

**WHAT IS COUNTED BECOMES WHAT COUNTS:
MEASURING THE CORRECT LEARNING
OUTCOMES IN ADULT LITERACY**

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Title for thesis 'What is counted becomes what counts' is a quote from 'Performance Accountability: For What? To Whom? And How?' (Merrifield, 1999)

Abstract

This research is an inquiry into reflections on the experiences of practitioners involved in adult literacy assessment. It began with reviewing existing Irish policy on assessment and extended for comparative purposes towards international policy. It queries the current quantitative method of collecting data on literacy skills attainment and asks if the data collected reflects an accurate picture of learning observed in literacy services. Through reflections, it emerged that practitioners were not resisting a move towards measurement, but argued that a discourse was needed on what exactly should be measured for reporting purposes. The findings point towards the broader social justice elements of literacy education and personal development of the learner. A theme of care for the learner also emerged, and ultimately the state's lack of understanding of 'learning care', and the impact this care has on literacy education practice.

This is a thesis where care and measurement converged. Arguing for reflective practice when policy making, it asks those in powerful policy making positions to take account of international experiences of literacy measurement and look towards creating a new model of assessment integrating human dimensions, based on the initial parameters set by the learner. It was agreed that initial and formative assessment are relevant and useful for lesson planning, but a discursive, purposeful approach to summative assessment should be undertaken to ensure that what is observed by the practitioner, and reported by the learner, as achievement is recorded.

Contents

Abbreviations	1
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	2
Research Question	2
Context.....	3
Background Leading to the Research	3
Assumptions Underpinning the Research.....	4
Changing Assumptions	5
Thesis Content	6
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
Introducing Assessment.....	7
Policy Making, the Power Existing in its Implementation and its Absence	8
The formulation of policy in literacy education.....	9
Existing policy	10
Existing Measurement Tools and Policies in the Irish Context	13
Mapping the Learning Journey	14
Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education.....	15
The Progress Framework	16
International Experiences of Assessment	16
What is counted becomes what counts.....	16
Business models and education.....	18
Measuring the wrong outcomes	18
The Learner and The State	20
Power, politics and policy.....	20
The state, measurement and real opportunity	22
Care and literacy work	23
The Human Development Approach	24
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY.....	27
Ontological Reflection	27
Epistemology	28
Inequality in education.....	28
Social Constructivism	29
Paradigms.....	31
Method and Methodology.....	32
The interviews.....	32
Where is the learner?.....	33
Objectives of interviews.....	33

Ethics	34
Reflexivity.....	35
CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS	37
Perceptions of the Measurement Tool	37
Initial assessment	37
Formative assessment	38
Technical Challenges	39
Use of the tool.....	39
Summative assessment: Fearing final statistics	40
Caring for the Learner, Caring about your Work.....	42
Affective care in literacy education	42
The State and Literacy Education	44
Assessment for whom and for what?	44
What does literacy education actually do?.....	45
Human capital or human capability?	47
CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	49
The Progress Framework tool.....	49
Positives of the tool; DES recommendations.....	49
Positives of the tool; Carrigan's recommendations	50
The Unintended Learning	51
Unaccounted outcomes	51
Who is the learner?	52
Social Justice.....	53
The Work the Tutor Does	54
Care and the learner	54
Care work; unrecognised and value-less.....	55
Output Indicators or Outcomes?	56
State Responsibilities	57
CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION.....	59
Personal learning; Affirmed Sense of Justice	59
Implications for Policy Making	60
Recommendations.....	60
Limitations	61
Further Research	61
Dissemination	62
Conclusion	62
Bibliography	64

Abbreviations

ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
ALS	Adult Literacy Service
CDETB	City of Dublin Education and Training Board
DEIS	Delivery of Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
MLJ	Mapping the Learning Journey
NCVA	National Council for Vocational Awards
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In my daily practice, as both an adult literacy tutor and a support tutor to my colleagues, I am in a position to hear many voices. Power determines the voices heard, power determines the interpretation of the story and how it is disseminated. The current powerful, dominant discourse of measurement of achievement within literacy education is quantitative, whether that be through assessment tools or portfolio presentation for certification. This introductory chapter takes the reader through my motivations for the research journey undertaken, my assumptions about the research area prior to beginning, and the resulting changes in my research question as the interviews progressed. It also sets out the structure of the thesis and its evolution.

Research Question

The purpose of this research was to hear the voices of practitioners involved in assessment. The process aimed to provide a platform to discuss assessment and the meanings people make of assessment procedures and ultimately the data that assessment tools collect. The research question is: What are practitioners' evaluations of the newly developed assessment tool for the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb)? It aimed to discover if there are untold stories overlooked by the numbers. The ultimate goal of the research was to query literacy assessment techniques in order to ensure that what is being recorded as the achievements of the learning process is reflecting what both the learners' report and tutors' observe as success.

