi chúram sagairt nó díthreabhaigh ar dtús chun teagasc a fháil sna scríoptúir agus sa mhóráltacht. Ba é an Bíobla an príomhthéacsleabhar a bhíodh in úsáid acu ach d'fhaigheadh na buachaillí bunús, freisin sa ghramadach, sa reitric agus sa gheoiméadracht (McGrath, 1979, lch 75). Thógtáí ar a gcuid oideachais ansin nuair a théidís isteach go foirmiúil sa mhainistir féin. Luann McGrath go leor foinsí a chruthaíonn go ndéantaí staidéar ar an reitric agus ar an bhfealsúnacht sa Laidin agus sa Ghréigis agus a chruthaíonn go mbíodh béim mhór ar an léitheoireacht i ndisciplíní éagsúla (McGrath, 1979, lgh 76, 98). Cé go bhfuil tuairiscí i nDlí na mBreitheamh ar sheacht ngrád éagsúla d'fhoghlaim reiligiúnach sna mainistreacha, áitíonn McGrath (1979, lgh 95-97) nach bhfuil mórán fianaise eile ann go leanadh na manaigh cúrsaí céimnithe den chineál sin ar aon bhealach docht.

Rud atá cinnte áfach, ná go mbíodh de nós ag na manaigh téacsanna a chóipeáil le cur ar fáil mar théacsleabhair do na scoileanna. 'Scriba' agus/nó 'fer léiginn' a thugtaí de ghnáth ar an saineolaí a chóipeáladh na lámhscríbhinní. Go minic chuireadh an cóipeálaí gluaiseanna i nGaeilge sna himill de na lámhscríbhinní chun cabhrú le scoláirí Éireannacha na téacsanna Laidine agus na téacsanna Gréigise a thuiscint. Ina theannta sin, bhíodh sé de nós ag na scríbhneoirí tuairimí, ciútaí agus fiú dánta pearsanta a bhreacadh síos sna himill de na lámhscríbhinní. I bhfocail McGrath:

The ancient Irish scribe had the engaging habit of occasionally jotting down in the margin and at the end of his manuscript personal observation (as distinct from his glosses). This practice, which was common to the monastic and to the later layscribes, has the merit of revealing to us much of the personality of the copyist (McGrath, 1979, lch 91).

Dán den chineál sin is ea *Pangur Bán* (Murphy, 1956, lch 2) a scríobhadh sna himill de lámhscríbhinn a fuarthas i mainistir Ostarach. Tuilleann sé aird sa pháipéar seo toisc gur machnamh pearsanta é ar nádúr na foghlama agus na scoláireachta agus toisc go bhfuil sé tógtha ar an gcomparáid a dhéanann an manach idir an próiseas foghlama atá aige féin, mar

scoláire, agus an próiseas seilge atá ag a chat bán. Cosúil leis an gcat, díríonn an scoláire a aigne ar a thasc agus is aoibhinn leis a chuid oibre; dála an chait a ghéaraíonn a shúil chun luch a ghabháil, géaraíonn an scoláire a aigne chun déileáil le fadhbanna léinn agus chun coincheapa a thabhairt chun míneadais. Bíonn an cat ar bís nuair a bheireann sé ar luch lena chrúb, agus bíonn ríméad ar an scoláire, freisin, nuair a fhuasclaíonn sé ceist chasta acadúil. Cé go bhfuil cosúlachtaí móra idir próiseas oibre an scoláire agus straitéisí seilge an chait, aithnítear sa dá véarsa dheireanacha go bhfuil a saincheirdeanna uathúla féin acu araon agus go mbíonn ar gach duine a bheith dílis dá dhán dúchasach féin agus iarracht a dhéanamh máistreacht a fháil air. Ó thaobh cúrsaí oideachais de, is dán é seo a chuireann béim ar an bhfoghlaim mar phróiseas ina ndéantar rúin chognaíocha a scaoileadh. Léiríonn an chomparáid in eithne an dáin go bhfuil foghlaim iúraisticiúil thaitneamhach ar siúl ag an scoláire. Is speisialtóir é agus tá an cuardach gníomhach, an díograis, an t-anailísiú agus réiteach fadhbanna ina gcéimeanna tábhachtacha sa phróiseas foghlama céanna:

Messe agus Pangur Bán, cechtar nathar fria shaindán:	(Mise agus Pangur Bán, (gach duine den bheirt againn dírithe ar a shaindán)
bíth a menmasam fri seilgg, mu menma céin im shaincheirdd.	(bíonn a aigne dírithe ar an tseilg) (m'aigne ar mo shaincheird féin.)
Caraimse fos, ferr cach clú oc mu lebrān, lēir ingnu; ní foirmtech frimm Pangur bán caraid cesin a macdán...	(Is breá liom, níos mó ná an clú, díriú) (ar mo leabhar beag, ag iarraidh é a thuiscint;) (níl Pangur Bán in éad liom:) (tá a dhán óg aige féin)...
Gnáth, hūaraib, ar gressaib gal glenaid luch inna línsam; os mé, du-fuit im lín chéin dliged ndoraid cu ndronchéill	(De ghnáth, uaireanta, tar éis streachailte cróga) (gabhtar luch ina líon;) (ach domsa, isteach i mo líon tagann) (argóint dheacair le ciall chasta)
Fúachaidsem fri frega fál a rosc, a nglése comlán; fūachimm chēin fri fēgi fis mu rosc rēil, cesu imdis.	(Géaraíonn sé a shúil ar an mballa) (is gléas foirfe é a shúil;) (géaraím féin, roimh dhúshlán na físe,) (mo shúil shoiléir, cé go bhfuil sí lag.)
Fäelidsem cu ndēne dul hi nglen luch inna gérchrub; hi tucu cheist ndoraid ndil os mē chene am fäelid.	(Bíonn ríméad air agus é ag gluaiseacht go tapa) (nuair a ghabhtar luch ina chrúb ghéar) (nuair a fhuasclaím ceist chasta thábhachtach) (is ormsa a bhíonn ríméad.)

Cia beimmi a-min nach ré	(Aon uair a bhímid mar sin)
ní derban cách a chéile:	(ní thrasnaíonn ceachtar againn ar a chéile)
maith la cechtar nár a dán;	(is maith linn féin ár ndán féin)
subaighthus a óenurán	(aoibhneas a thugann ár ndán féin dúinn féin)
Hé fesin as choimsid dāu	(Is tiarna air féin an té)
in muid du-ngní cach óenláu;	(a mháistríonn an obair a dhéanann sé gach lá)
du thabairt doraíd du glé	(ag caitheamh solais ar an gceist dhorcha chasta)
for mu muid cēin am messe.	(ag mo chuid oibre féin, táim cumasach.)

(Murphy, 1956, lch 2).<sup>1</sup>

### **An tréimhse chlasaiceach: filí ina n-oidí, ina mic léinn agus ina gcriticeoirí liteartha<sup>2</sup>**

Mar a deir Caoimhe Máirtín: “Tháinig spéis agus díograis sa léann dúchais chun blátha leis na bardscoileanna a lean ar feadh ceithre chéad bliain idir 1200 agus 1600” (Máirtín, 2003, 12). Tá go leor ar eolas ag scoláirí faoin gclár oideachais a lean na filí sna scoileanna sin. Tá clú coitianta ar chuntas a scríobh Thomas O’Sullevane<sup>3</sup> sa bhliain 1772 fúthu. Sa chuntas sin, déanann O’Sullevane cur síos ar ghníomhaíochtaí laethúla na mac léinn agus na n-oidí sna scoileanna, pléann sé leis na cáilíochtaí a bhíodh ag teastáil ó mhic léinn agus pléann sé an modh oibre a bhíodh acu.

