SECTION TWO

Case Studies on Improving Practice

LINC Programme: Enabling Leadership for Inclusion through an Innovative Competency-Based Blended Adult Continuing Professional Learning Programme

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Abstract

In 2015, an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) examining mechanisms to support access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme for children with disabilities recommended the creation of a role of Inclusion Coordinator in early years' settings. LINC, an innovative competency-based adult continuing professional learning programme, is a Level 6 Special Purpose Award[1] designed to enhance the inclusion of children with additional needs in early years' settings with graduates becoming Inclusion Coordinators. This paper provides a background and overview of the LINC Programme, examines the adult learning methodology employed and outlines the tools adopted for measuring its success.

Keywords: Inclusion, Early Years' Education, Childcare, Access, LINC, Continuing Professional Learning, Additional Needs, Special Needs, Disability, Higher Education, Further Education, Adult Education, Blended Learning, Online, Education Methodology, Impact, Evaluation

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1   The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels used to describe the Irish qualifications system including qualifications achieved in school, further education and higher education. The relationship between the Irish NFQ and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF – EHEA) has been formally established. See http://www.nfq-qqi.com/ for further information.

Introduction

The benefits of high quality inclusive education for children in the early years are well-documented (Ring *et al.,* 2016; Ring and O'Sullivan, 2018). However, providing for an effective inclusive education system is a complex political, economic and social struggle, involving reform at governmental, societal, pre-school and school levels. While the Irish Government has invested significantly in fostering inclusive school systems at primary and post-primary levels, investment at pre-school level has been neglected until very recently (Ring, 2016). This has had negative consequences for young children with additional needs and their families in terms of access to an appropriate educational experience right from the start (Ring, Daly and Wall 2018). It has also amplified the status-gap between early childhood and primary /post-primary teachers, with the latter enjoying significantly higher professional status and related pay and working conditions. In order to begin to address these emerging dissonances, the Irish Government launched the seven level *Access and Inclusion Model* (AIM) in November 2015, to provide for a new model of government-funded supports aimed at supporting the inclusion of children with additional needs at pre-school level (Inter-Departmental Group (IDG), 2015). This article reports on an innovative competency-based blended leadership adult continuing professional learning (CPL) programme developed to address level three of the AIM and discusses some of the initial programme evaluation findings.

Background – LINC Programme Overview

Embedded in international research, the seven-level AIM detailed in Figure 1. adopts a child-centred approach and acknowledges the centrality of developing a co-ordinated, responsive, effective and sufficiently resourced inclusive education system for children in early childhood care and education settings (ECCE). The model was developed following extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the parents of children with additional needs. In accordance with best practice, the model focuses on identifying and responding to each individual child's developmental level, abilities and needs rather than relying exclusively on formal diagnoses.

Figure 1. AIM Model (IDG, 2015, p. 6)

The Leadership for INClusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme, located at Level three of the AIM, acknowledges the critical role of continuing professional learning (CPL) in cultivating and leading inclusion. The *Competency Framework for Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education* (LINC Consortium 2016b) in Table 1 below, underpins the programme and was developed through identifying the knowledge, practices and values specific to leading inclusive culture, practice and pedagogy in the early years (LINC Consortium, 2016b; Urban, Robson and Scacchi, 2017; Pilgrim *et al.*, 2017; Ring, Daly and Wall, 2018).

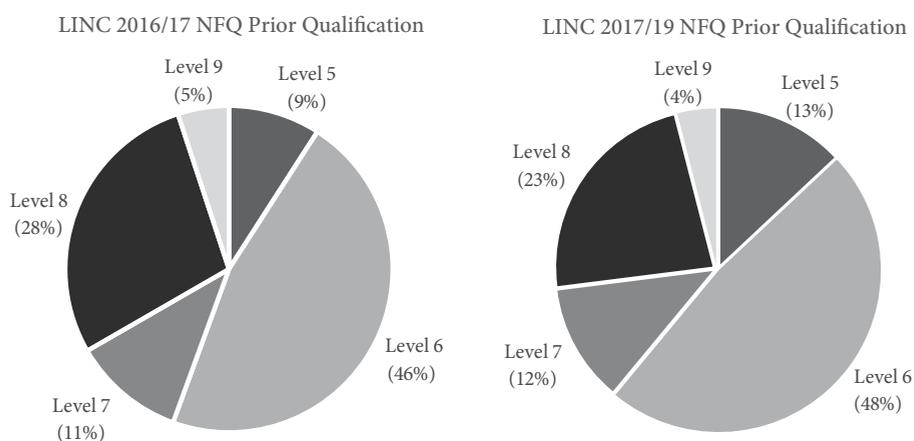## Table 1. Competency Framework Underpinning the LINC Programme (LINC Consortium, 2016b)

A.	An Inclusive Culture
1	All children are welcome.
2	All children are valued.
3	A focus is placed on promoting respectful interaction.
4	There are high expectations for all children.
5	Partnership with parents/carers is actively promoted.
6	Difference is acknowledged.
7	The environment accommodates the needs of all children.
8	All policies are inclusive policies.

B.	Inclusive Practice
1	Transitioning to and from the setting is a positive experience for children, families, and staff.
2	Support for children with additional needs is co-ordinated.
3	Staff members are encouraged to avail of continuing professional development opportunities.
4	All staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the promotion of inclusive practice.
5	The expertise of staff is acknowledged and utilised.

C.	An Inclusive Pedagogy
1	Children's experiences are planned with the needs of all children in mind.
2	Strategies are in place to promote the participation of all children in learning.
3	A range of appropriate pedagogical approaches is used to support the holistic development of all children.
4	Play and playful learning are key features of practice for all children.
5	All children's communication and interaction are promoted.
6	All children's views are values and responded to.
7	Early identification of children who require additional support is central to practice.
8	A variety of approaches to observation, recording and assessment is in place.
9	Early years educators plan, implement, and evaluate children's learning in partnership with children, parents/carers and relevant others.
10	Positive relationships are understood and nurtured.
11	Children's specific assessed needs are understood as 'signposts' that support children's learning and development.
12	External assistance is elicited where required to support the setting in meeting children's additional needs.

The first cohort of adult learners commenced the LINC programme in September 2016, following a competitive tender won by a consortium led by Mary Immaculate College (MIC), and including Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) and Maynooth University (MU) – Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education (MIC, 2016). To date, almost 1800 adult learners have participated in the programme.

A Diverse Cohort

As the learners on the LINC Programme are nominated by early years' setting (employers), all of the learners continue to work with their setting while undertaking the programme. The Irish regulatory requirement for early years' settings requires that early years' educators have a qualification that meets certain minimum requirements and a list of such recognised qualifications is published and maintained by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (DCYA, 2018). Recognised early years' qualifications range from Level 5 to Level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (NFQ, 2018). As a result, both the first and second LINC cohorts have included learners with a wide range of educational qualifications and backgrounds from Level 5 up Level 9 graduate diplomas and Masters degrees, which suggests substantial diversity in terms of learners' prior education experience and qualifications (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Prior Qualifications of LINC Learners (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 NFQ Prior Qualification

Level 9 (5%)
Level 5 (9%)
Level 8 (28%)
Level 6 (46%)
Level 7 (11%)

LINC 2017/19 NFQ Prior Qualification

Level 9 (4%)
Level 5 (13%)
Level 8 (23%)
Level 7 (12%)
Level 6 (48%)

While learners' qualifications are diverse, it is also significant that many learners had not engaged in formal education in some time with 10% (2016/17) and 8%

(2017/18) not having been engaged in formal education programmes in over 15 years prior to commencing the LINC Programme. Figure 3 below, details the educational experience of the first two cohorts, and demonstrates that more than 50% (56% - 2016/17 and 51% - 2017/18) had engaged in formal learning in the five years immediately prior to them commencing the LINC Programme.

Figure 3. Time Since Last Education Experience for LINC Learners (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 Education Experience

LINC 2017/18 Education Experience
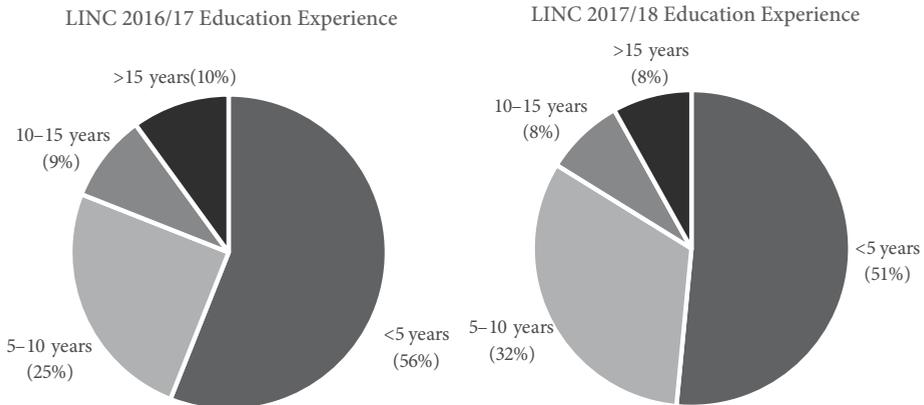
The age profile of the cohorts is also varied and, as detailed in Figure 4 below, includes learners from their early 20s to their mid-to late 60s.

