

Among Others: Team-teaching to foster deeper links between formal and non-formal educators

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Introduction

Recent demographic and attitudinal changes in Irish society have necessitated a reimagining of the professional practice of both teachers and youth workers (McGinnity et al. 2018; McBride & Neary 2021). Despite the important role both youth workers and teachers play in the lives of young people, and although they do occasionally come together to examine and address the issues facing young people, such initiatives are quite rare in the Irish context. Rarer still are instances of cross-sectoral work in the initial professional education of formal (teachers) and non-formal (youth workers) educators (Cooper et al. 2015). Team-teaching by lecturers on two professional programmes at Maynooth University (MU), this work involves student teachers (post primary) and youth work students learning together on a shared module that bridges a gap traditionally dividing these educators. Aiming to develop and deepen mutual understanding among the two professions pre-qualification, our approach is underpinned by a commitment to democratic education and teaching for social justice (Young, 2006). During the module we discuss and share collaborative approaches to working with young people to address and enhance understanding of issues of plurality, equality and culturally responsive education and communication. Team teaching here has not only deepened the understanding of the differences in the professional cultures among the participants themselves, but it has enabled a critical lens to be applied to many otherwise unquestioned assumptions we, the lecturers, hold about our respective educational spheres.

Method

Our research aims to capture and analyse what we believe is the transformational learning that has become apparent to us as we have worked on this ever evolving module in the past five years. Adopting a mixed methods approach, we conducted surveys and focus group interviews with the students and combined these with reflections on our own practice to capture insights about our respective experiences. Situating the research within a broader discourse on the purpose and practices of education and how this is shaped by, and shapes, the wider societal context we explore the impact this work has made to our collective senses of professional identity as educators (Beauchamp and Thomas 2016; Biesta et al 2015; Hatton, 2022).

Results

Findings demonstrate that bringing the two student cohorts together opens an opportunity for students to gain insight about their own and others' professional values and commitments as well as deeper understanding of the complex lives of young people. Moreover, we have found that the process of developing, delivering and reflecting on the shared teaching and learning space, has had a significant impact on us as the educators of educators, re-shaping our perceptions of the possibilities of and for initial professional education in our respective fields and the value of team teaching in this context (Rickard and Walsh, 2019).

Conclusion

We reflect on some of the challenges facing both formal and non-formal educators seeking to fulfil what they see to be the purpose of their professional practice, and we signpost some of the opportunities to respond to these challenges (O'Shea and Rickard, 2023).