In alt an-suimiúil le Damian McManus léiríonn sé go bhfuil go leor fianaise sna dánta féin, agus go háirithe sna ‘tráchtas ghradaí’, chun tacú le tuairisc cháiliúil O’Sullevane. Is fiú, dá bhrí sin, achoimre a dhéanamh anseo ar phríomhphointí alt McManus. Sa chéad áit, aontaíonn McManus le O’Sullevane go mbíodh scoileanna scaipthe ar fud na tíre agus go mbíodh sé de nós ag an ábhar file dul i bhfad óna áit dúchais féin chun freastal ar scoil. Léiríonn sé, freisin, gur léir ó na dánta, go mbíodh de nós ag filí freastal ar níos mó ná scoil amháin. Dúirt Eochaidh Ó hEodhasa (c. 1568-1612) i ndán dá chuid, mar shampla, gur fhreastail sé ar scoileanna éagsúla d’fhonn a chuid foghlama a aibiú (‘aipdhioghadh m’fhoghlomae’, luaite in McManus, 2004, lch 101).

Maidir leis an gcúrsa oiliúna féin, dála O’Sullevane, luann McManus léamh, scríobh agus cuimhne láidir i measc na gcáilíochtaí ba thábhachtaí i mic léinn. Tráchtann sé ar scrúdú ag tús an chúrsa agus ar an rangú a dhéantaí ar na mic léinn bunaithe ar a n-aois, ar a gcumas agus ar a stair scolaíochta. Cúrsa sé bliana nó seacht mbliana a bhíodh i gceist sula mbrontaí an chéim dheireanach orthu. Deimhníonn McManus go bhfuil tagairtí sna dánta a chruthaíonn go mbíodh an chumadóireacht sa dorchadas agus an staidéar ar shaothar na máistrí ina ngnéithe lárnaacha den chúrsa oiliúna. Go deimhin, ba chúrsa oiliúna praiticiúil é a chuireadh béim ar scileanna a thabhairt chun foirfeachta trí obair dhian, seachas tríd an ngeit nuálach chruthaitheach. I gcodarsnacht leis an mbéim a chuirtear, sa lá atá inniu ann, ar an gcruthú as an nua, ba í an aithris an modh foghlama ba thábhachtaí i scoileanna na mbard. I bhfocail McManus:

We know that the poet's training was practical in its orientation and that he could achieve a high standard in his profession by emulating his predecessors, especially those who had gained notoriety for their skill and fluency in the medium. Innovation, experimentation and the development of an individual style were not encouraged in the way that imitation was, so that the emphasis in training will undoubtedly have been on a detailed study of the works of master poets (McManus, 2004, lgh 102-103).

Tugann McManus samplaí den scoth ó na dánta a léiríonn na filí mar mhúinteoirí a mhúineadh ealaín na filíochta dá gcuid mac léinn agus mar chriticeoirí liteartha a déilíodh caighdeáin arda. Cé go mbíodh ar na mic léinn obair a dhéanamh go príobháideach agus sa dorchadas ina "n-árasáin" féin, ina dhiaidh sin thugtaí soilse isteach, agus, faoin solas, chuireadh an file a chuid oibre i scríbhinn. Bhailíodh na ranganna le chéile arís ansin, agus chuireadh na mic léinn a gcuid oibre faoi bhráid na máistrí. Bhíodh an scrúdú, an mhion-anailís chúramach agus an ceartú ina ngnéithe lárnacha d'obair na máistrí. Mar a mhíníonn McManus, bhaintí úsáid as téarmaí ar leith dóibh sna dánta: "...sgagadh 'straining, sifting', glanadh 'cleansing', gleódh 'purifying' and breithniughadh 'judging, examining' appear... in the poetry..." (McManus, 2004, lch 113). Bhíodh ar na mic léinn a gcuid oibre a athdhréachtú ansin i bhfianaise mholtaí na máistrí. Scaoiltí na mic léinn abhaile gach Márta don samhradh tar éis do gach ábhar file tuairisc faoina iompar, faoina chumas agus faoina dhul chun cinn a fháil óna ollamh. Ní haon ionadh é, dá bhrí sin, go bhfuil go leor tagairtí i ndánta na mbard don chaidreamh a bhíodh ann idir máistrí agus mic léinn. Mar a deir McManus:

For the most part... students and teachers seemed to form a strong bond and the student's dependence on the teacher, together with his affection for him, is evident in the poetry (McManus, 2004, lch 115).

Dán cáiliúil amháin a thuilleann aird ar leith sa chomhthéacs sin is ea *Anocht Sgaoilid na Sgola* le Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn (c. 1448). Is marbhna é ina gcaointear Fearghal Ruadh Ó hUiginn, úinéir bardscoile. Deartháir leis an údar ab ea Fearghal, agus bhí sé ina mhúinteoir aige, freisin. Tugann an dán léargas ar nádúr an teagaisc agus ar nádúr na foghlama a d'fhaigheadh ábhar file sna bardscoileanna i gcoitinne. Ról an dorchadais agus ról an spáis chuí san fhoghlaim a thugtar faoi deara ar na véarsaí a luaitear anseo thíos. Cosúil le seabhaic óga, chuir na filí tús lena gcuid oiliúna i mbotháin dhorcha áit ar roinn an t-oide rúin a chuid eolais lena dhalta. Ach, is léir, freisin, go gcuireann an file béim ar an dea-chaidreamh a bhíodh ann idir Fearghal agus a chuid daltaí. Geall le printiseacht ullmhaithe ab ea an tréimhse foghlama agus chaitheadh an múinteoir agus an foghlaimeoir tréimhsí fada i bhfochair a chéile. Bhíodh dlúth aithne acu ar a chéile agus is léir go dtaitníodh comhluadar na scoile go mór leis na scoláirí áirithe seo. Ba leasc leo teagascóir nua a fháil tar éis bhás Fhearghail agus bhíodh drogall orthu, de ghnáth, imeacht dá gcuid laethanta saoire ("far fhuath libh labhradh na gcuaich do chluinsin"). Tá an véarsa deireanach thíos spéisiúil óir tagraítear ann don tslí ar ghabh an file ról an oide chuige nuair a fuair a dheartháir bás. Ní



hamháin ceird na filíochta a d'fhoghlaim an printíseach óna ollamh-oide, ach d'fhoghlaim sé ceird na múinteoireachta uaidh, leis, agus ghlac sé leis an teagasc mar dhualgas gairme:

Anocht sgaoidid na sgola, leabtha uadha a n-aontomha: do-ghéna lucht gach leabtha	(Anocht scaipeann an scoil) (beidh na leapacha folamh) (na daoine a bhíodh ina gcodladh sna leapacha)
déra re hucht n-imtheachta... Oide d'iarraidh 'na ionadh, rob usa dhóibh deilioghadh:	(silfidh siad deora agus iad ag imeacht)... (Oide a fháil ina áit) (bheadh sé níos fusa dóibh scaradh óna chéile)
breath bhroide, a Dhé, dá dhalta, dá mbé ag oide iasachta...	(gébheann duairc, a Dhia, dá dhalta) (dá mbeadh sé le hoide iasachta)...
Dom ullmhughadh níor áil lais  mo bheith adhaigh 'na égmáis: gur léig sé ar an énlaith inn, mé a n-énbhoith re hÓ nUiginn.	(Do mo chuid ullmhúcháin níor theastaigh uaidh) (mé a bheith oíche amháin ina égmáis) (go dtí gur lig sé chuig na héin mé) (bhínn in aon bhoth le hÓ hUiginn.)
Ó aois leinbh do léigeadh rinn (Dia dhá íoc re hÓ nUiginn!) gach rún frithir dá bhfaghadh, gur mhithidh dún dealaghadh.	(Ó aois linbh roinneadh sé) ([Go dtuga Dia cúiteamh d'Ó hUiginn!]) (gach rún fuinniúil a d'fhaigheadh sé,) (go dtí go raibh sé in am dúinn scaradh óna chéile.)
An oideacht do-ním aniogh dá dhaltaibh d'éis an fhileadh, Fearghal Ruadh do-roighne soin, truagh, a Choimdhe, nach cosmhoil...	(An teagasc a dhéanaim anois) (dá dhaltaí tar éis a bháis) (ba é Fearghal Ruadh a rinne é,) (is trua, a Thiarna, nach bhfuil sé cosúil lena chuid teagaisc féin...)

(Bergin, 1984, 147-150)<sup>4</sup>.

Tá Michelle O Riordan tar éis plé cumasach a dhéanamh, freisin, ar dhánta a scríobh filí na mbardscoileanna faoi cheird na scríbhneoireachta féin. Sonraíonn sí go mbíodh dánta áirithe in úsáid ag na filí mar uirlisí teagaisc agus tugann sí comhthéacs Eorpach do na cleachtais teagaisc a bhíodh coitianta sna scoileanna Éireannacha. I measc na ndánta a luann sí tá *Madh fiafraidheach budh feasach*<sup>5</sup> le Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh (c. 1387). Is leor an chéad rann a lua anseo chun blaiseadh a fháil ar an dán ina iomláine agus ar an gceiliúradh a dhéanann an dán ar an tslí a n-osclaíonn an fhiosracht intleachtach, agus an obair dhíograiseach chuardaigh, doirse na heagna:

Madh fiafraidheach budh (má chuirtear ceisteanna beifear  
feasach; eolach;)  
glic an éicsi ilcheasach; (tá ealaín na filíochta dúshlánach agus cliste;)  
solas na ceasa ad-chluine, (solas/soiléireacht na faidhbe a chloistear,)  
doras feasa fiafruighe. (doras feasa fiafraí.)  
(O Riordan, 2007, 185-203, is liomsa an t-aistriúchán).

Is sampla é de dhán ina gcuirtear an máistir i láthair go hoscailte mar fhear léannta a thugann moltaí dá chuid mac léinn agus dá chomhfhilí maidir lena gceird. Agus é ag caint faoin dán céanna dúirt McManus: “there is probably no better insight to be had in poetry, as opposed to the grammatical tracts, into the strict academic regime of the bardic schools.” (McManus, 2004, lch 117). Léiríonn O Riordan go bhfuil an dán lán le samplaí den cheartúsáid ba chóir a bhaint as teicnící reitriciúla éagsúla. Is dán fada é (55 rann san iomlán) faoin eolas agus faoi na scileanna a bhíodh ag teastáil ó fhilí chun dán siollach a chumadh. Cuireann an file béim mhór ar ról an cheistiúcháin i bhfoghlaím eolais agus i bhfoghlaím cheird na filíochta. Tríd an dán síos ardaíonn sé ceisteanna faoi chúrsaí gramadaí agus freagraíonn sé na ceisteanna céanna agus é i ról ollamh-oide údarásaigh. Mar a deir Damian McManus faoi:

One cannot but feel that question and answer sessions of this kind were an important part of the training of the aspiring bardic poet, and that, as Ó Dálaigh puts it, ‘questioning’ was ‘the door to wisdom’ (doras feasa fiafruighe...) (McManus, 2004, lgh 120-121).

Thar aon rud eile, cuireann an dán ina iomláine béim ar an obair dhian, ar an bhfoghlaím rialacha agus ar an aithris a bhíonn ag teastáil chun teacht ar an bhfios. Mar a chuireann O Riordan é:

This knowledge is not... a free gift. It is a hard-won expertise, acquired properly only from the teaching of experts and the emulation of them or through instruction by them (O Riordan, 2004, lch 202).

### **An tréimhse iarchlasaiceach: beatha an scoláire**

In ainneoin gur tháinig deireadh le córas oideachais na mbard tar éis Theitheadh na nIarlaí agus in ainneoin gur cuireadh cosc iomlán ar an scolaíocht aimsir na bpéindlíthe, tá go leor dánta ón tréimhse iarchlasaiceach ina bhfaightear tagairtí measúla ar an teagasc agus ar an bhfoghlaím. Saol an mhic léinn atá faoi chaibidil ag an bhfile anaithnid sa dán *Beatha an Sgoláire* (O’Rahilly, 1972, lgh 16-17) ón seachtú haois déag. Dar leis an údar, is méanar don scoláire atá saor ó smacht ceannairí, ó bhuarthaí airgeadais agus ó ghnáth-chúraim oibre agus fheirme. Is féidir leis díriú ar an bhfoghlaím, ar an léann, ar an gceol agus ar a shaol sóisialta. Santaíonn an file saoirse agus aoibhneas stádas an scoláire:

Aoibhinn beatha an sgoiláire  
 bhíos ag déanamh a léighinn;  
 is follas díbh, a dhaoine,  
 gurab dó is aoibhne i nÉirinn.  
 Gan smacht ríogh ná rófhhlatha...  
 gan chuid cíosa ag caibidil...  
 Moichéirghe ná aodhaireacht  
 ní thabhair uadha choidhche...  
 Do-bheir sé greas ar tháiplis,  
 is ar chláirsigh go mbinne,  
 nó fós greas eile ar shuirghe  
 is ar chumann mná finne.

Maith biseach a sheisrighe  
 ag teacht tosaigh an earraigh;  
 isé is crannghail dá sheisrigh  
 lán a ghlaice do pheannaibh.  
 (O'Rahilly, 1972, lgh 16-17).