Figure 4. Age Profile of LINC Learners (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 Age Profile

LINC 2017/18 Age Profile
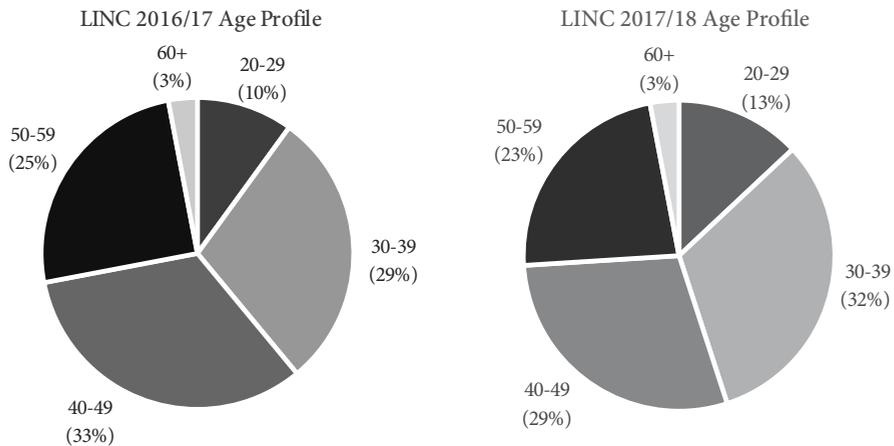
Prior to commencing the programme, learners were asked to identify how much interaction they had previously with online learning. Figure 5 below, highlights that 62% of learners had never engaged previously with online learning, while 38% had, with 19% having completed some (defined as being 'a module or more') and 19% having completed 'a lot' (defined as being 'a full programme').

Figure 5. LINC Learners' Experience of Online Learning (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 Experience with Online Learning
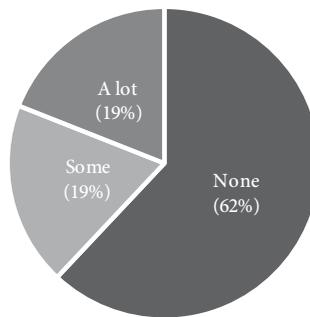
The diverse profile of the learners therefore necessitated an approach to CPL that optimises learners' engagement while simultaneously acknowledging, celebrating and accommodating this diversity.

Adult Education Methodology

The traditional face of education has seen a transformation of sorts in recent years and now encompasses an increasingly electronic world (Williams, 2002). There is now a requirement to embed technology-based practices in education and to reach a more diverse cross-section of the population (Hicks, Reid and George, 2001). This integration of online learning along with face-to-face learning experiences can be referred to as blended learning (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004).

Some have suggested that this blended learning approach may in fact be even more efficient and effective than the traditional classroom model. Benefits of this approach include its flexible nature for learners (Cheung and Hew, 2011) and the potential to accommodate large numbers of learners (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). Learners also have the opportunity to learn from home and have some control over 'time, place, path and/or pace' (Horn and Staker, 2011,

p. 3). Studies further indicate that faculty members, who employ a blended-learning approach to course design, report improved outcomes from their learners related to, *interalia*, the quality of written assignments, depth of engagement with course content and overall success rates (Garnham and Kaleta 2002; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2015).

Although technology plays a vital role in facilitating the LINC programme, technology was considered a means to a pedagogical end with instructional designers and content developers utilising pedagogical expertise to enhance learning through the *meaningful* use of technology (McGee and Reis, 2012, p.15). Key principles of instructional and universal design were combined with established learning theories to promote an active online learning environment (Gagné, Briggs and Wager, 1992; National Disability Authority (NDA), 2014).

A variety of methods was developed to ensure that the LINC programme was accessible to learners with a range of learning styles and experiences. Each of the six modules comprises one face-to-face day (approx. six hours) along with six weekly online 'units' of both synchronous and asynchronous learning materials. In order to ensure as much flexibility as possible for the 900+ adult learners annually, the majority of the programme employs asynchronous online learning, ensuring lessons and learning activities can be completed at a time that is convenient for the learner. Each week, the asynchronous material includes three pre-recorded lessons and between one and three learning activities. The online lessons are a mix of voice-recorded over content interleaved with specific activities, for instance, viewing of video-clips, reading articles or webpages and reflections. In addition to these, there are requirements to contribute to specific learning activities including online discussion fora with other learners, mini-quizzes, uploading reflections and practice-related assignments. The synchronous element of the programme requires learners to engage in a weekly online tutorial, in groups of 20-25, and complete a text-based tutorial with their tutor over a 30-minute timeframe. Taking into account the Irish broadband situation, whereby one in ten internet users highlighted speed as being an issue when completing online purchases (Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2017), video and voice-based tutorials would not have been possible for all learners, given the bandwidth requirements, and may have caused issues for this synchronous learning activity. Therefore, a text-based tutorial system was used, and has functioned well in ensuring effective communication amongst learners themselves and with their tutors. These tutorials were designed to promote communities of practice (Anderson, 2008), to ensure that key learning

points were understood and to provide learners with an opportunity to engage in discussion, question and seek clarification.

Finally, a key element of the LINC Programme is the mentoring session which creates a forum for learners to meet with their tutor on a one-to-one basis and reflect on their practice. The session is conducted with reference to *The Competency Framework for Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education* (LINC Consortium 2016b referred to in Table 1 previously), which is used by the learner and tutor to develop an action plan for the learner in order to assist with the implementation of the theory into practice. This process comprises a core part of the final module, the Portfolio module, where the learner has the opportunity to demonstrate inclusive culture, practice and pedagogy.

A Supportive Team

The LINC Programme is supported by a large team, responsible for the delivery of the programme. The Steering Group, comprising representatives from each of the Consortium Members (MIC, ECI and MU-Froebel) is responsible for the overall governance, strategy and direction of the programme. A Consortium Academic Advisory Team (CAT), with combined expertise in ECCE, inclusive and special education, as well as leadership and management is involved in programme development. Operationally, a team of academic and professional services staff, managed by the National Programme Coordinator (NPC) has responsibility for the programme roll out. Figure 6 below, provides an overview of the 50 people involved in in the rollout of this programme.

Figure 6. LINC Programme Governance, Management and Operational Team (LINC Consortium, 2018)
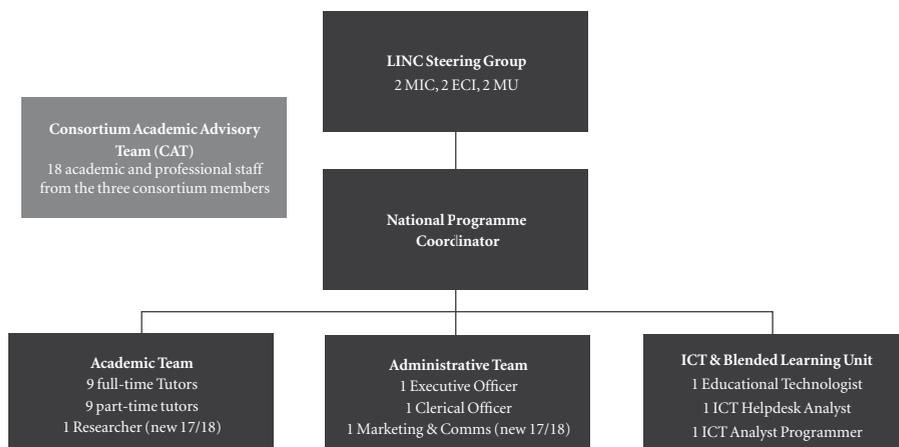
Specific attention has been directed to supporting the diverse learning cohort through Learner Support Services; Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Support; Educational Technology Support and Academic Support.

Learner Support Services

A dedicated support team has been recruited to manage queries from members of the public, prospective learners, employers and learners. This team assists and guides prospective and current learners through processes such as application, enrolment, examinations, bursary payments and graduation. This 'one-stop-shop' is a dedicated support for LINC learners, and enhances access by learners to other support areas where necessary. This also precludes the needs for these learners, who are not based on the MIC campus, to access all services in one place.

