Correlation of Dynamics of Pedagogical Skill and the Psychological Support

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"Quality Education" the fourth goal among the seventeen **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** outlined by the United Nations, is "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". These descriptions are remarkably similar to the focus identified through this research and, with this in mind, the three dimensions of this research are further explained as being; (1) the '*Importance of Interaction*' – referring to the various levels of interaction between individuals within the school environment, accounting for behaviour, atmosphere, and types of communication, (2) the '*Dynamics of Individuation*' – referring to the way in which the differing needs of individuals are personalised and catered for, accounting for classroom pedagogical approaches and student diversification, and (3) the '*Need for Psychological Support*' – referring to the way in which individuals within the school and the school as a whole is supported by its community, from both an educational and psychological perspective. By suggesting that these research directions are intertwined concepts, they propose a holistic observation of contributing factors that influence the educational process.

This assessment could be used to identify teacher strengths from a personal, interpersonal, psychological, and pedagogical perspective. The **Questionnaire of Teacher Interaction (QTI), Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPaCK),** and **Mental Health Inventory (MHI)** were used in the pilot study and were considered to be suitable for the needs of this research stage.

The 'Educational Bubble'

In a recent talk, Seema Bansal (2016) mentioned being asked by the then head of the Department of Education in the state of Haryana (India), for help in addressing issues in their public schools.

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These 'issues' ranged in detail and complexity, including that up to 50% of students fall so far behind their peers before the age of eleven that they will be unable to recover. Despite public schools offering free meals or books to students, it was also found that 40% of parents would pull their children out of these public schools and register them into private schools. Bansal (2016), representing BCG (Boston Consulting Group), was asked to assist in the education renovation of an Indian state of Haryana, which consists of 15,000 public schools with over 2 million students. Bansal mentions needing to uncover the factors that have caused the educational issues in the first place and, in identifying the goals necessary to develop strategies for reaching this particular goal, decided to go directly into classrooms and observe the way educators were teaching. Reporting that the problem within Indian schools was the quality of education, not access to education, mentions that Bansals' BCG team devised a three-year plan that was based around student learning outcomes and explicit focusing of accountability, data systems, and organizational capacity.

Bansal (2016) reports that Haryana teachers were very capable of teaching a class but, the majority of their time was spent outside of the classroom; this was interesting as, before physically entering a classroom, non-educators had apparently viewed teachers being 'lazy' or 'incapable'. Although Bansal (2016) reported teachers not necessarily teaching, she mentions that it was because they were supervising the construction of new classroom buildings, supervising the cooking of student lunches, or visiting a bank to deposit scholarship money for students. This particular insight was (and is) incredible; Bansal asked teachers why they were not teaching and the teachers answered by saying that "*when a supervisor comes to visit us, these are exactly the things that he checks*" (5:29). This particular finding shows that in the provision of government programmes in Haryana, designed to motivate students to stay in school and give greater access, had become an additional point of accountability for teachers and had started to impede classroom instruction. Seeing this as an issue, Bansal and her team began to look at the literature at various educational programmes and pilot programmes that have been shown to improve instructional practice. However, what a large proportion of individuals fail to recognise is how the implementation of these programmes will always come at a cost. For example, schools that take part in a pilot that explores the use of innovative technologies on student learning might show that this programme does indeed result in higher levels of academic outcomes.

In Bansal's (2016) talk she mentions that, with regards to studies and interventions, researchers will typically bring in resources such as money, experience, research assistants, or products. Unless researchers intend to roll out this innovation across every classroom in the country, the findings are most likely going to be un-scalable, ungeneralisable, unusable, and does not reflect a real-world classroom setting. It has been previously mentioned that "*teaching requires being responsive to real-world conditions and constraints that shape the activities of the classroom and students*" (Motoca *et al.*, 2014, pg. 120). This view is similar to schools being 'learning organisations' where the "*emphasis of research might be more upon the selection and differentiation of pupils and on their subculture rather than on the authority structure or the decision-making processes within the school*" (Bell, 1980, pg.183). Hamzah, Yakop, Nordin and Rahman (2011) explain that, like all organisations, there is a strong emphasis on schools to adapt to their surroundings, encourage flexibility, and to be responsive to the various societal and cultural changes across an educational landscape.

While there is a large body of evidence favouring schools as learning organisations (Mulford, 1997; Stoll and Fink, 1996), research concerning how a school should go about this change is not as prevailing (Silins, Zarins, & Mulford, 2002). While it is clear that there are similarities between a school and an 'organisation', both have structure, both have management, there is leadership, interaction, and varying levels of accountability, it is also clear that many factors influence the way in which both operate. Johnston (1998) sought to investigate the key characteristics that involved a school identifying itself as being a 'learning organisation'. Although focusing exclusively on post-primary schools based in Austrailia, it was found that inclusive, collaborative structures, effective communication channels, integrated professional development, and learning-focused leadership were the four main characteristics of schools being one of these 'learning organisations'.

