

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta

The Teaching Council



Title of Research Project: The Nature of Pedagogy in a Post Leaving Certificate College

Researcher: Niamh Gainé



Contact Details: niamh.gaine@corketb.ie

Relevant key words: Further Education and Training (FET); Post Leaving Certificate College (PLC); Vocational Learning; Pierre Bourdieu; Habitus and Ethic of Care

Summary:

A Bourdieuan lens was adopted, using the notions of Field and Habitus to explore teaching in the Further Education and Training Sector (FET). FET is a diverse area of Irish education incorporating ten different types of provision (SOLAS, 2014). The current research focuses on the practice of teaching and learning Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) colleges, which are funded and administered by the Education and Training Boards (ETB). A case study approach was adopted to investigate teaching in a large standalone (PLC) College. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 teachers, across all College departments and analysed using thematic analysis. FET and PLC colleges are a contested policy field in Irish education, operating underneath the second level system at “2 and a half level” (ESRI, 2006). Despite this ambiguity and policy neglect, FET teachers expressed no doubt that FET is a distinct field of education embodying specific habitus.

FET students were conceptualised as “different” to those in other fields of education. FET learners were describe as having an intrinsic motivation for their course of study and a readiness to learn. Similarly, teaching in FET was conceptualised as different to other fields of education. FET teachers were described as having a different duty of care to students in FET. This may be because most FET learners are over the age of 18, therefore FET teachers are not acting in loco parentis. Participants felt this facilitated a more informal relationship between learners and teachers than traditional second level education. FET is non-compulsory, learners have chosen to undertake their course of study. This further alters the teacher- learner dynamic to become more equal. Furthermore, the habitus of care and a strong ethic of care (James, 2007, Gilligan, 1982) emerged in analysis. All participants displayed

a deep *care for* learners and spoke of learners with a deep warmth, respect, and empathy. Unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1969) emerged as a strong feature of the teacher-learner relationship.

A challenge which emerged was the high level of knowledge needed to teach in FET. FET courses are vocationally orientated courses which can change rapidly. Practical and vocational learning applied to “real life” was highly prized by all participants. This creates a challenge for teachers to continually upskill to make teaching and learning “relevant to real life”. This places a significant burden on FET teachers.

The Department of Further and Higher Education (DFHET) was established in July 2020. This positive step acknowledges FET as a specific field of Irish education with its own habitus. At the start of a new decade, perhaps FET will no longer be the Cinderella of Irish Education and will emerge from the shadows.

Published: February 2021