ICT Support

Given the blended-learning element, and the profile of the learners, their prior ICT and educational experience, as well as the fact that they are working, the provision of ICT Support was deemed to be critical. As a result, the LINC Programme has funded a dedicated ICT Support Technician, as well as an ICT Administrator. These posts allow for the existing ICT Helpdesk hours to be extended (from 5pm up to 7pm nightly and on Saturday) to facilitate LINC Learners as well as provision of timely server and network administration and support.

Educational Technology Support

A dedicated Educational Technologist role, located within MIC's Blended Learning Unit (BLU), has facilitated the design of the relevant module pages on Moodle, the design of the module templates, and the implementation of a thorough content review process prior to modules being made available for learners. This quality assurance mechanism ensures that the material presented is accurate, relevant and presented in a suitable format for an online learning approach.

Academic Support

A team of tutors, each leading one of the centres, is responsible for working with approximately 100 learners. The tutor delivers the face-to-face content (twice in order to facilitate smaller group sizes); facilitates the weekly tutorial session; moderates the online discussion; assists learners with queries and completes the

mentoring session with the learners. It should be noted that strict criteria are used to recruit this team of tutors, including an academic qualification (degree-level) in ECCE, experience working in the early years' sector, an adult education qualification and experience in the adult and further education sector. Assistant tutors support the delivery of the face-to-face classroom sessions, reducing the ratio (approx. 1:25) further to facilitate effective group work.

Measuring Success

A multi-method methodological programme evaluation framework has been designed and is summarised in Table 2 below. This contemporaneous evaluation is designed to ensure that the views of all stakeholders are harnessed and the voices of children, parents, families and practitioners are captured, as advocated in *Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2009; Ring, 2018).

Table 2. Summary of the Multi-Method Methodological LINC Programme Evaluation (LINC Consortium 2016a)

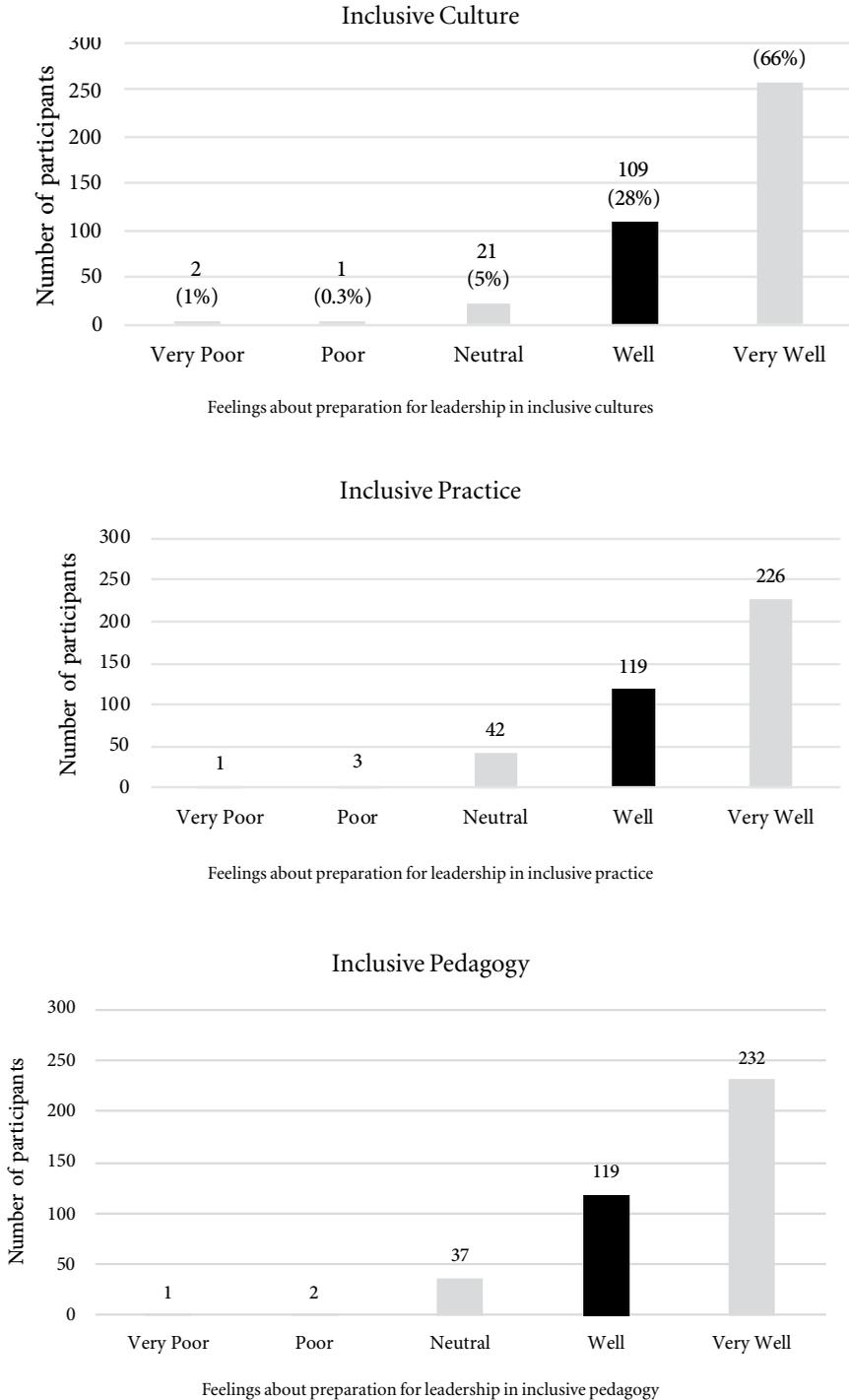| Strand	Research Technique	Summary	Time–Frame
Strand 1	Literature Review	Focuses on the development of inclusion; key elements of inclusive practice; teacher competency for inclusion and utilising innovative technologies for teacher education.	2016-2020
Strand 2	Survey of participant evaluation of each individual module	On-line survey	2016-2020
Strand 3	Annual participant and employer evaluation of the programme linked to the competency focus of the programme	On-line survey	2017-2020
Strand 4	Stakeholder Consultations	Semi-Structured interviews	2019-2020
Strand 5	Individual interviews with Tutors	Semi-Structured interviews	2019-2020
Strand 6	An analysis of programme materials, documentation and assessment data	Documentary Analysis	2017-2020
Strand 7	An analysis of quality control visits to face-to-face deliver sessions	Documentary Analysis	2016-2020
Strand 8	Compilation of final report		2020

Strands two and three have now been completed for the first cohort (2016/17). Participants had the opportunity to anonymously answer evaluative surveys based on each individual module, as well as the overall programme, while employers were also offered the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback through the employer's evaluation. In particular, strand three generated a large number of responses (n=391, or 46% of learners). The key outcome of this evaluation is an 86% satisfaction rating for the programme overall (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7. LINC Evaluation: Overall Satisfaction (LINC Consortium, 2018)

How do you feel about the programme overall?
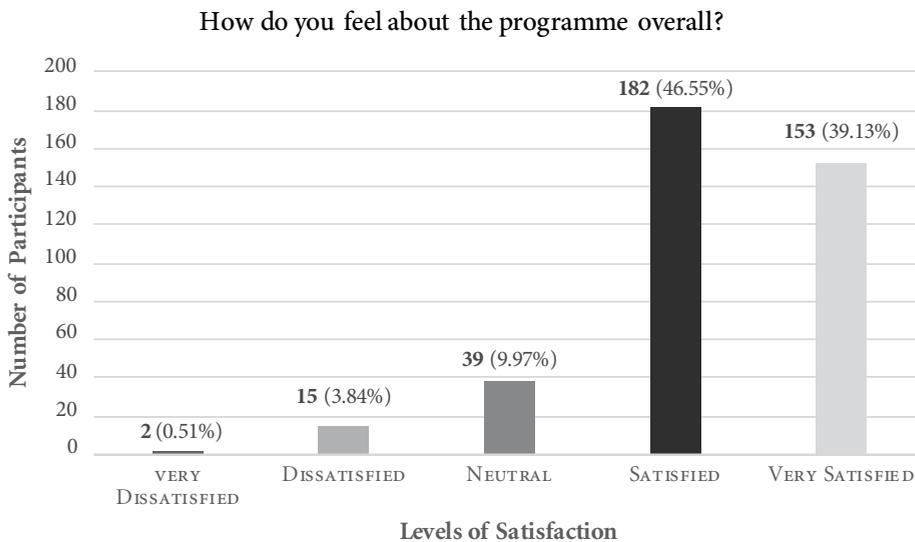
In relation to the *Competency Framework for Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education* (LINC Consortium 2016b, 94% of learners believed the programme prepared them to lead an inclusive culture effectively, while 88% and 89% responded positively on how well they were prepared to lead inclusive practice and inclusive pedagogy (see Figure 8, below).

