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Student Conference
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That puts me in my place! Locating my study within a paradigmatic framework

Kathleen Smyth

This paper will focus on how the teaching of reading comprehension is currently organised within the mainstream primary school setting where children with special educational needs (SEN) are supported. This research will aim to help teachers respond to the inclusion of children with SEN in our classrooms from the perspectives of the home and school as advocated by Lynch (2007). It will outline my epistemological and ontological stance and explore how this will shape subsequent methodology.

Silverman (2000) contends that paradigms are perspectives that inform the way educational provision is planned and delivered. In essence paradigms are models that inform practice and research and in this instance they will inform the teaching of reading comprehension.

I will demonstrate how my developing research questions relate to the interpretive paradigm that I have presented and I will demonstrate how the interpretive paradigm within which I locate my study might inform my research design. Outlining strategies for 'framing' my research both philosophically and theoretically is important. Situating my research paradigmatically within a philosophical framework will enable me to theorise my research problem and enable me to link my own research agenda with the philosophical and theoretical perspectives underpinning it. This will make it possible for me to find my own philosophical voice as a researcher. This will help me to articulate and clarify where I am presently located in my thinking around these concepts thus declaring: "That puts me in my place!"

Keywords: Theoretical perspectives, Paradigm, Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology

Corporal punishment in Irish schools during the 1950s

Aisling Macken

Corporal punishment is the use of pain to correct misbehaviour (Straus and Stewart, 1999). Social research studies on the topic are rare in their consistency in describing it as “detrimental to children’s wellbeing and ethically unacceptable” (Baumrind, 2002. 581).

Maguire and O’ Cinnéide (2005) note that excessive physical punishment was widely used in school and home environments in the decades following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921 which today would be defined as abusive and illustrate the refusal by the Irish government to limit its use by parents and teachers or to differentiate legitimate from excessive punishment. Despite this, there is a paucity of academic research in an Irish context.

In this presentation I will investigate the origins and development of the phenomenon of corporal punishment throughout history and examine the understanding we can gain from the literature of how this practice came to be extensively abolished in the 20th century. I will explore corporal punishment in the cultural and sociological context of the 20th century Irish education system, the conceptualisation of childhood at the time and the protective legal instruments in place for children. I will consider the psychological and sociological theories which may provide insight into the child’s ability to learn and their relationship with their teacher to help us to derive understanding of how the interplay of interdependent relationships in a child’s life can create an insightful picture of their learning experience at school.

This presentation seeks to create an awareness of the practice of corporal punishment in 20th century Ireland and of the emotional dimensions of the teacher-child relationship.

The Leprechaun and the Dickey Bow complicate in equal measure: Issues of learning in group string pedagogy

Patrick early

Abstract for a conference to encourage music teachers to be more courageous.

Moving in the direction of truth from a post positive paradigm (Popper, 1934) and underpinned by post structuralist examinations of text (Foucault, 1969), attention is drawn to discourse who's main function appears to be to reinforce an archetypal brand.

While there is much to be learnt from tradition, comodification of the imagined past frustrates real attempts to address primary learning issues leaving students void of cultural capital comparable with other disciplines relative to time invested.

In the creation of a national identity post the founding of the state in 1922 the underlying discourse emanating from both new and old colonialist (Freire 1970), has resulted in a dichotomous and covert paralysis. (MEND 2002). Pedagogical string praxis must withstand influences punctuated by branding, perception and misinformation.

The leprechaun: epitomising an ancient friendly guardian of tradition presiding over all things vernacular, cuts a bemused figure who cannot fully understand his antithesis: innovation, and its 'corrosive' influences which threaten to pollute ironically O'Riada's, 'river of sound' (O'Shea, 2008).

The dickey bow: representative of an older colonialist hegemony, wielding the baton of control and subjugation, gate keeping attempts to enter the 'imagined museum of musical works' (Goehr, 2007) complicates with sophisticated appeal in equal measure, methods which reinforce a similarly elitist and exclusionary competitive structure.

Imbedded in discourse and institutions, these imperceptible elephants in the classroom make life difficult for generalist teachers who struggle to gain confidence with their own abilities to address real pedagogical issues like intonation, bowing technique, posture or a diverse music repertoire void of ownership. The teacher having established the security of the known, must now introduce the unfamiliar, where 'other' is unknown to ether.

Keywords: discourse, impartiality, pedagogy, teacher.