Sonraíonn Caoimhe Máirtín (Máirtín, 2003, lgh 55-59) gur mháistir scoile iad cuid mhaith de na filí le linn ré na scoileanna scairte in Éirinn. I measc na bhfilí a luann sí, tá na filí cáiliúla Piaras Feirtéar, Seán Ó Conaill, Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin agus Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin. Scríobh siad, uaireanta, faoi théama an léinn agus faoi théama na foghlama agus is é sin an ní atá déanta in *Amhrán na Leabhar* (luaite in Máirtín, 2003, lgh 245-246 agus i gcló in Ó Doibhlin, 2011, lgh 186-189), mar shampla, le Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1785-1848). Tagraíonn an file ar dtús don 'sealad' a chaith sé 'mar mháistir léinn' i measc na ndaoine i bPort Mhac Aoidh agus ansin do na leabhair go léir a chaill sé nuair a chuaigh an bád ina raibh siad á n-iompar go tóin poill tar éis bualadh le carraig i dtimpiste fharraige. Cé go bhfuil rian den áibhéil ar éirim an dáin seo, léiríonn sé go raibh eolas agus cur amach ag máistir scoile ar leabharlann fhairsing, leabharlann a chuimsigh go leor ábhar idir dhiagacht, stair agus léann dúchais agus gur chuir an máistir luach suntasach ar an léitheoireacht leathan i gcoitinne san fhoghlaim:

Dá siúlfainn Éire a's Alba,  
 an Fhrainc, an Spáinn a's Sasana  
 agus fós arís dá n-abrainn é gach aird faoin ré,  
 ní bhfaighinnse an oiread leabhra  
 a b'fharr eolas agus tairbhe  
 ná is mó a bhí chun mo mhaitheasa...

Bhí Comerford a's Ó Hallmharáin  
 a's Céitinn, leabhar an tseanchais  
 a's Saltair mhílis Chaisil ar a dtráchtadh sé.

Bhí sceimhle chath Chluain Tarbh ann  
inar dhíbir Brian na Danair uainn  
a's an tslí gur bhuaigh Maolsheachlainn ar an namhaid i bplé;  
bhí Cath Fionntrá sa leathan-bharc a d'fhág táinte tréith,  
a's Cath Chnoc an Óir a thug ainneir dheas thar sáile léi...  
Bhí lia an choirp a's an anama  
– an Scrioptúr diaga beannaithe,  
an tobar diagachta eagnaí go ndearnathas é.  
Bhí dlí ceart Mhaois ba bheannaithe...  
Leabhar Críche Parthais,  
a's Dochtúir álainn Gallchóir  
a's Eochairsciath an Aifrinn a ba bhreá le léamh...  
(Ó Doibhlin, 2011, lgh 186-189).

Tá roinnt dánta teagascacha anaithnid, ón tréimhse iarchlasaiceach ar marthain, freisin, ina bpléitear lenár dtéama. Sna dánta teagascacha sin cuirtear dea-chomhairle ar an mac léinn faoi ghnéithe den fhoghlaim. Cé gur seánra ársa i litríocht na Gaeilge í litríocht na dea-chomhairle, tháinig bláth faoi leith ar an gcineál sin filíochta sa Ghaeilge tar éis an Fhrith-Reifirméisín. De ghnáth bíonn na filí ag iarraidh dul i gcion ar chreideamh agus ar iompar morálta an léitheora de réir nósanna na seanmóireachta. Sa sampla anseo thíos (Ní Bhuachalla, 2009, lch 58) moltar don dalta tosú amach ar an bhfoghlaim agus é óg, gan aird a thabhairt ar bhaois an tsaoil agus aithne a chur ar Chríost. Gnó cráifeach is ea an fhoghlaim de réir an dáin agus is díol spéise í an bhéim a chuireann an t-údar, sa dá rann dheireanacha atá luaite anseo, ar ról an chinn agus ar áit an chroí san fhoghlaim. Téann tóir an eolais (“bailigh glaneolas go cruinn”) agus tóir an chirt le chéile (“is coinnigh gach ní ina cheart”) agus is é an grá (“glór a bhogann an croí”) sprioc na foghlama, rud a shásaíonn Dia, dar leis an bhfile:

A linbh atá i dtús do shaoil,  
Mo theagasc go cruinn beir leat –

...Ná santaigh ráite baois'  
Ná an dream go mbíd acu;  
Sula dtaga iomad de d'aois,  
Bíodh aithne ar Chríost agat...

I d'óige oscail do mheabhair  
Is bailigh an fhoghlaim leat;  
Óir an glór ná tuigeann an ceann,  
Is cuma é ann nó as...

Bailigh glaneolas go cruinn  
Is coinnigh gach ní ina cheart –

An glór a bhogann an croí  
Is é thaitníonn le Rí na bhFeart.  
(Ní Bhuachalla, 2009, lch 58).

## Conclúid

Spléachadh ar théamaí teagaisc agus foghlama i bhfilíocht na Gaeilge a bhí san aiste seo. Ar an ábhar sin ní bheadh sé bailí snáth smaointeoireachta maidir leis na téamaí sin sa traidisiún ina iomláine a lorg ón tsintéis theoranta thuas. É sin ráite, áfach, cé gur dánta aonair iad, is dánta ionadaíocha iad, freisin, a thugann blaiseadh don léitheoir ar shaibhreas an téama i dtréimhsí liteartha éagsúla. I ngach ceann de na dánta léirítear an fhoghlaim mar ghníomhaíocht a thuilleann meas. Sa dán ón luath-thréimhse is í an fhoghlaim iúraisticiúil thaitneamhach atá faoi sholas ach ina theannta sin, aithníonn an file go n-éilíonn an cuardach díograis agus dúthracht ón mac léinn. Cuireann na dánta ó thréimhse na mbardscoileanna béim ar an gceistiúchán agus ar an obair dhian, freisin, agus tugann siad léiriúchán ar chóras oideachais a bhí tiomnaithe go hiomlán d'fhoghlaim na cumadóireachta fileata de réir rialacha dochta acadúla agus d'aithris a dhéanamh ar na máistrí. Aoibhneas shaol an mhic léinn, tábhacht na léitheoireachta leithne i saol an mhúinteora agus an nasc idir an fhoghlaim agus an eitic a thagann chun cinn mar théamaí sna dánta ón tréimhse iarchlasaiceach.

Tá tábhacht fós ag na topaicí oideachasúla sin go léir d'oideachasóirí an lae inniu. Áitíonn Clare Maloney, mar shampla, go bhféadfadh modhanna oideolaíochta agus córais oideachais araon múnla a fháil ó fhoinsí fileata agus ó na cleachtais a bhíodh coitianta i scoileanna fileata meánaoiseacha. Agus í ag tagairt do scoileanna na mbard, mar shampla, tá an méid seo le rá aici faoi thábhacht an dorchadais do mhic léinn nua-aimseartha:

Today's students must also be given guidance on how to work in the dark, not only students of language, literature and the arts but students of the sciences too. After all, when one comes to the limits of one's scientific knowledge one finds oneself ultimately 'in the dark'; darkness vastly outsizes light in our universe. How to work when one is at the limits of 'the known' is a question of imaginative educational processes that reach into the darkness of that condition and raid the inarticulate (Maloney, 2007, lch 73).

Agus in áit eile, áitíonn sí gur cailteanas ar an gcóras oideachais nua-aimseartha é nach dtugann an córas sin áit lárnach ar an gcuraclam do phróiseas na scríbhneoireachta fileata agus nach bhféachann sé i dtreo an phróisis chéanna do mhúnla foghlama eiseamláireach agus do chruinneshamhail oideachais úr:

The most important educational consequence of the collapse of the bardic schools, however, was that the links between language, learning and the role of poetry and its writing process in education also collapsed... Although the study of poetry continues to be part of education down to the present day, not since then has the hands-on

composition of poetry been as influential in the school curriculum nor has it 'modelled' a way of learning, an overarching educational process (Maloney, 2007, 78-79).