Figure 8. LINC Evaluation: Preparing to Lead (LINC Consortium, 2018)

Inclusive Culture

Feelings about preparation for leadership in inclusive cultures

Inclusive Practice

Feelings about preparation for leadership in inclusive practice

Inclusive Pedagogy

Feelings about preparation for leadership in inclusive pedagogy

Learners were asked to rate how useful to them each of the programme activities were in terms of their learning and in terms of the transfer of learning into practice. Figure 9 below, demonstrates participants' satisfaction with each of the learning activities. As can be seen, the online recorded lessons (92%) and face-to-face classroom sessions (91%) rated highest, with the mentoring visit (88%) also rated highly useful in terms of the learning process. The weekly chats (later renamed online tutorials) were rated at 66% useful, and orientation day at 69% useful – both of these elements were re-designed ahead of the rollout for 2017/18.

Figure 9. Usefulness of Programme Aspects (LINC Consortium, 2018)
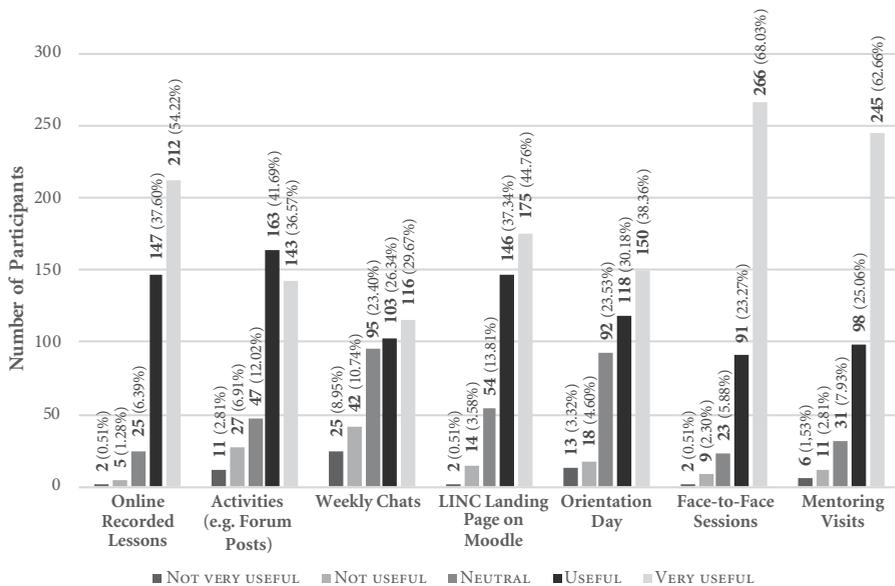
Finally, as outlined above, more than 60% of the learners had not had any experience of online learning prior to taking part in the LINC Programme. Learners were asked to rate their own competence in relation to using Technology for Educational Purposes both before and after the programme. Prior to undertaking the programme, 70% of learners rated themselves as being competent or very competent, with this raising to over 92% after the programme. 17% of learners rated themselves as not being competent prior to undertaking LINC, and this reduced to 1% following their completion of the programme. Learners were not asked if they intended to pursue any further education after completing the LINC programme, however, this question has now been added to the overall programme evaluation survey for 2017/2018.

Figure 10. Competence in Using Technology for Educational Purposes (LINC Consortium, 2018)
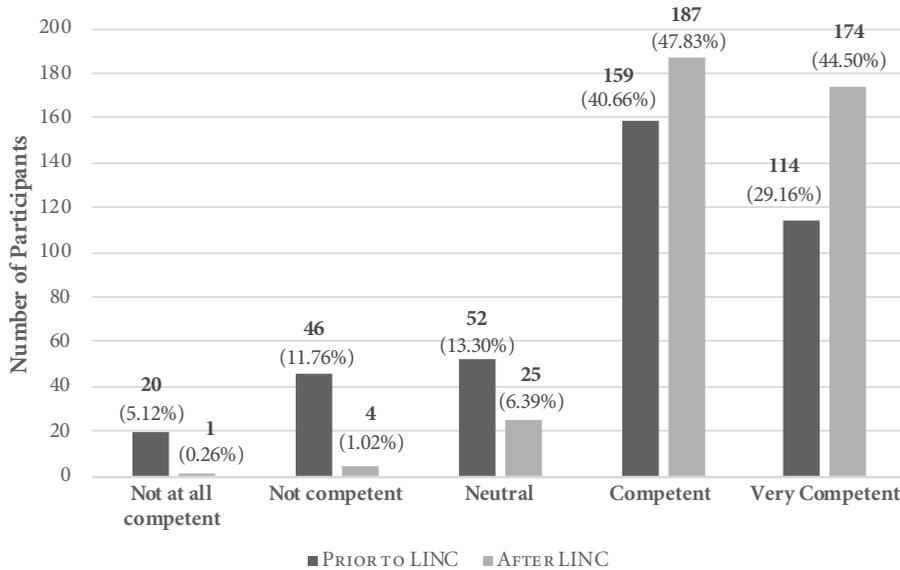
The LINC Programme was shortlisted and won the 'Best Online Learning Experience' Award at the Education Awards 2017, was shortlisted for an AONTAS STAR Award in 2018 and has also been shortlisted for an Education Award 2018.

Conclusion

Emerging findings from the evaluation of the LINC programme suggest that the development of a competency-based blended adult learning programme, which considers participants' prior learning, accommodates a variety of learning styles, provides a range of targeted supports and is based on best practice in instructional design, has the potential to transform the experience of CPL for adult learners. The academic excellence underpinning the programme, the differentiated pedagogical strategies and the experiential practice-based focus have clearly contributed to optimising engagement for a wide variety of adult learners in a multi-media environment. Critically the evaluation findings suggest that the programme has impacted considerably on enabling leadership for inclusion and has the potential to transform both the lives of adult learners and those of children, families and society in Ireland.

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Breaking the Cultural Silence Imposed upon Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants: A Snapshot of the Current Faith-based Project in Tigers Bay (North Belfast)

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Abstract

This case study tracks an established collaborative partnership between faith-based organisations and the local community of North Belfast. The initial stages of the project of implementing a welcome day, a cultural food and activities fest day and an Ulster University led Unblocking Potential programme. This set the scene for social cohesion and community integration through emancipatory praxis. The next stage of the project is to engage the group in theatre dramatising their experiences and disseminating the shared learning throughout the local community.

Through the delivery of our programmes we identified issues around fear, low self-esteem and the lack of mechanisms within the wider community to empower participants to confidently engage more meaningfully within their own community and the wider community bringing a new dynamic to transformational cultural diversity work.

Context

The context of creating cohesive partnerships at local level is heavily influenced by the existing social constructs of a people in a process of conflict transformation. The cultural paradigm shift that has been created by the influx of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, who have been allocated housing in already contested and polarised communities, can paradoxically further the cause of conflict rather than build bridges of hope and provide opportunities for reconciliation.

Collaborative Partnership in Action

The partnership between the faith-based group St Paul and St Barnabas (STP&B) and All Nations Ministry (ANM) came about from an invitation from

ANM's leader, David Maganda. He came along to an evening church service, and asked if the church could send a representative to a meeting the following week to discuss how they could begin building relationships in the area. The rationale for the church becoming involved in such a partnership was firmly embedded in the vision strategy of outreach to the local community which included: embracing diversity, provide a safe warm and friendly environment where indigenous people and newly housed refugees, asylum seekers and migrants could learn how to live together in community, to learn about cultural traditions and difference, whilst not losing indigenous identity, and gain skills of integration.

David Maganda (ANM, 2018) gave an update stating that recent statistics revealed there had been 150 families from Syria accommodated in North Belfast since December 2015, and that new groups arrive every eight weeks. The ongoing work with such groups is widely recognised as being extremely important. This was highlighted by the Church of Ireland Refugee Working Group Report on supporting asylum seekers and refugees (2018):

> Clergy and parishioners whose neighbours include asylum seekers and refugees are encouraged to take up unexpected opportunities to serve as and when they arise e.g. by offering lifts to hospital appointments in rural areas, food banks, helping people to improve their English language skills through classes and everyday conversations, or giving goods for mothers and toddlers.

During the first information sharing meeting with community representatives, a request was made for use of the STP&B church premises to host a weekly 'drop in' session as the premises they currently were using was not suitable for group activities. Further discussions resulted in the suggestion of a welcome service to mark the initial launch of a suggested 'drop in' at the church. This was the first test of collaborative partnerships as the organising committee consisted of representatives from local churches/residents, ANM and local faith-based groups. The plans were detailed and action points taken on board. The STP&B group took a coordinating role and set in motion some action plans for each representative.

This first collaborative working group meeting was highly encouraging and a statement of commitment from each representative was made. The critical thinking behind the role required by the leaders is based on the definition given by one of the group leaders (Hawthorne).