What makes Irish urban primary disadvantaged schools 'tick' throughout the change process for literacy

Elizabeth Farrell

The proposed research will focus on why some DEIS schools have made improvements in Literacy, supported by the First Steps Reading programme and the factors that supported or deterred improvement and innovation. The researcher is interested in going beyond the statistical data and exploring 'what' and 'how' changes have occurred or not, using a qualitative approach. The proposed study will use a comparative multi-case study approach; with the dominant instrument being semi-structured interviews to explore 3 urban DEIS primary schools in their real-life situations rooted in their complexities.

Research to-date has largely focused on achievements and pupil learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy (Smyth et al., 2015; Sheils et al., 2014; Weir and Denner, 2013). It is timely to disentangle the 'portrait' (Grbich, 2004) of an improving urban DEIS school (Tuohy, 2008; Geijsel et al., 2009; MacGilchrist et al., 2004; Keursten et al., 2006) to get behind the statistics of literacy improvement (Shiel et al., 2014; Weir and Denner, 2013) to explore infrastructures (Keursten et al., 2006) and 'knowledge productivity' (Geijsel et al., 2009), using First Steps Reading (2004) as the stimulus for discussion in 3 urban DEIS primary schools in Dublin. An exploration of the levers that have supported or hindered school improvement (Keursten et al., 2006; MacGilchrist et al., 2004).

It is beneficial to explore from a whole school and individual perspective which models of professional development have made an impact on DEIS schools (Kennedy, 2007; Joyce and Showers, 2002; West-Burnham, 2011). There is ongoing professional development support to teachers (PDST) however it is timely to explore how this support services is perceived and if it has impacted on the school with the First Steps Reading programme (2004) as the focal point.

The research is an exploration of what stimulates and hinders teachers to drive their own learning and in tandem to support 'school-wide improvements' (MacGilchrist et al., 2004, p.32). The 'improving school' needs 'systematic, sustained effort' (Van Velzen et al., 1985, p.34) and has this been attained in the eyes of the DEIS school?

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Máire Ní Ríordáin

Teacher as Researcher – Supporting Risk-taking

Engaging in practitioner research provides valuable opportunities for teachers to improve their practice, their understanding of their practice, and the situation in which their practice takes place. It can empower teachers to critically examine an experience that demonstrates the potential that they can be influential researchers within their educational situations and promote educational change. However, risk-taking is an inherent aspect of educational change and engaging in practitioner research. Perceptions can inhibit teacher engagement in new pedagogical practices and fear of public failure and losing control influence teachers' perceptions of risk. A number of research projects, with teachers central to the research process, will be explored in this talk. Results indicate that pre-service and in-service teachers harbour a range of uncertainties not only with learning how to teach mathematics but also with learning to engage in action research. A case can be made that doubts about one's efficacy as a mathematics teacher are sometimes difficult; however, through action research, this sense of uncertainty can be recognized, accepted, and addressed in a positive and productive manner. Similarly, difficulty is also encountered in relation to culture, timetabling and support structures at a school level. Significant and long-term education reform is inexorably linked to the capabilities and willingness of teachers to encompass and take action on the uncertainties that emerge, which is difficult given that they teach in a time of high accountability and focus on high-stake testing. Therefore, supporting risk-taking in professional learning for educational change is important.

How Teachers Influence Student Learning and Achievement in Mathematics: Preliminary Findings from the Quantitative Phase

Maria McMahon

This presentation will explore the quantitative data analysis approach that was taken in my mixed methods study, which investigates how teachers influence student learning and achievement in mathematics. A brief selection of findings that have emerged from the quantitative data analysis will be discussed in relation to; how they correlate with the literature review, how they were integrated into the qualitative phase of the study, and how they compare and can be built upon through analysis and findings from the qualitative interviews.

'The problem of disadvantage'

Jean McGowan

In Ireland the underachievement in educational attainment of children from low socio-economic (SES) areas, also termed disadvantaged areas, compared with the achievement of children from higher SES areas persists (Weir and Denner, 2013). The impression that the myriad of State sponsored interventions designed to 'tackle the problem of disadvantage' (Dempsey, 2002) over the past three decades is indicative of a political concern to create equity in the educational system may be otherwise if viewed through a critical theory lens.

The literature suggests that the educational system operates from a middle class perspective (Bourdieu, 1993; Lareau, 2003, Cregan, 2008,) whilst ideologies of meritocracy and achievement normalise and justify social inequality by placing the onus for success, or failure squarely in the hands of the individual (Kress,2012). Bourdieu's theoretical perspective requires researchers to look at the dynamic interaction between individuals and the surroundings in which they find themselves and situate their accounts within a larger historical, political, economic and symbolic context (Mills and Gale, 2007).