Is tuairimí spéisiúla iad na tuairimí sin a d'eascair as obair idirdhisciplíneach inar tugadh disciplín na litríochta Gaeilge agus disciplín an oideachais le chéile (feic, freisin, de Paor, 2009, lgh 102-114). Tugann Maloney blaiseadh don léitheoir den tairbhe agus den inspioráid is féidir le hoideachasóirí an lae inniu a bhaint as filíocht ó thraidisiún na Gaeilge. Sa chomhthéacs sin, níl amhras faoi ach go dtuilleann na dánta go léir a pléadh san aiste seo tuilleadh taighde agus machnaimh.

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## NÓTAÍ

- 1 Cuirtear aistriúchán scaoilte sa Nua-Ghaeilge ar fáil in aice leis an téacs. Tá an t-aistriúchán bunaithe ar aistriúchán Bhéarla Nagy (Nagy, 2001, lgh 7-8).
- 2 Feic teideal alt Damian McManus (McManus, 2004): 'The bardic poet as teacher, student and critic: a context for the Grammatical Tracts.'
- 3 In *Memoirs of the Marquis of Clanricarde (1722)* agus a bhfuil fáil éasca ar shleachta aisti in *Irish Bardic Poetry* (Bergin, 1984, lgh 5-8).
- 4 Tá an t-aistriúchán scaoilte Nua-Ghaeilge anseo bunaithe ar aistriúchán Béarla le Bergin (Bergin, 1984, lgh 147-150, 280-282).
- 5 Tá téacs iomlán an dáin ar fáil in McKenna (McKenna, 1947, lgh 66-76).





to be viewed as a distinct and respected practice in democratic society.

The exploration is in four parts. The first part acknowledges that the case to be made may be counter-intuitive, especially in view of the dominance of paternalistic conceptions of education in the history of Western civilisation. In contrast to such conceptions, the notion of education as a practice in its own right is brought to the fore.

The second part examines, at closer range, the notion of a practice in its own right, emphasising the point that what makes any practice distinctive is the range of inherent goals that are specific to that practice. An important distinction is made between the internal and external politics of a practice. It is argued that, if the latter become too dominant, a practice can become colonised by pressures from outside and its own inherent goals can become distorted, or become restricted to select groups rather than to humanity in all its diversity.

The third part investigates the main features of education as a practice in its own right. Indications of such features are identified in some landmark writings in the history of Western education. A major precedent is traced, however, to the kinds of practices engaged in by the historical Socrates, as illustrated, for instance, in the earliest group of Plato's dialogues. Investigating this largely eclipsed Socratic precedent highlights, for our own time, some particular merits of education as a pluralistic practice, with its own distinct ancestral tradition.

The final part draws on Hannah Arendt's reflections on the inescapable plurality and natality (i.e. emergent possibility) of the human condition itself. It stresses that a due recognition of such features becomes central where education is adequately understood as a human practice. Some illustrations of the kinds of learning environments that embody these features are given. Finally, it is suggested that, where obligations toward plurality are neglected or ignored, educational practice is likely, wittingly or otherwise, to be party to a reproduction of enduring inequities and acrimonies.

### **A paternalistic precedent**

Family upbringing and formal education are complementary undertakings. But they are not to be identified with each other, and any attempt to do so, or to make one subservient to the other, is likely to disfigure one or both. Familiar historical examples from East and West illustrate the point. Prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain, communist authorities systematically used schools and colleges as a major instrument of state power. That power not only colonised the school curriculum and the approaches to teaching, it also sought to control the influences that prevailed in youth organisations and in homes. Learning, whether in the school or in the home, was to serve the interests of 'scientific socialism.' Among Western countries, Ireland provides one of the clearest examples of persisting church control of schooling. Current controversies over the use of a baptism clause for admission, even the possibility of its use, illustrate how church power reaches beyond the school itself to influence important decisions on upbringing in the home. Central to this has been an insistence on viewing the school as a seamless part of the parish, or wider Catholic community (Catholic School Partnership, 2011). Another example of the reach of this control is the exemption secured by Catholic authorities from key provisions of the Employment Equality Act, 1998 (see Morrissey, 2013).

What has historically enabled such control to be exercised in the Irish context has not been an elaborate state machinery of repression like that of former Eastern bloc countries. Rather, it has chiefly been a highly paternalistic concept called ‘patronage’, with deep roots in Ireland’s educational past. The fact that such a concept was given a vigorous new lease of life by the 1998 Education Act, despite the pluralist rationale in that act’s preamble, makes it all the more necessary to explore the roots of the concept now. In particular, it is necessary to reveal the inbuilt inhospitality of the concept of patronage to the educational needs of a pluralist democracy.

It is well known that chief secretary Stanley’s provision for the establishment of the Irish national school system in 1831 sought “to unite in one system children of different creeds” (‘Stanley Letter’, quoted by Hyland and Milne, 1987, pp. 100-101). The device chosen by Stanley to achieve this aim, however, was precisely one that served in time to undermine the aim itself. The Board of Commissioners established by Stanley’s initiative was to invite joint applications for funding for schools from persons of standing in local communities who would become ‘local patrons’ for the schools; for instance, “the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy of the parish”, “One of the clergymen, and a certain number of parishioners professing the opposite creed” (quoted by Hyland and Milne, 1987, pp. 104, 105, 101).

Because Presbyterian authorities boycotted the new system, as did large numbers of Church of Ireland clergy, the national school system had almost become *de facto* denominational by 1850. Encouraged by this success against the odds, and following the decisive Synod of Thurles of that year, Catholic demands to secure additional powers for patrons proceeded in a more aggressive key in the second half of the 19th century. Further consolidation of patrons’ powers took place after the British administration was replaced by an Irish government in the 1920s, and that control became ever stronger in subsequent decades (see O’Connell, 1968). Not only did this long process concentrate crucial powers in the hands of patrons, it also occasioned the cultivation of a specific managerial prowess in ecclesiastical quarters; one that was jealously guarded and that was largely exclusionary of other interests, whether parental, municipal, community-based or whatever. This history has been well documented in major studies such as: Akenson (1975), Tittle (1983), Farren (1997), O’Donoghue (1999), Coolahan, (1981/2017). Variants of such a history can also be traced in other countries, particularly in clashes between church and state for control of schools. Common to most variants is not only a strong desire to advance the sphere of influence of one’s own denomination or interest group, but also an essentially paternalist conception of education itself.

Against such a view, I’m keen to show that formal education, if it is to be regarded as a coherent and defensible practice, has inherent imperatives of its own. These arise from the nature of the practice itself, as distinct from obligations that spring from outside the practice – from a church, state, political party or other body. Central among the inherent imperatives of education is to engage in learning practices that cultivate human potentials while seeking to do proper justice to the individuality and the plurality of the human condition. I’m aware that this argument may seem like a counter-intuitive one. For instance, an initial objection to it might run as follows: ‘At the end of the day a philosophy of education must depend on a philosophy of life – Christian, Marxist, Islamic, Neoliberal or whatever. So education is

essentially a contested field of action. Its goals spring in the main from the values of the body or bodies that control the education system.' An endless supply of confirming instances can be called on in support of such an objection, and to show the historical 'naturalness' of exclusionary pedagogies and of paternalistic forms of leadership in education. Such confirmations are supplied not only by empirical evidence from history and the social sciences but also by a substantial range of philosophical sources.