> The construct of transformational leadership in a contemporary framework is about re-visioning praxis, bringing forward initiatives for change and taking responsibility for developing people and projects. It is our understanding from a community development perspective that transformational leadership is not about taking a key role of managing people or projects in any authoritative way but working in a collaborative, inclusive and participatory context that drives positive change.

The support for this and the notion of collective action formed part of the initial discourse and was agreed by the leadership group. However, as the weeks passed, there was a heightened sense of panic and frustration as the action plans were not being executed as previously designed. This lack of communication increased the frustration and anxiety among group members. There was a palpable sense of racial discrimination where some voiced 'typical African time, they work to the beat, dead slow and stop', and other discriminatory comments such as: 'I spent 2 years in Nigeria, so from my experience, once you realise 'they' are on a different time-zone, you will have to make a decision either to go with 'their' time-clock, or forget working with them'. After some critical reflection we realised this was a clear indication of deep rooted differentiation and that we needed to confront our preconceived ideas and prejudices we each held, and deal with these accordingly. This reinforced for the group, the seismic problem facing us in trying to encourage people from the local community to cognitively reframe *their* prejudices, as we realised we needed to deal with our own that had lain dormant until awakened during this process. We agreed that we needed to skilfully work through this towards building an inclusive environment that would permeate into each group and situation we might encounter. This also brought home to us the importance of developing a partnership that would be based upon integrity and strive to be committed to being collaborative and supportive to each other.

The paramount aim of this partnership was to build social capital which according to Field (2003, pp. 1–2), is based upon the central idea that 'social networks are a valuable asset … and are the basis for social cohesion'. Putman (2000, p. 19), further postulates the trustworthiness that arises from these networks that is closely related to 'civic virtue' and this is most powerful when embedded in social relationships within such partnerships.

Embracing Cultural Diversity

The task then has been to work collectively to frame the scaffolding needed to introduce the community at large to change. This means nurturing and helping

people to identify the building blocks that will help increase confidence and give assurances. The purpose of this was to encourage congeniality rather than dissension that historically has manifested when territorial claims are threatened. An entrenched introspective worldview of sectarianism and racial discrimination is common with people in this area, and the idea of embracing integration across ethnicities is fraught with tensions.

Already the indigenous community live in a contested space, and this new cultural shift presents a complex and multifarious task to all involved in collaborative transformatory praxis working toward social justice, social cohesion and inclusion. Already in this community there have been incidents of hate crime and heinous acts of violence against ethnic minority families who have tried to settle in the area. In more recent weeks one family from Somalia was intimidated and had to have Police protection to relocate to another part of the country.

The task was clearly a mammoth undertaking to avoid further community conflict as indigenous people are suspicious when they believe their identity is threatened, at which point, attack becomes their first line of defence. It is within this context that the outreach initiative to welcome refugees, asylum seekers and migrants is located. The project is firmly grounded in a faith-based community partnership that has an inherent desire to reach out to those who are in need as strangers, and to help indigenous people embrace cultural diversity. This mirrors the thoughts of Nic Craith (2003, p. 16) who advocates for the pluralism and ethnic diversity with the penultimate aim to integrate into the host society.

The need for this project has been established through previous work and consultation with the refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities through the delivery of a celebration of Diversity Welcome Day. Thirteen different nations were represented and a total of eighty-three people attended. The programme provided opportunities for story-telling, music, dance, and multicultural food tasting. Each of the dishes served had been prepared by the participants. This was followed up by a 'food fest event', and sixty-five attendees joined in fun activities that included arts and crafts, games, drumming circles and a variety of food tasting. Since then, there has been a programme of activities during an on-going weekly 'drop-in'. The primary aims of these sessions were to provide advice, help with language, ensuring the basic needs of food, clothes and shelter are met. A significant consideration was how to create an environment where participants have a sense of belonging and gain confidence to explore possible shared future goals.

Breaking the Cultural Silence by Creating Space for Transformative Intellectuals to Grow

One of the key issues voiced by participants in the drop in sessions was the lack of educational opportunities open to the refugees, asylum seekers and migrants' community. This evidently reinforces Freire's (1984, p. 50) concept of 'cultural silence'. As a group we were aware of and concerned with addressing the social injustice of discrimination and inequalities. We recognised the need to provide a forum where participants identified as most silenced in our community could engage in consciousness-raising activities that are liberating. By using generative themes in a problem-posing way through critical praxis approach, we reasoned they could perhaps begin to question their lived experiences of oppression. Freire (1993, p. 109) postulates that in order to reach critical conscientization, the seeker must be fully immersed in curiosity, critical reflection, rigour and humility. Ledwith (2016, p. 54) suggests this can only be realised if it is 'coded in the language and culture of the people'.

We began thinking about how we could address these important issues. Research on the effect of formal educational opportunities by Hawthorne-Steele and Moreland (2014, p. 91) concluded that

> Transformational learning can occur within a formal learning environment and that, given the right conditions of providing a positive mutually accepting learning environment, one that freely allows the learner to participate in life-scripting, critical reflection and dialogue, students can begin the process of engaging in transformational learning.

Transformative Educational Opportunities

The opportunity to advance the group came in the shape of the Unblocking Potential (UP) programme designed and delivered by the community development team from Ulster University.

The UP programme aims to bring individual participants and their educational histories to the fore and to increase self-worth, self esteem, and confidence building, allowing them to explore setting goals and work towards achieving these. The course is regarded as a stepping-stone towards further education. It further aims to create opportunities for people from disadvantaged communities, who are often disillusioned by the barriers they face that prevent them from accessing third level education. It is underpinned by the value-base of creating social mobility often achieved through educational advantage. Whilst

we recognise the significant civic value of promoting positive social change by encouraging indigenous people to become what Gramsci (1971) describes as 'radical organic intellectuals', who work to a political agenda to raise awareness in the working class producing leaders to engage people in collective struggle, we believe it is in fact, more closely aligned to Giroux's (1988, p. 151) assertion that advocates 'transformative intellectuals who provide moral, political and pedagogical leadership'. We determined that providing access to higher education is a critical element of social mobility. It is our ambition then, to encourage people to avail of educational opportunities so they may then serve as positive relatable role models within their communities. Through the course they would be equipped with the skills to articulate the needs and issues of the oppressed. The UP programme is designed to introduce students to learning theories and discovering their specific learning needs. Often the apparently immovable obstacle in the journey of an adult learner lies in ignorance about tailoring learning needs to the individual. Once this is processed and unblocked, the learner can begin to enjoy learning. The UP programme with the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community group, is currently in an early stage with twenty active participants, and an essential aspect is ensuring participants gain knowledge and understanding about their particular learning style. The tutors of the programme noticed the attendance at the beginning was sporadic and discussed this with the students and discovered that a number presented as Muslim and needed to set aside time to pray. The start time was changed to accommodate this and the attendance problem was averted. The intention is to continue to monitor progress and critically evaluate the impact of the programme upon completion. It is hoped this will help identify what areas of the partnership that may need to be strengthened or perhaps eliminated.

The next stage for this group is currently in the early ground-breaking stage. We are working to develop and deliver over a period of 12 months across North Belfast a three-phase project. This was borne out of listening to some of the harrowing stories of people who have been active participants in STP&B outreach programmes.

This project is grounded in the model of transformatory praxis. To this aim we intend to provide a pedagogic pathway by ensuring these programmes are accredited so that participants can readily access higher education, thus exercising the right for an inclusive education. The aim of the practical aspect of the project is to capture stories of integration or those attempts to integrate, into the local community, through using the expression of arts, primarily Augusto

Boal's (1995) theatre of the oppressed workshops. The project recognises the importance of tracking transformational change through measuring outcomes of social capital, educational attainments, healthier lifestyles through use of professional video and roadshows, performing with other communities, and producing 'integration guidelines' for future incoming migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Putman asserts,

> Social capital can help to mitigate the insidious effects of socioeconomic disadvantage … children are powerfully shaped by social capital … opportunities, educational achievement behaviour and development … public spaces are cleaner, people friendlier and safer, lower crime rate … better health and happier lifestyle. (Putman, 2000, pp. 319–320)

Story-telling

The aims of this project is to record the stories of the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community from North Belfast. Their stories will identify the issues they face as 'newcomers' coming to live in Northern Ireland and report on the difficulties they suffer including racism. The overall project objective is to highlight their issues and dispel misconceptions from the indigenous community around the 'taking our jobs and houses' statements as so often referenced in media reporting. The second phase of the programme will involve working with the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community to bring to life some of those stories using Boal's theatre of the oppressed techniques. This will give the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community the opportunity to proactively do something to address the issues that have been explored and address the key problems and issues facing themselves and their families trying to make a new life in North Belfast. Such voices are seldom heard. Besides being considerably isolated by regulatory requirements, limited resources and language difficulties, they live in a society whose renowned expertise in sectarianism, the first cousin of racism, makes interaction with mainstream society a risky business for strangers. Many persons seeking sanctuary live with a constant sense of anxiety – about their situations, their family and friends and, particularly, the outcome of their claim, which can lead to random arrest. Many have a well-founded fear of 'authority' figures based on previous experience, making it hard to trust those who are often in positions to help them. In consequence, people who live among us with much to teach us all about values and priorities, are voiceless, and live in a vacuum that forces a culture of silence within a hegemonic environment, hence the importance of this project. The third and final phase of the programme will allow us to showcase and use our

theatre pieces to tour around local schools and community centres to highlight the issues of the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community. It is hoped this process will allow interaction from the audiences and create a safe space for dialogue. This programme will inform the wider community and help to dispel inaccurate myths about the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community. It will hopefully give them confidence to voice their opinions, influence their community and the wider society for the better of all. In terms of personal development, it will hopefully enable them to their build their self-confidence and self-esteem levels and lead to their increased participation within their community and beyond.