Whilst the difficulties teachers experience in connecting with the learning needs of children in disadvantaged schools (Cregan, 2008, Devine, 2013) have been identified, it has been suggested that future worthwhile research would be to explore how a range of cultural influences impact on teachers' understanding and children's engagement with learning activities (Swann et al., 2012).

In this paper I consider if using Bourdieu's set of interrelated conceptual metaphors of habitus, capital and field, facilitate the examination of factors that inhibit children's engagement in learning in one particular school. It is also proposed to explore if participatory action research in which teachers aim to learn to see the world through their students' eyes can improve the teaching and learning relationship.

The possibility that deeper understanding may shift the spotlight from the 'disadvantaged' to the system is worth exploring.

Teaching Well-being in Schools

Steve Lane

Pupils and students today live in an environment where there are very high levels of psychological distress. According to the Irish College of Psychiatrists (2005) more than 86,000 Irish children have a moderate to severe mental health difficulties. These public health issues have induced something of an upheaval in psychology and heralded the advent of Positive Psychology. No longer is psychology solely concerned with relieving the psychological states that make life miserable. The promotion of well-being of populations and groups now shares stage with the amelioration of the illness of individuals (Seligman, 2003). The emphasis of this positive psychology is on well-being, flourishing, character strengths, virtues, meaning and achievement.

Schools have been identified as important settings for the promotion of children's well-being (DES, 2015). Promoting well-being involves a two-factor approach; the removal or reduction of negative factors in tandem with programmes to advance the positive factors. The removal of negative factors is currently addressed in many *anti* programmes – anti-bullying, anti-smoking, anti-drug, etc. The positive side is not as well addressed with little more than 2 pages of a recent 52 page DES Guideline on Well-being in Primary Schools devoted to the promotion of the positive education (DES, 2015).

Martin Seligman has proposed a model of well-being based on positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman 2011). This model has been adapted for delivery in school settings. Positive Education is based on the premises that the skills and mindsets which enhance well-being can be explicitly taught in schools (Norrish & Vella-Broderick, 2009; Seligman et al, 2009) and that these well-being programmes also promote positive behaviour, learning and academic success (Bernard & Watson 2011). Durlak et al (2011) in a meta-analysis of 213 studies involving over 250,000 pupils across all school levels found an 11 point achievement gap between those who participated in Positive Education programmes and those who didn't.

One such programme was rolled out in Geelong Grammar School near Melbourne. However, the project though, had significant funding from amongst the wealthy alumni.

My research seeks to examine how a positive education intervention along similar lines could be rolled out in an Irish school setting given the financial and structural constraints of the Irish milieu. I anticipate that this will be an action-research project conducted with a whole school involving pupils, staff, BOM, and parents.

Lesson study as one potential curriculum reform tool

Tracey Curran

Primary education in Ireland is undergoing a period of scrutiny, change and reform. International Studies (PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, etc) and National Assessments (Curriculum Review, DES Reports, WSEs, etc) have highlighted poor pupil attainment levels in numeracy and literacy. This has subsequently culminated in the publication of the Literacy & Numeracy Strategy (2011) which has resulted in the development of a new Language curriculum. Next on the national agenda is the Primary Mathematics Curriculum.

15 years after the 1999 primary mathematics curriculum was introduced, it has been found to be insufficient in meeting international standards and national assessments have highlighted a key issue (among others) to be teacher interpretation and implementation of the curriculum rather than the aims or principles in the curriculum and guidelines. Simply put, it has not translated into practice.

The problem that this study hopes to address is the disconnect between the intended curriculum and the enacted curriculum. More specifically, this study aims to investigate if the tenets and principles of the 'new curriculum' might be adopted, internalised and essentially translate into meaningful and lasting change in teachers pedagogy if introduced through the medium of Lesson Study as a professional development and curriculum reform tool. There are many factors which impact on the successful enactment of a curriculum (assessment, mathematical knowledge, support for change within schools, teacher efficacy etc.). This study simply attempts to look at lesson study as one potential curriculum reform tool.

The curriculum is changing in a climate where schools are increasingly using models of internal evaluation and improvement (School Self-Evaluation). When it comes to devising models of professional development, it appears that this is most effective when it is context based and meaningful to teacher's everyday practice as opposed to externally imposed and generalised.