Examples of the empirical evidence include diverse instances like the following: the subordination of colleges and places of higher learning to ecclesiastical discipline over many centuries in Western Christendom; the subjection of education systems to the political will of the party in power, whether a Napoleon, a Politburo, or a Neoliberal government; the absorption and recasting of educational goals under the influential sweep of transnational bodies like the OECD. (Boyd, 1994; Matthews, 2012; Maclure, 1998; OECD/Gurría, 2016).

Support for the subordination of educational practice to a superior body can also be found in classical texts of Western civilisation like Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*. In such sources, the superior body is identified as the state (polis) and, in Plato's case, this was possibly an ironic gesture. In any case, it wasn't for some centuries that such hierarchical conceptions became widely incorporated into schooling. That change was associated with Christianity becoming institutionalised as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and also with important developments in theology that occurred at this time. Probably the most influential of these developments was the seminal influence of St Augustine (353-430AD), not least his monumental work *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*. This helped to recast Christianity itself along Platonist lines: an upper world of celestial beauty and order and a lower world of human depravity and sinfulness from which fallen humans must be continually safeguarded. A paternalistic tenor also subtly infused Augustine's specific book on education, *De Magistro (The Teacher)*. It is more overt in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), and the *Jesuit Ratio Studiorum* (1599). In recent times it appears in more urbane form, but scarcely less paternalistic where educational policy and practice are concerned, in papal documents on education since Vatican II. In these, education is still seen as an undertaking within the context of evangelisation. While emphasis is properly placed on "Asserting that culture and education cannot be subservient to economic power and its working", there is a notable absence of any similar remark about subservience to ecclesiastical power (Vatican , 2014, par.b).

A paternalistic view of education has, of course, found some notable critics, if infrequent ones, within Western traditions of learning. Here one could include some writings by Erasmus in the early 16th century, Montaigne in the later 16th, Kant in the 18th and early 19th; writings that incisively challenged dominant attitudes and practices in the education of children and youths. Of writers who dealt more systematically with education, one might recall the recurring ardent appeals to freedom in Rousseau's *Émile*, or John Dewey's renewed probings of educational issues from a democratic perspective throughout his long philosophical career.

The educational writings of authors such as these still stand as landmarks. Yet they are counter-currents to dominant educational understandings which had long become cast in hierarchical moulds. Institutionalised paternalism could, in fact, accommodate itself to

widely different stances, not least to attacks arising from Enlightenment criticisms of religious or royal prerogatives. For instance, the unseating of ecclesiastical authority in French education with the Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath did not grant the decisive voice in matters educational to practitioners – i.e. to teachers and school leaders. In fact, the educational bureaucracy and hierarchy Napoleon initiated was more far-reaching in control and influence than anything in the Ancien Régime. Instances like this serve to show that where paternalism of one kind or another becomes institutionalised in education, so also does a tendency to think of education itself in sectional or denominational terms: the provision of education comes to be viewed mainly in terms of different traditions – often rival or opposed traditions. This has had many enduring consequences, even to our own day. Among the most decisive is that when pluralism in education is advocated as a policy goal today, it is natural to think of this as a plurality of school types, as distinct from catering for plurality within each school or learning environment. A further consequence, but one that has received little enough critical scrutiny, is that the question of justice in education comes to be approached from within the perspectives of the different traditions. Thus a Catholic conception of justice in education might do battle with a secular-humanist one, or a socialist conception might seek to displace a Christian democrat one. In such circumstances, however, a conception of justice in education per se tends to become eclipsed. Such a conception would properly arise not mainly from any ‘ism’, but from understanding education as a practice in its own right, with obligations that are prior to what individual traditions have to say, whether about justice, or equality, or the aims of education itself.

These last remarks may help to make more concrete the counter-intuitive nature of the case I’m seeking to argue. If education were widely understood as a practice in its own right, that case might be a more self-evident than a counter-intuitive one. This calls on us then to explore the notion of a practice in its own right, and to continue then with an exploration of education as such a practice. This should help to identify key practical consequences for how plurality is to be adequately understood for educational purposes.

### **The idea of a practice in its own right**

To suggest that something is a practice in its own right – say architecture, medicine, nursing – is not to say that the practice thereby has an absolute autonomy. It is not to suggest that it can be independent of all influences arising from outside the practice – most notably perhaps political, religious, commercial, or ideological influences. Firstly, it is to suggest, with authors like Alasdair MacIntyre (2007) and Joseph Dunne (2005), that there are some human goals (values if you like), that are inherent to anything that can properly be called a practice. That’s to say they are definitive of the particular expertise of the practice and inform its ethical orientations. This is a crucial point because only in such a context can the word ‘practitioner’ be accurately and meaningfully used. Secondly, it is to suggest that the inherent goals of a practice cannot be adequately conceived in the first place if they are to be understood mainly in the light of the external influences that invariably play on the practice. For example, the inherent goods of medicine as a practice include the accurate diagnosis and treatment of illnesses, the saving of lives endangered by illness or injury, the promotion of healthy

lifestyles. But consider what happens if what is to count as 'illness' or 'healthy lifestyle' can be decided by practitioners only in conformity with influences brought to bear by political, commercial, religious or other external influences. In such cases – 20th century history alone provides numerous examples – the inherent goals of the practice become distorted or compromised from the start.

We might initially ask here: What would the inherent goals of education as a practice in its own right look like? A preliminary answer might suggest that the key goals of such a practice include: firstly, to uncover those potentials for constructive thought and action that are native to each individual human being; secondly, to cultivate those potentials through imaginative, sustained and renewed engagements with inheritances of learning; thirdly, to try to ensure that such learning engagements bring enduring benefits to others as well as to the individual learner. We can already see that things like individuality and plurality arise as key educational issues here, and I'll probe these further in the next section. For now, however, I just want to point out that goals like the three just mentioned can count as *prima facie* credible candidates in a universal sense for education as a practice in its own right. Credible candidates in this sense are very different from prescriptions, proscriptions or anything that can be imposed by decree.

Deliberating on the goals of a practice and making decisions on priorities for action involves politics in one form or another. That's an inescapable fact of life, and it remains as true of formal education as it does of medicine or archaeology. In acknowledging this, however, it's important to distinguish such politics from party politics, or religious politics, or commercial politics or other politics, whether at local, national or international level. More particularly, it's important here to dismantle the faulty idea that education is, of its nature, a 'contested' or 'contestable' field of action. As a practice with its own goals it is no more 'contestable' than is nursing or engineering or pharmacy. The issue of contestability becomes central only where external pressures become so dominant that they largely colonise or obscure the inherent goals of the practice.