Based on the findings and literature reviewed, this thesis will make the following arguments:

- Literacy assessment is important for evaluating learners' needs and influencing teaching and learning.
- Aggregated data of learners' performance of tasks as a summative measurement does not reflect an accurate picture of all the learning which has taken place.
- There is a possibility that measuring only indicators of literacy progress, rather than the broader educational and personal attainment of the learner, may actually cause unintended damages to the service.

Context

The organisation is a large the Education and Training Board (ETB), all participants are either managers, support tutors or tutors with the Adult Education Department. The organisation has been for many years at the helm of devising a literacy assessment tool, one which is both initial and also formative. It is in its fourth year of use and management are interested in reviewing its impact for policy formulation on literacy assessment in order to comply with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) requirements. As support tutor, I collate the data on student progress for reporting to the regional office. I also support other tutors in recording their learners' progress. Furthermore, through conversation with my own learners I record their own perceptions on their achievements. With each of my own students I find the conversation takes on average about twenty minutes, it is rich, subjective and construed in relation to social situations. Converting that conversation to numbers has lead me to question the value of those numbers to any external reader, whether that is regional management, SOLAS or the DES.

Background Leading to the Research

As a practising literacy tutor for the past decade, I have experienced increasing formality around assessments procedures within the Adult Literacy Services. Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programmes, piloted in 2006 and running since, brought much needed funding for intensive, six hours per week, tuition for learners. The funding brought with it an assessment tool, one which could be used to plan teaching also. It is an excellent programme in that it allows for the devising of a curriculum set by the learners, and provides two to three classes per week. The establishment of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FEATC) brought new modules to literacy education, a loose curriculum but specific set of learning outcomes. Learners had an opportunity to gain national certification reflecting their learning. FETAC also brought a quality framework and concurrently an increased workload for tutors.

In 2013, the DES published a review¹ into the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) run by the Vocational Education Committees (now ETB) in Ireland. The review was responding, among other things, to; commitments made in the Programme for Government, recommendations by an Oireachtas Joint Committee², calls from stakeholders for a review³ and also to serve as a basis for future policy decisions that might be made by SOLAS. Of particular resonance to this piece of research is future policy decisions, and specifically policy making on assessment procedures in the literacy services. The DES review made thirty two recommendations, three of which relate directly to literacy assessment. The recommendations essentially call for the creation of a comprehensive initial and formative assessment tool, based on already existing tools (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education and Mapping the Learning Journey), accommodating the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs⁴ (2007) recommendation of recognition of prior learning.

In 2011, a new teaching and learning tool was introduced in the ETB in which I am employed, aiming to guide lesson planning through formative assessment. From 2014, tutors were asked to report back from the tool a quantitative measure of student performance on tasks. Tutors were dubious about the tool initially and my position was to support those using it, and encourage those who were not engaging with it to see the benefits of the tool for teaching and learning purposes. On asking tutors to record a measure of student performance on the tool, I was met with quiet resistance, non compliance. I work with a group of incredibly hard-working, earnest and experienced tutors, tutors who have continued professional development throughout their careers, always eager to learn new skills and approaches to apply to their practice, tutors who approach their work with integrity. I did not believe that this was an unfounded resistance. This research is the result of that resistance, it aims to find out why there are doubts about the tool and if the concerns are valid.

Assumptions Underpinning the Research

I assumed that one of the possible reasons for resistance was simply the continually increasing workload, that the tool provided yet another 'thing to do' within an increasingly stretched hourly rate. However, this did not make sense with volunteer

¹ Department of Education and Skills (2013) 'Review of ALCES funded Adult Literacy Provision'

² Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science (May 2006), "Report on adult literacy"

³ NALA (2009) 'Seeking a refreshed Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy'

⁴ EGFSN (2007) 'Tomorrow's skills - Towards a national skills strategy'

tutors, so if that was the reason for paid tutors, it certainly was not the only reason. Another assumption was that it was too complex, it is a very large document running to ten pages. I aimed to make the tool more user friendly, which was met with a good response from tutors and thus it was modified accordingly across the ETB. Still the tool was rarely used without my prompting. Was this the experience across the service in my ETB or just my centre? I assumed we could not be that unique. Having read the DES review, I felt that we had a good tool and if any I would hope this was the one that would be accepted nationally, but the resistance, I felt, had to be acknowledged and discussed as it is my belief that the practitioners have the best interests of the learners at the centre of their practice and there was a story which needed to be told.

Changing Assumptions

In the course of interviews, the participants began to tell stories about the learning they witnessed in their practice, learning not solely related to literacy skills. They spoke about the broader impact exclusion has on an individual, how lacking literacy skills excluded them from varying aspects of participation in education, work, family and social settings. The improvement of literacy skills led to further inclusion in each of these settings and it is this achievement that practitioners rate as the most valuable outcome of the literacy services.

I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Maggie Feeley, an experienced theorist and practitioner in the field of literacy education. She highlighted the broader implications of measuring incorrect outcomes, in terms of justice and economics. This was a turning point in my own personal journey on this masters programme. I discovered the work of Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, which led me to question measurement on two fronts, firstly social justice and secondly economic usefulness. I then researched international experiences of assessment, and its pitfalls, and examined this within the framework of both normative social justice and recognised measures of economic growth.