Traditionally a Japanese form of teacher professional development, research on 'Lesson Study' present this medium of professional development as an increasing credible and rigorous vehicle for pedagogical change and improvement. Through the lens of a research lesson, teachers form a professional learning community (within their own context) who engage in professional dialogue around pedagogical issues focused on improving the learning outcomes for pupils.

It is the hypothesis of this study, that within this professional learning community that teachers can 'decontextualize' an externally designed and broad curriculum and 'recontextualise' this curriculum in terms of their professional values, beliefs, decision

making and ultimately translate into meaningful and sustained change (improvement) in pedagogical practice.

Keywords: Primary Mathematics Curriculum, curriculum reform tool, enacted curriculum, Lesson Study, models of internal evaluation and improvement, school self-evaluation, context based, professional learning community, professional values, beliefs & decision making.

The Unheard Voice

Betty Kehoe

This study aims to investigate the challenges nine year old students encounter in completing word problems in mathematics. The summary update on implementation of The 2011-2020 strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) in 2014 reveal the need to “further develop higher level mathematical processes” in second to sixth classes in the primary school (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Additionally, Eivers and Clerkin, (2012) show no significant change in overall maths achievement among Irish fourth class students since 1995. Consequently, this research to be both timely and pertinent.

The lack of student voice in dialogue on evaluation of problem solving in mathematics is noteworthy in empirical research (Lester, 2013; Jao, 2013; Boaler, 2009; Lampert, 1990). Evidently, there is an emerging need for inclusive, participative research that supports students, teachers, researchers and policy makers to enter the discussion (Stigler and Hiebert, 2009). The researcher shares this view in identifying students as partners in education. Hence, their voice through feedback is necessary in improving educational outcomes and ultimately in defining its success. Standardised norm-referenced tests compare students’ performance with national norms and judge students’ achievement is a quantitative assessment of learning outcome while self-assessment involves qualitative assessment measures. Involving students in self-assessment informs good decision making and permits amendment of curriculum content or pedagogy (NCCA, 2007).

The choice of theoretical framework and research design is influenced by the understanding of the term problem within a mathematical context. A problem should “have the capacity to engage all students in the class in making and testing mathematical hypotheses” (Lampert, 1990:39). Consequently, a qualitative phenomenological research in the paradigm of critical pedagogy (Hooks, 2010: Freire, 2007) is proposed. Research instruments, group semi-structured interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, diary entries and observations will generate data. A thematic analysis of qualitative data will be compared to quantitative analysis of standardised test results.

How does early childhood adversity impact on problem solving in middle childhood: A study of post institutionalised inter-country adopted children in Ireland

Mary O'Connor

The process of adopting children from another country is widely referred to as 'intercountry' adoption (Adoption Association of Ireland 2010). The majority of intercountry adopted children internationally have lived in institutions prior to adoption (Lancaster and Nelson) and for this reason provide a good example of a natural situation of early adversity which ends abruptly (Rutter et al. 2001; O'Connor 2003; Haugaard & Hazan 2003). 70% of children adopted into Ireland have spent longer than six months living in orphanages prior to adoption (Greene et al. 2004/'05).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore, through the perceptions of adoptive parents and teachers of intercountry adopted children, whether early life adversity impacts on the problem solving ability in school children between eight and twelve years of age. Findings on conditions inside the institutions suggest that babies and young children spend much of their time alone in cribs and suffer emotional deprivation and neglect at the hands of overstretched caregivers (Federici 1998; Mc Guinness et al. 2000; Glennen 2002). While intercountry adopted children make enormous gains after a number of years in their adoptive homes (Rutter et al. 2001), children who have spent longer than six months in an institution continue to have delays in specific areas of functioning years later. Speech and language may be affected (Meese 2002; Glennen & Masters 2002) while simple sentence comprehension tasks may be an issue for others (Desmaris et al. 2012). Regulating emotions is also a challenge for many intercountry adopted children (Dennenberg 1999) and also behaviour and personality challenges (Bowly 1951, cited in Bowlby 2010). Neuroscientific evidence suggests that 'an alternative neuro-developmental pathway' may be created as a result of child maltreatment in early life (Teicher et al. 2003), and as a result cognitive function is also affected (Pollak al. 2010).

Findings may contribute to knowledge and allow for more individual consideration of intercountry adopted children prior to or shortly after entering the school system.

Keywords: Intercountry adoption; Problem solving; Mathematical reasoning; Neuro-developmental pathways; Cognitive function.