Every practice worthy of the name is attended by an internal politics and an external politics. The internal politics involve deliberations, sometimes disputes, among the practitioners themselves over how the inherent goals of the practice are best to be defined, prioritised, organised and pursued. And the internal politics of the practice cannot be fruitfully carried on unless capable practitioners are allowed adequate scope; scope to share ideas and to develop ways of doing things that reveal themselves to be convincingly better than the present state of the art. Also crucial to success in this venture are the vibrancy, coherence and repute of the research community for the practice in question. To the extent that the research community lacks these qualities, to the extent that its own goals have been compromised by monetary, political or other forces, the yield of fertile ideas for developing the practice is likely to be diminished. In summary, the internal politics of a practice can be in healthy order only insofar as there are well-informed convictions among practitioners about the distinctive goals of the practice and a shared willingness to uphold and develop these goals.

The external politics of a practice are concerned with the interplay of influence between the practitioners and their leaders on the one hand and the reigning powers-that-be in

society on the other. From the side of the powers-that-be, whether autocratic, democratic, or other, there are invariably desires for more control. Such desires characteristically seek, in milder or more forceful measure, to harness the inherent goals of a practice and to align these better with the strategic interests of the reigning powers. Sometimes such extension of control can reach to a recasting or disfigurement of the practice. Historical research furnishes many examples of practices becoming colonised in this unhealthy sense. Examples include: routine discriminations in law, such as in theocratic, penal or apartheid structures; coercive uses of medicine, such as compulsory sterilisation programmes, certification of political dissidents as insane, or euthanasia programmes for social misfits (Kershaw, 2015, p. 206). Where educational practice is concerned, we have already cited examples above from East and West.

Although any practice is distorted where it is forced to yield to the march of powerful external forces, no practice can hope to be free from an external politics. Such freedom is illusory. Every practice has a history, and only if it could be carried on independently of that history, and of the social influences of the society in which it is pursued, could such freedom be realised. Now a perceptive grasp of such historical realities is needed if a practice is to stand robust in engaging in its external politics. Such political insights also provide a better basis for the actions needed to transform fruitful developments in the practice into lasting improvements. But it speaks ill of a practice if its practitioners become comfortable bedfellows of the state, church, commerce or other institutionalised power, even where coercive influences are not a feature in the relationship. Where the relationship becomes cosy, considerations other than the proper ones invariably gain prominence in the exercise of influence and the shaping of policy decisions. The core necessity in such formal relationships is one of informed trust, based on mutual acknowledgement of inherent purposes and of capable authority. Where such a trust prevails between the major practices and the organs of government in society, the practitioners are transparently accountable to the public for the resources the practice has received from public funds. It takes time to build up such trust, but it cannot be accomplished if practitioners are made accountable – usually through ill-judged government policies – for fruits ('outcomes') other than those that are genuinely of the practice in question.

### **Features of education as a practice in its own right**

In the previous section three inherent purposes of education as a practice in its own right were initially identified: (a) uncovering constructive potentials that are native to each individual; (b) cultivating such potentials through renewed imaginative engagements with inheritances of learning; (c) promoting practices of learning that bring enduring benefits to others as well as to the individual learner. To argue like this is to say that a learning environment that is truly educational is marked less by allegiance to a particular party, church or group, and more by a commitment to building and sustaining a vibrant, pluralist, community of enquiry. It is to say moreover that teachers, as far as possible, need to become discerning authors of their own work. This ethical orientation would distinguish teachers from a workforce whose practices are mainly dictated by conformity with inherited routines

or imposed directives, or by any reluctance to engage constructively with teaching and learning issues. It is also to say that students or pupils need to become active and responsible participants in their own learning, thus enhancing their human capacities and continually discovering new aspects of their own identity.

If one were to seek historical precedents for such learning environments, and for such an ethical orientation for educational practitioners, one needs to reach farther back than the works of the critical authors mentioned earlier: Dewey, Kant, Rousseau, Montaigne, Erasmus. A major source can be found in the educational work of Socrates, as portrayed for instance in the early writings of Plato. The *Apology* is particularly illuminating among these writings because in this courtroom drama, Socrates does what he doesn't do elsewhere: he provides an explicit account at his trial of the rationale for his public educational work. In the course of his defence, Socrates makes clear the single-minded vision that inspired his life and actions. Nowhere does he teach anything in a doctrinal sense, his account of his actions gives much promising food for thought where the ethical tenor of teaching and learning is concerned. These actions make an appeal to purpose and meaning; an appeal to that for the sake of which life is lived, or ought to be lived. Socrates's account to the court reveals that the inspiration of his work was a 'divine sign.' This was communicated to him not through any of the office-holders of the polis, but through the oracle which spoke the mind of the god at Delphi; for the Greeks a supreme authority.

Socrates could have responded to the god's declaration that he was 'the wisest of men' by establishing an elite academy with its own 'teachings' and high fees. This would almost certainly have saved him from being charged and prosecuted. He could have enjoyed a reputation of being first among the sophists; controversial indeed, but financially well-off and no threat to the established order. In seeking, however, to disprove the oracle's declaration, Socrates brought to life forms of teaching and learning that were strikingly different from anything practised in the schools of the sophists. Particularly striking is how quickly the certainties of the sophists became unsettled when opened up for critical scrutiny. No less striking is the ease with which a diversity of participants and onlookers (including readers many centuries later) can pursue the fresh paths of questioning and reasoning that are now opened up. From his experiences with the sophists and other luminaries of Greek intellectual life, Socrates eventually drew a conclusion with insights of singular educational promise. Unfortunately this conclusion sealed his own fate. Not only that; his insights were also more often disregarded than embraced by mainstream Western philosophy, and by institutions of learning in Western civilisation. In any case, the *Apology* reports Socrates voicing his insights as follows:

Real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us 'The wisest of you is he who has realised, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless' (*Apology*, 23 a-b).

At first sight the declaration that “human wisdom is really worthless” doesn’t look promising for anyone who would be a teacher. The remark, however, is a good example of Socratic irony. The question has to be asked: Why would someone who spent most of his adult life committed to the collective pursuit of learning make such a remark? The most likely answer would seem to be that Socrates understood that as human knowledge advances, so does human ignorance; or more precisely, so should an awareness of the immensity of what remains unknown, and possibly unknowable, by mere humans.

In practical terms, this kind of orientation expresses itself in the conviction that learning is best undertaken as a collective kind of enquiry, dedicated to seeking truth, whatever the topic or theme of the investigation, but always open to criticism and fresh perspectives. A key point here is that such perspectives would be called for not just from like-minded people, but in progressive degree from the wider plurality of humankind. This is a seeking in which those involved are prepared to contribute their best ideas to date, and to learn from the critical appraisals of all contributions. To call this a ‘Socratic dialogue’ would be true enough. But this phrase is misused in many walks of life today wherever ‘dialogue’ is seen only as a method or a technique, to be used as a strategy for procuring a pre-specified outcome. Such misuse, whether by managers, by military personnel, or by teachers themselves, obscures decisively the underlying Socratic orientation, or ethical conviction. It also loses sight of the real meaning of the very significant Greek term *ethos*.

Where experiences of learning are promoted and developed along the lines sketched above, the inherent goods of educational practice can be seen to include the following as central:

- ⌘ The unforced disclosure to learners of their own particular talents and limitations as they encounter mathematics, music, woodwork, languages, and so on.
- ⌘ The quickening of interest provoked by finding oneself in new imaginative neighbourhoods in these and other subjects.
- ⌘ The new reserves of energy and motivation springing from even modest learning achievements and their affirmation.
- ⌘ The acknowledgement by fellow students and by a teacher of one’s specific contribution to a topic being explored.
- ⌘ The attentive restraint that enables one to listen to and think about the standpoints of fellow-learners.
- ⌘ A capacity for respecting genuine differences, promoted through learning environments where encounters with human plurality are regularly experienced in concrete ways.
- ⌘ The emergence of a keen awareness that *ethos* is a characteristic of learning environments that have to be painstakingly built and renewed, as distinct from anything associated mainly with the powers or prerogatives of church or state.