Under the three guiding topics of this research, explicitly outlined through questions and hypotheses, this current research sought to discover what the Irish educational environment needs and how a piece of research could be used practically to support school systems and the individuals within them. This research is looking towards the perception of a school being a learning organisation; considering the way which Silins, Zarins and Mulford's (2002) express the

four factors of 'learning organisations' above. These descriptions are remarkably similar to the focus identified through this research and, with this in mind, the three dimensions of this research are further explained as being; (1) the '*Importance of Interaction*' – referring to the various levels of interaction between individuals within the school environment, accounting for behaviour, atmosphere, and types of communication, (2) the '*Dynamics of Individuation*' – referring to the way in which the differing needs of individuals are personalised and catered for, accounting for classroom pedagogical approaches and student diversification, and (3) the '*Need for Psychological Support*' – referring to the way in which individuals within the school and the school as a whole is supported by its community, from both an educational and psychological perspective. By suggesting that these research directions are intertwined concepts, they propose a holistic observation of contributing factors that influence the educational process.

While research in an Irish context has found that only 33.1% of schools regularly engage with SSE (Brown, 2010), this dispute between the DES and teaching unions will cause frustration, anxiety, and confusion throughout the educational community. The SSE is a thorough research process that requires considerable resources, the problem is one of 'lack of support', almost mirroring the issues faced by Bansal's (2016) team in Haryana. Additionally, this lack of support echoes in other ways. For example, on 30th of March 2016, the INTO released a press release that argued against the cut in government funding for education and highlighted that schools are being forced to fundraise themselves, that they are "*kept running on cake sales, raffles and sponsored walks*" (2016b), despite having no empirical evidence to support.

3.6. Conclusion - The Individualised Teacher Report

This claim within the press release itself, it does clearly articulate the many problems experienced in Irish Education.

Despite focusing on the individual educator, rather than the collective school environment, this Ph.D. project somewhat resembles the development of a self-evaluation process; it requires educators to compete measures that evaluate their subjective instructional and psychological resources. Although the issues surrounding self-evaluation may be a possible limitation, this research would argue the opposite. This study could provide a process that allows schools to self-evaluate in a way that takes the workload away from schools, provides tailored feedback to

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individual educators, has a standardised methodological approach, and is evidence based and research driven. A new model of self-evaluation may be considered a momentous task; however, it is not beyond the scope of this project.

According to Collins and Pratt (2011), "*there is a move to adopt a single, dominant view of effective teaching ... *[where]* teachers are asked to reflect on who they are and how they teach but with an implied message that reflection should conform to some preconceived notion of a 'good' teacher*" (pg. 359). It is naïve to assume that there is a 'single view' of what it means to be an effective educator, as the requirements and needs of one classroom group will differ that than of another. What is arguably more appropriate for education, rather than training educators to teach in the same way and conform to a preconceived notion of what a 'good teacher' is, is to encourage and train teachers to be self-reflective and adapt their teaching to suit the needs of their students. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) mentioned that reflective practice is an important human activity where provision is given for individuals to recapture their experiences and evaluate them to improve on one's abilities. One consistency throughout the literature of educator training and interaction is the importance of self-reflection; Paterson and Chapman (2013), for example, argue that self-reflection that motivates an individual to learn from their experiences and is the key towards the maintenance and development of competency throughout their work practices. Others, such as or Hendrickx *et al.* (2016), mentions that reflective teachers who are aware of their influence on student behaviour can tailor their interactions to benefit their instructional practices.

According to Patil (2013), reflective practices are self-regulated processes that aim to enhance an individuals' ability to communicate and make balanced decisions. Educational researchers, such as Valli (1997), describe reflective teachers as being individuals that can "*look back on events, make judgments about them, and alter their teaching behaviors in light of craft, research, and ethical knowledge*" (pg. 70). Other researchers argue that reflective action "*involves intuition, emotion, and passion and is not something that can be neatly packaged as a set of techniques for teachers to use*" (Zeichner & Liston 1996, pg. 9). These quotes would suggest that reflective practice in education is an ideal that pedagogics and educational researchers would encourage
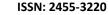
teachers to become accustomed to, but that the practical implementation of may be somewhat difficult to achieve.

Kay and Johnson (2002), speaking about the University of Washington's teacher education programme, mention that the reflective seminars and completion of reflective portfolios are a useful method to provide support to student teachers in developing the skills necessary to reflect on their practices. Kay and Johnson (2002) do mention that the limitation of these methods is the way they categorise dimensions of reflection into a teachable concept, or that the use of typologies naturally constrain teachers towards 'thinking like a teacher'. But, similar to Pratt and Collins (2010) view of the TPI, the concept of using this approach as a tool is quite useful. Without the opportunity and a way for teachers to systematically reflect on their instructional practices, they may be unable to view the importance of their instructional decisions, interactions, and relationships with students.

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