The biggest destabilising factor within working class communities is disinformation or 'fake news'. Historically we as a community have built walls to keep each other out, resulting in division and allowing 'others' to feed our own sectarianism. This programme will address the spread of racism delivering the facts around immigration and immigrants and their entitlements and in a way through theatre that humanises them as people through the telling of their own stories. This will inform the wider community of those facts and contribute to more cohesive neighbourhoods. In this partnership programme we seek to work towards addressing racism and the wide spread damage it causes to people and communities.

Envisioning the Future

We envision the social impact in the short-term to provide a safe space for the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community to have their voices heard. Through the storytelling they can begin to dispel the myths that have grown and inform the wider community with the facts. This will undoubtedly empower and develop the capacity of the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community through programme delivery. We envision the long-term impact to work towards eradicating racism in the wider community, and bring about opportunities for all to celebrate the diversity of cultures within North Belfast, forging neighbourly relationships and creating a safer community.

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Herbal Medicine: An Adult Education Response to Mental Health

TOM O'BRIEN

Abstract

Adult education is concerned with the redistribution of resources and the recognition of rights held by citizens and to have these rights respected (Honneth, 1995). Mental health is an important domain of rights that are disrespected and unprotected by the state. This article reflects on herbal medicine as a practice in adult education in response to the mental health needs of citizens. It argues that adult educators need to pay more attention to the limitation of biomedicine in the defining and treatment of mental health. Herbal medicine has potential to offer adult educators a critically reflexive space, to critique issues of power, medicine and wellbeing.

Keywords: Herbal Medicine, Adult Education, Biomedicine, Mental Health, Addiction

Introduction

I grew up on a small land commission 52-acre farm in Wicklow, surrounded by nature, plants and animals. My father produced milk for the co-op and we survived on his small farm income. He borrowed money from the bank to develop the farm and paid it off through the cycles of nature and its produce. In 1997 he died of a heart attack aged 62. His struggles were the same as many of small farmers all around the world, who face the same or worse, in trying to provide a sustainable living for their families (Patel, 2008). When he died, I remember the conversations after the funeral about health, heart attacks and sausages. However, it took me a few more years to realise that sausages while not the healthiest of foods, were not the singular cause of heart disease in Ireland. At the time of my father's sudden death, he was being treated by his doctor for heart disease. It was the failure of his medical treatment that sparked my inquiry into the limitations of medicine and led me to become an adult educator and herbalist.

A year before my father died I was involved with a group of local people and organisations from the north inner city of Dublin in setting up the Crinan Youth Project, in Sean McDermott Street. This was a biopsychosocial model of addiction treatment for teenagers using heroin and other substances that combined youth work with medicine, psychotherapy with art and personal development with community development. However, as time passed, I noticed that these discourses of treatment did not operate on a level playing pitch. It seemed to me that medicine was the dominant discourse of treatment that influenced how the service evolved. The rest of the discourses passively accepted their position in the hierarchy and did not challenge the status quo that maintained medicine. This became the focus of my PhD research and later as an adult educator, managing two drug treatment services, 'The Young Persons Programme' in Trinity Court and 'Sankalpa' in Finglas until 2016.

Developing these ideas in *Is there a way out of this clinic?* (O'Brien, 2007), I tried to show how a medical hegemony or medical domination without force (Gramsci *et al.*, 1971) existed in addiction treatment and this hegemony was supported by a reductionist model of scientific materialism that undermines and distorts the complex and profound way in which herbal medicine can facilitate the healing process (Flower, 2012). These models of medicine and research are underpinned and supported by the pharmaceutical industry and neoliberal models of political and economic governance (Brown, 2015). This set of political and economic relationships gave rise to a medicalised model of addiction treatment maintained and controlled by psychiatrists who continue to justify higher doses methadone, with additional prescriptions of anti-anxiety drugs, sleeping pills, anti-psychotic drugs, while many of the subjects of these treatments, were still self-medicating on cannabis, heroin, cocaine and sometimes alcohol (O'Brien, 2007). As Richard Ashcroft from the Verve says, 'The drugs don't work, they just make you worse' (Ashcroft, 1997). Prescription drugs can make things worse for many as seen in the new epidemic of prescription addiction that has been linked to the medical model of treatment and to a much bigger problem in health known as the 'overuse of medicine' (Gibson and Singh, 2010).

In my practice as an herbalist and adult educator I work to uncover the diseasing model of addiction and mental health that tries to lay the blame for people's pain in flawed genes or personal circumstances (Heather *et al.*, 2018; Metzl and Kirkland, 2010; Courtwright, 2010). Adult educators need to challenge oppressive and reductionist forms of treatment that risk doing more harm than

good under the guise of evidence-based treatment. They also need to resist blind acceptance of medical assumptions about addiction treatment that exclude and ignore the socio-economic roots that influence drug choices, addiction patterns and wellbeing. Data from the US indicates that medical harm is now one of the leading causes of death (Myhill, 2015). It was against this backdrop that I decided to become an herbalist, believing that it would provide me with a different way of seeing health and illness and allow me to work with people in their suffering and challenge the dominance of biomedicine in people's lives.

My herbal medicine journey began in the Irish School of Herbal Medicine and after a four-year period and 450 hours of clinical practice I qualified as an herbalist in 2012. Herbal medicine is a form of traditional medicine using plants that have medicinal benefits. As a student herbalist in Sankalpa, I was able to introduce herbal teas to clients, in a morning ritual that involved an informal check-in and a meditation. I also introduced a nutrition programme to support recovery through food. However, by the time I had qualified as an herbalist, the economy had collapsed and austerity politics had started to impose funding cuts and stricter governance rules that shifted the power in favour of the funder (Health Service Executive) who now controlled what an addiction service could offer its service users (Cullen and Murphy, 2017). Herbal medicine was not on the menu, at least officially. Meanwhile prescribed drugs went unchallenged even though they continue to be linked with increased numbers of drug related deaths among drug users (O'Brien, 2013). Herbal medicine has a history of being misrepresented and undermined by powerful vested interests seeking to maintain the capitalist social and political order. The most successful marginalisation of herbal medicine came when the American Medical Association was formed in 1847 and it became illegal for doctors to practice herbal medicine (Baer, 2001). While herbal medicine did go into decline it was kept alive through social movements around the world for people who didn't have access to biomedicine.

The Word Health Organisation estimate that 80% of the world's population still relies on traditional medicine as their primary source of health care, with the market in herbal medicine estimated to be worth $60 billion annually (Tilburt and Kaptchuk, 2008). In Ireland, herbal medicines are controlled by the Health Products Regulatory Authority and the European Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. Herbalists are self-regulated like many other professions in Ireland. Herbal medicine has been critiqued for a lack of scientific evidence to support claims about various medical plants (Ernst, 2000). Despite this critique

there is a growing body of scientific evidence (Hung and Ernst, 2010) including systematic reviews demonstrating the efficacy of herbal medicine.

Becoming and being an herbalist is central to my practice as an adult educator and way of resisting neoliberal biomedical and pharmaceutical interventions that I believe risk harm to body, mind and spirit. Today I practice under the name of 'The Mental Health Herbalist' and work mainly with people who suffer from depression and anxiety. As part of my practice I have a YouTube channel that supports my goal of educating people around the world on the benefits of herbal medicine for better mental health. In my practice I meet people on a regular basis who suffer from depression. Some of them don't want to go on to antidepressants and others want to come off them. There are a wide range of evidence based herbal medicines that I use to treat depression and anxiety; Passion Flower, Lemon Balm, Valerian, Skull cap, Brahmi, Ashwaghanda, St John's Wort, Linden Blossom, Hawthorn Berries, Hops, Wild Lettuce and Wood Betony (Mowrey, 1986; Mischoulon and Rosenbaum 2008; Tang *et al.*, 2017). These herbs offer a powerful way to support a person's nervous system while they take additional steps to improve their overall wellbeing. I also help people look at their diet as certain foods have been found to have a positive impact on people suffering from depression (Johannessen *et al.*, 2011). Food choices are also linked to socio economic inequalities, a theme within the wider goal of my work as an adult educator (van Lenthe *et al.*, 2015).