It might be thought that what has been described in the previous paragraphs is possible only in advanced forms of learning, such as in a university graduate school. This, however, would be a basic mistake. Those who probably take most naturally to concrete manifestations of difference – of colour, religion, ethnic origin and so on – are young children. Only through sustained involvement in exclusionary forms of learning – at home, at school or elsewhere



– do humans become habituated in the stance that such differences are indicators of superior or inferior worth. I'm not suggesting that such exclusionary forms of learning are advanced mainly in order to create divisiveness, though such a motive has been all too frequently to the fore in the past. Where such divisiveness results from segregated forms of formal education, it is probably more from an absence of encounters with a diversity of others than from anything deliberately divisive. That's to say, an absence of contact with those whose dis-similarities provide regular antidotes to the chauvinisms that might otherwise advance unnoticed. A key consequence of this point is that educational practice should begin as it means to continue: defining educational environments as places where the plurality of humankind is naturally and regularly encountered.

This brief characterisation of the features of education as a practice in its own right contrasts strongly with any system that removes the essentials of governance from the learning community itself and that gives to the 'stronger party' the power to impose its own stamp on the conduct of learning. The 'stronger party' here can be seen not only as authoritarian rulers of the past, but any institutionalised power – political, religious, commercial or other – which is content to view education more as a strategic instrument than a distinctive practice.

### **Taking pluralism seriously**

It wasn't until the 19th century that universal primary education began to emerge in Western countries as a demand that governments had to meet. This fact alone, more than any other single piece of evidence, shows the centuries-long hold of the idea that education was essentially for the few and would be wasted on the many. The Socratic example examined in the previous section bears witness to a contrary orientation; an orientation that never became a dominant force in Western educational history. Yet this is an orientation which can rightly lay claim to being a definitively educational tradition; crucially moreover, a non-partisan tradition. Such a tradition bears witness to practices of teaching and learning that seek to embody practical virtues like the following:

- ✎ they are non-coercive;
- ✎ they are inviting to newcomers;
- ✎ they help to uncover one's previously undiscovered potentials and limitations;
- ✎ they regard inheritances of learning as potential conversational partners;
- ✎ they characteristically subject received wisdom and unacknowledged assumptions to criticism;
- ✎ they advance higher levels of proficiency so that enquiry can more fruitfully proceed;
- ✎ they promote through concrete learning experiences a deeper understanding and tolerance of human differences;
- ✎ they encourage the unfolding of a vibrant sense of personal identity, while supporting a similar unfolding among fellow-learners;
- ✎ they cultivate an ethos of community where diversity is embraced.

In short, we discover here a family of learning practices that are predisposed to be hospitable to plurality. This predisposed hospitality gains further educational significance when viewed in the light of insights provided by two notable 20th century thinkers. In this connection, I want firstly to highlight the educational import of Hannah Arendt's remarks on plurality and natality in *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1999). Secondly, I'm keen to stress few distinctive ethical insights arising from Martin Buber's Heidelberg address of 1926, translated under the title 'Education' (Buber, 2004).

Of the three forms of human activity analysed by Arendt – 'labour', 'work', 'action' – education falls chiefly under the last of these. Unlike 'labour', its main concern is not with producing the vital necessities for survival. Unlike 'work', it is not primarily concerned with creating artefacts and structures that progressively alter the material environment. The main concern of 'action' is the attempted betterment of the conduct of human affairs. 'Action', for Arendt, is the form of activity that intervenes to promote changes for the better in beliefs, attitudes, laws, practices, customs, traditions, and the like. It is primarily interaction, whether face-to-face or indirectly. 'Action', writes Arendt, "corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" (p. 7). And on plurality she writes: "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (p. 8). A similar insight is captured by Hans-Georg Gadamer's perceptive remark that "to understand at all is to understand differently" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 293). Being disposed to seek insights from unfamiliar quarters is thus disclosed as key virtue of educational practice. So is the effort to accomplish gradually the necessary fluencies required, whatever the field(s) of study in question.

Arendt's emphasis on natality is also directly relevant here. She points out that "action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something new, that is, of acting" (p. 9). Where action of an educational kind is concerned – i.e. the actions which constitute education as a practice – the newcomer is anyone and everyone who is to be encountered in undertakings of formal learning. 'Newcomer', however, can also refer to the birth of new possibilities, or of new difficulties, through the diverse actions that unfold in learning environments. So here one could include: the newcomers to a classroom that a teacher meets at the beginning of the school year; the diverse possibilities that begin to flow and ebb among learners as new paths of learning are embarked upon; the different perspectives that come to light in teachers' engagements with fellow practitioners; the new questions that are discovered for investigation through the collective endeavours of students and teachers. Engaging fruitfully with such newcomers underlines the necessity, on a teacher's part, of something like the predisposition to be hospitable to plurality. It also explains why the nurturing of such a predisposition is as much an imperative for teacher education – initial and CPD – as it is for educational practice more widely. The ethical energy of such a predisposition is memorably captured by Martin Buber in his remarks on the 'unerotic' character of educational practice. Of the practitioner he writes:

He enters the school-room for the first time, he sees them crouching at the desks, indiscriminately flung together, the mis-shapen and the well-proportioned, animal faces, empty faces, and noble faces in indiscriminate confusion, like the presence of the created universe; the glance of the educator **accepts and receives them all**. He is assuredly no descendant of the Greek gods, who kidnapped those they loved (p. 112) (emphasis added).

The inescapability of plurality in any adequate understanding of the human condition points to another inescapability: the obligation constitutive of educational practice to include rather than to segregate, and to do so openly and wholeheartedly. It is an obligation that from the start extends to each concrete human being as student, regardless of differences in gender, colour, ethnic background, religion, age, intellectual ability, sexual orientation, or socio-economic standing. But it is an obligation that may be plausibly avoided where denominational or other sectional conceptions of education have become ingrained in established custom and practice. This is not to suggest that there should not be special provision schools for learners with specific learning difficulties that cannot be dealt with in mainstream schools. Neither is it to say that students would be denied an opportunity to specialise in their preferred fields of study when there is evidence available that such choices can be made with due discernment and maturity. It is merely and simply to suggest that the learning environments of mainstream education should, as far as possible in the normal conduct of practice, engage the human condition in its full plurality. It is also to suggest that such learning environments are to be properly staffed with educational practitioners who are capably, caringly and venturesomely at home in such environments. It is finally to suggest that, where such an obligation is neglected or ignored, educational practice is likely, wittingly or otherwise, to be party to systematic reproduction of inequities, resentments, and antagonistic divisions.

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#### NOTES

Further authors whose educational works might be included in varying degrees in this critical company include Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Herbart (1746-1841), Froebel (1782-1852), Montessori (1870-1952).

In quoting extracts from Arendt and Buber, I haven't altered the gendered use of language.