At the heart of my relationship with each suffering adult who comes to see me is a synergy between adult education and herbal medicine. Becoming an herbalist for me was a natural response as an adult educator to the oppressive practices I saw from biomedicine in the form of psychiatry. So, when I practice as an herbalist, adult education underpins my approach to understanding and critiquing concepts such as: 'disease', 'treatment', 'healing', 'medicine', 'patient' and 'power'. My practice as an herbalist is built on many of the concepts which underpin adult education today. The relationship between the herbalist and the person suffering is not a passive one of compliance like in biomedicine, where the good patient is treated as a passive object rather than empowered subject (Greenhalgh, 2001; Rowe, 1999). In herbal medicine the person suffering is understood as an embodied subject who exercises agency in the healing process (Tang and Anderson, 1999). Herbal medicine offers a person-centred and self-directed experience of wellness and recovery from illness. Herbal medicines are used as a catalyst in promoting homeostasis and natural recovery (Chopra, 1990). Herbal medicine offers a transformative learning experience of illness

and recovery as the person reflects on their life and learns to challenge some of the assumptions they held about disease and its treatment. This is an idea supported by Mezirow's transformational theory of adult education, where the central task is 'the critique of assumptions through critically reflective learning' (Wilson and Kiely, 2002, pp. 1). Adult education has a strong focus on emancipatory adult learning theory as a means to social transformation and the attainment of human freedom (Welton, 1995). For some people coming off medications like antidepressants after many years with the support of an herbalist can be emancipatory. A major review of anti-depressants found that 82% of the response to anti-depressant medication is as a result of the placebo effect (Kirsch, 2009). While some people find comfort from antidepressants, many find that they don't address the root causes of depression and in the end leave people dependent and with little choice but to stay on them. On a macro level herbal medicine provides a critique of neoliberalism in the form of industrial farming that is undermining local environments and economies around the world (Patel, 2008). Herbal medicine provides a micro model of health and medicine that is sustainable, that connects local food markets, with local economies and models of community that support stronger social cohesion and community wellness (Myhill, 2015). Herbal medicine can also be understood in the context of critical health literacy, as it has a strong commitment to ensuring that the person receiving the treatment understands the language used and their role in the healing process. The biomedical model on the other hand has been critiqued for its disempowering effect on the patient understanding of their condition and its treatment due to the over technical use of language and the clinical relationship between doctor and patient (Vilhelmsson, 2014).

Health systems based on biomedicine are failing on a massive scale around the world and yet the illusion that these systems are completely based on evidence remains virtually unchallenged within the field of adult education. Health is political and adult educators interested in the redistribution of health resources, need to pay more attention to the health needs of adults in their practice and challenge the assumptions of biomedicine. In Ireland we spend €20 billion or 10% of our GDP on health each year and despite this redistribution of our taxes, many citizens who can't afford private health insurance, must wait for prolonged periods of time to be treated. Currently there are over 600,000 people waiting for a medical procedure in our health system. Each night around 700 people are unable to secure a hospital bed for treatment and instead must lie on a trolley in a hospital corridor, without privacy (*Irish Medical Times*,

2017). This is what Illich (1975) called 'iatrogenic disease' which occurs when a medical intervention leads to making the problem worse. Despite the failure of our health system hospital consultants are one of highest paid professions in the state.

Conclusion

Adult educators are at risk of becoming irrelevant if they don't find new ways to challenge dominant and oppressive discourses and controlling influences in the lives of ordinary people that have lasting consequences. Adult educators must avoid being sucked into a world where one is unable, unwilling or afraid to challenge the status quo or articulate an alternative way forward because of the risks associated with such a challenge. We all benefit and lose from the neoliberal blanket that we critique, that both keeps us warm and threatens us at the same time. We must enrich our practice as adult educators with new and innovative ways to address the challenges that face us today. I believe that mental health is an area that must concern adult educators more and that herbal medicine provides a space to reflect and think about mental health in a different way to that offered by biomedicine. I believe herbal medicine can form part of an adult education approach in the tradition of critical theory of adult health and contribute to new emancipatory and participatory health practices in the area of addiction and mental health (English, 2012).

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Assessing Lifelong Learners through Enquiry Based Learning: A Master's Level Perspective

ANGELA WRIGHT

Abstract

'Enquiry Based Learning' (EBL), as an engagement strategy to encourage lifelong learning, is the focus of this paper. Participants in this study are adult learners in full time employment who are returning to education, in many cases, after a substantial break. The empirical data was gathered from these students who are studying a master's in business. As educators, there is a need to move beyond traditional assessment models to more creative and innovative ways to ensure learning. The empirical data gathered in this research is relevant and important and will inform practice when considering the inclusion of EBL for assessment and its role in lifelong learning.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Enquiry Based Learning (EBL), Assessment, Masters, Engagement, Adult Learners

Introduction

Student engagement is an 'umbrella term' that covers a very wide range of strategies and activities (Wynne, 2014), but, in the context of this discussion on Enquiry Based Learning (EBL), it leads to the encouraged use of working with 'real life' issues and problems, outside of the educational institution, for pedagogical enhancement and, ultimately, as a valuable assessment tool. Attempts at engagement present challenges on two fronts: in the day-to-day order of how a university conducts its work, and in higher order considerations around values, identity and purpose (Wynne, 2014). Emphasis is placed on public scholarship, on sharing the expertise of the university more broadly, and on learning from communities, to contribute to public problem solving, where civically engaged universities are mindful of the contribution they make to the economy (Hunt, 2011; Wynne, 2014). Hutchings (2007) attempts to set out the

philosophical bases of EBL, and argues that the true sources of EBL are to be found in enlightenment thought, its epistemology and in its aesthetics.

Research Context

It is vital that we move beyond a conceptualisation of education as the simple acquisition of knowledge to one which equally emphasises, nurtures and assesses innovation and expertise in the utilisation and application of knowledge (Boland, 2010). This research focuses on the use of EBL as an appropriate assessment tool for the adult learner at a master's level 9. In Ireland, qualifications are assigned to one of 10 levels on the National Framework of Qualifications as defined by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. Levels 6–10 cover higher education qualifications with level 9 equating to Master's level. Adult learners are defined either based on their age, cognitive maturity, or, as a non-traditional learner (Chao, 2009). The adult learner returning to education brings a different perspective to the classroom and varying standpoints to education, in terms of emotion, motivation, and financial resources, when compared to students entering higher education through normal channels after second level education. Students learn differently in varying situations (Ramsden, 1992), and this is to the fore with adult learners and lifelong learners. Connotation varies greatly with each student but especially with the adult learner (Ramsden, 1992). Considered reflection is therefore important when developing and applying appropriate assessment strategies for these learners. EBL has enjoyed increasing inclusion in assessment processes and, now, some informed student feedback is timely; correspondingly, this study was conducted in conjunction with adult learners studying a master's in business degree.

Literature

Problem solving (as it was initially called - and later referred to as Problem Based Learning (PBL)) in higher education (HE) was developed initially for medical schools (Ertmer and Simons, 2006). The use of problems and EBL in HE prepares students to be more effective in the real-world situations in which they work, and to return to their places of work with the skills and knowledge that they need to develop policy and implement change (Miles, 2006). Advocates, specifically of EBL, outline numerous benefits of EBL such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, deep learning etc., but are reluctant to acknowledge any disadvantages, such as the ability of students to gain and develop large knowledge about the particular topic, the difficulties for instructors and, in general, the need to change the ethos of the educational institution. Gaining large quantities of knowledge in a fast manner is typically suited to a traditional

classroom situation and not problem solving. Problem solving is still not yet widely used (Ertmer and Simons, 2006). Implementation and operational issues around EBL and PBL are challenging and much more taxing for the instructor. Instructors need to have a much boarder skill set, and be able to adapt and be flexible (Ertmer and Simons, 2006) to this changing learning environment when compared to traditional classrooms—the instructor is now facilitating and not instructing, and also a provider of scaffolds[1] (Resier, 2004) for the student. Transitioning to this type of guidance is exigent. Barrett (2005) considers problem solving not merely as a teaching and learning technique, but a total approach to education, and outlines several philosophical principles underpinning Problem-based Learning.

What is Enquiry Based Learning (EBL)?

EBL describes approaches to learning that are driven by a process of enquiry (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). The tutor establishes the task and supports/ facilitates the process, but the students pursue their own lines of enquiry, draw on their existing knowledge (often found in the workplace) and identify the consequent learning needs. They seek evidence to support their ideas and take responsibility for analysing and presenting this appropriately, either as part of a group, or, as an individual supported by others. They are thus engaged as partners in the learning process (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005), and students can take control of their learning (Whowell, 2006). EBL, however, while incorporating elements of PBL, also covers a broader spectrum of approaches (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). Problem and Enquiry-based Learning are multifaceted in nature and are not mere teaching techniques but rather total educational strategies (Barrett, 2005).

EBL V PBL

An examination of the literature reveals that the terms EBL and PBL are used interchangeably – although some theorists suggest differences. Kahn and O'Rourke (2005) outline for example, that EBL has a definite overlap with PBL, where the handling of a problem defines and drives the whole learning experience of the students. EBL, however, is more far reaching in nature (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). Problem Based Learning originated from innovative health sciences and progressed into mainframe schools and Universities. PBL is a learner-centred approach – students engage with the problem (Savery, 2006).

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1   A teacher assists a learner, altering the learning task, so that the learner can solve problems or accomplish tasks that would otherwise be out of reach, (Resier, 2004, p. 274).

Problem-based Learning is seen as a set of approaches under the broader category of Enquiry-based Learning and is a total approach to education (Barrett, 2005). Within PBL, significant time is involved in the search for relevant resources. If a sufficient set of relevant resources has already been collated, then the time for searching will be reduced (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). In PBL, the students define their own learning issues (Barrett, 2005). Interestingly, one of the main defining characteristics of Problem-based Learning, which distinguishes it from some other forms of Enquiry-based Learning, is that the problem is presented to the students first at the start of the learning process, before other curriculum inputs (Barrett, 2005). This is an important point to note.

By contrast, EBL advocates a wider use of project work or research activity, emphasising the use of project-work to master a given body of knowledge itself, and not simply to make connections within an existing body of knowledge. This approach is a key factor that distinguishes an enquiry-based approach from a more traditional use of projects. During the EBL process, students are facilitated to construct their knowledge (Kahn and O'Rourke). Certainly, EBL facilitates deep, and especially, memorable learning (Whowell, 2006), and is now implemented in higher education institutions across the U.K. and world-wide in a broad and diverse list of subject areas (Whowell, 2006).

Methodology

The motivation for this study was to inform practice, and to examine the value of EBL as an assessment tool at master's level. It was considered appropriate to apply a positivistic research methodology in this context. A quantitative research survey instrument using Likert questions was devised based on surveys and suggestions on educational research on Survey Monkey. Quantitative measurements and hard facts may be of more use in demonstrating concrete achievement to the researcher (Harvey, 1998). The survey was completely confidential, facilitating confidential and anonymous contributions to access negative feedback (Harvey, 1998), thus allowing graduates the freedom and confidence to make a relevant and genuine contribution to the research. Sixty-two graduates (male and female 23-55 years of age), consisting of the total population of the last three years of the taught master's programme, were invited to give feedback on this method of assessment. This was considered an appropriate sample size; more students could have been invited to participate, but it was believed that a more recent pool was more beneficial. Prior to sending out the survey, the questionnaire was tested to eliminate any errors and cleansed prior to surveying the sample proper. When the survey was ready, an email was

sent to the sixty-two graduates with the survey link attached with a request to complete same in the interest of improving practice. Four of the emails bounced (the emails on file were work emails), implying that the graduates had moved from their place of work and relevant email to another position. Therefore, the working sample was reduced to 58. Forty graduates of the relevant 58 taking the survey responded – a response rate of 68.96 – 70%.

Discussion

In the context of lifelong learning at master's level 9, the use of EBL is encouraged and considered a worthy approach for assessment at group level within HE. It is also considered to be attractive to prospective students returning to education when compared to traditional examinations. The key reason for using EBL and not PBL is due to the fact that the 'Enquiry' assignment is not presented to the students until week 4 of the term, (in line with Barrett), as it is necessary to present relevant theory to the groups in advance of their 'Enquiry' process so that they are fully informed. For the initial lecture, the format and process of what will happen throughout the module is provided to the students (Hadgraft, 2000). Findings from this research, however, reveal that graduates would actually like to get the problem earlier in the term due to its short nature (12 weeks) prior to week four.

For the EBL, a business organisation (local or international) is chosen by the lecturer (who will facilitate the learning), and the research problem is developed in conjunction with this organisation. Overall, and in line with the literature, respondents were satisfied with the quality of the organisations, and derived particular satisfaction when it involved a 'not for profit' organisation (86%) especially. Problems that are current, local, relevant, and authentic were welcomed by respondents as they are viewed as beneficial to both parties to the exercise. 'The best elements of the course were the live case studies and the guest speakers'. 'The speakers from industry worked very well and gave excellent insights into their companies and problems'. 'As an adult returning to education, this was attractive to me'.

This research found that EBL as a method of assessment was both engaging and challenging for students. 89% stated that EBL was challenging, but in a 'positive way', with only 7% stating that it was 'stressful'. When asked about working together in groups to 'problem solve', 38% stated that problem solving in groups 'helped me to work better in a team setting and ultimately, in my work setting'. 38% stated that it improved their professional development skills, and 25% stated that it improved their communication skills at their place of work.

In line with the literature, when setting the EBL problem, it is important that a clear language and unambiguous terminology is used to define concrete concepts and goals, and acknowledge and reward successful outcomes (Wynne, 2014). Sophisticated problem solving requires strategies for planning and guidance with good quality scaffolds (Resier, 2004). The EBL 'forced us to structure our learning and to plan well'.

By contrast, some respondents were concerned with 'free loading", where weaker students gained an advantage by using EBL. 'By nature, group work tends to allow weaker team members to coast on the coat tails of others, so, perhaps, a certain structure within the group work scenario could be established to address this'. 'It could be easy for some students to be 'carried along' particularly in larger project groups'. On balance, however, students engaged well with the EBL. 'I loved working with actual companies and believe that these types of projects benefitted me most'. Overall, the participants were satisfied with the assessment strategy applied for the EBL (presentation to the relevant company and feedback from same), with 86% affirmation. However, concern was still expressed in terms of 'free loading' of students. This will have to be considered and reviewed.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand. (Benjamin Franklin - politician, writer, scientist. In Spronken-Smith, 2012)

The findings of this research support Biggs (1999a) who believes that setting a problem and encouraging enquiry is a perfect way to assess students. Some graduates expressed a concern around the 'free loading' of others while working on the EBL; however, a solution to this can be found by offering a range of assessment methods, matching the complex open-ended nature of an enquiry (Biggs, 1999b). Macdonald (2005) notes that the real challenge is to make assessment rewarding, stimulating, and a fun learning experience! Assessments must be attractive to lifelong learners to encourage participation. This is mirrored in the research findings.

This research recommends the application of a Tripartite Assessment (Macdonald and Savin-Baden, 2004), while using EBL at master's level. Firstly, the group submits a report for which they receive a mark. Secondly, the individual submits the piece of work they researched. Finally, the individual

writes an account of the group process that is linked to the theory of group work. These three components are added together to form the overall individual mark (Macdonald and Savin-Baden, 2004). The advantage of this is that it does not privilege some students who do less work, and an individual student will be responsible for gaining two-thirds of the marks. Most students, therefore, perceive this grading as fair (Macdonald, 2005). This solution will address the 'free loading' concerns expressed in this research.

Participants also expressed the view that they are anxious to start the EBL as soon as possible in the term, before week four, for example. Given the short-term time of 12 weeks, if this is a future consideration for the masters, then the EBL, as defined by Barrett (2005), may well have to become a PBL where the problem can be presented prior to academic delivery. Theorists provide much debate around the ideas and philosophies for the use of EBL and PBL, with advocates for each providing compelling benefits in the literature. The benefits are especially evident for adults returning to education and for the future encouragement of lifelong learning. The use of any type of problem solving certainly provides new challenges for instructor and student alike, but, on balance, the case for its use in a blended format is compelling. EBL certainly presents benefits along with disadvantages but, holistically, the advantages have a clear recompense, as the students will reap the rewards of being able to undertake EBL interacting with a 'real life' team in an organisational setting. According to one student, 'projects where you work with real companies are supremely productive and invigorating!'. 'Lifelong learning can be rewarding and fun'.

As an adult, returning to education can be a daunting prospect for those who want to engage in lifelong learning. For lifelong learners, including EBL assessments can encourage participation and make the prospect less intimidating for such learners, especially as many of the EBL involves organisational work. This may be perceived as a comfortable environment for many adult learners when compared to traditional examination-based assessments. It is incumbent on HE Institutions to promote the benefits of lifelong learning by inserting even more EBL assessments into adult learning programmes for the future.

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