The research revealed for me that neoliberal policy making has not been as mendacious as I believed, but that it certainly has lost its way. The notion underpinning neo-liberalism was that the free market would benefit all. Sen (2012) does not vilify production and growth, but advocates for a fairer distribution of its produce to give

people means to achieve their capabilities. With the OECD's (2014) report on the impact increasing inequalities are having on growth, due to free markets and obsession with GDP measures, there is hope of a sea change in attitudes towards measurement. It is time to take stock of what, how and why we measure, and the impact this has on human lives behind the measurement.

Thesis Content

The literature review in chapter two takes the reader through the existing policy behind literacy assessment, the Irish tools currently available for measuring literacy attainment, international experiences of literacy measurement, the role of literacy practitioners and finally broader implications of measurement for the state. Chapter three describes and justifies the methods used in this research and my own ontological approach. Chapter four gives voice to the participants as a standalone findings chapter. In chapter five, I analyse the emerging themes referring back to my own ontology and literature reviewed as a result. Finally, chapter six concludes the findings, explains limitations and makes recommendations for further research. As this research has been driven by policy decisions, and as a consequence reviewed national and international policy decisions in adult literacy education, consequentially the tentative recommendations made are oriented towards future policy making.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

"...discourse is secretly based on an "already said"; and that this "already said" is not merely a phrase that has been already spoken, or a text that has been written, but a "never said", an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breadth, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark." (Foucault, 1975, p.25)

Foucault was aware that there was power in the unspoken or unheard. The discourse this research is interested in resides in the area of policy making on assessment, or measurement, of literacy learners. Measurement is synonymous with neo-liberalism, and neo-liberalism is so pervasive that acceptance of demonstrable, quantifiable achievements or outcomes on education programmes has largely remained unchallenged. This chapter looks at the evolution of policy and practice in literacy education. It then specifically reflects on existing assessment tools in Ireland, the newly developed tool within the CDETB and international experiences of measurement tools. Finally, the chapter addresses the broader concept of measurement by the state and asks if in doing so, whether the state is requesting measurement of the correct outcomes or missing important outcomes, and whether the state has a duty of care to acknowledge all the learning taking place in literacy education. Furthermore, if devoid of a responsibility of care, does the state have a duty to ensure all learning is captured for accountability purposes, and is it possible that learning within the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) has an economic value beyond just improved literacy rates? This chapter will also tentatively explore an alternative model for collecting data. The Human Development Index has in recent years been adopted as a measure of growth, replacing Gross National or Domestic Product, in developing countries. Its approach to disaggregating data will be discussed regarding its possible value in adult literacy assessment. This chapter aims to review the existing literature with the purpose of voicing the unheard in policy making on assessment.

Introducing Assessment

The issue of assessment has been ongoing and contested for years within the ALS. The recognition that literacy is embedded in the individual's daily experience and is difficult to measure in abstract (Street, 1995, Hamilton & Barton, 2000, Tett, 2014) has been at the core of the ad hoc nature of assessment practices. Although the concept of adult

literacy as social practice, as opposed to a standalone skill, has its critics (Brandt & Clinton, 2000) it is not argued that basic skills should be measured out of context, just the extent to which context is relevant. Lave & Wenger's (1991) research into learning crafts and trades in African communities demonstrated that learning happens at the side of an experienced practitioner and should be applicable immediately in order for the learner to become a member of that craft or trade 'community'. Their resulting Communities of Practice model can be applied to literacy education. The model goes further to not only place the literacy skill and learner in context but recognises the communities they live in (learning, family, work and social) as essential to learning and performing acquired skills. Resulting increasing confidence in literacy skills equates to a further inclusion in each of the individual's relevant communities, moving from periphery to praxis. Literacy assessment then should take account of not only skills, but social application of those skills. As recently as 2013, the Adult Literacy Organisers forum called on Adult Literacy Organisers (ALO) from around the country to present their methods of assessment at their annual conference, demonstrating continued inconsistencies of practice within the services. A recent review, by Carrigan (2010) of VEC practices nationally, also revealed various shortcomings in existing practices (discussed below). The DES therefore are correct in calling for the development of a national assessment tool to ensure agreed standards are put in place in the area of initial and ongoing assessment.

With multiple stakeholders at play in literacy assessment, from the learner, the tutor, the organisational management through to national and international players, in reviewing the literature my question is; in the creation of the CDETb's assessment methods (integrated into its teaching and learning tool called the Progress Framework), are we moving away from a learner-centred, situated social practice approach, towards a results driven practice? Results are important, but the concern of this research is; what counts as results, what results are not counted, and if there are unheard voices available to empower, enrich and influence good policy making on assessment.

Policy Making, the Power Existing in its Implementation and its Absence

Ball (2012, p.28) equates the emergence of educational policy with Foucault's conjectured 'problematization'. Coal face workers often react in two distinct ways to

new policy announcements, either accepting policy decisions influencing their daily practice with the notion that policy making at organisational level is out of their control or alternatively, if a new policy decision is unfeasible, union action being the only means to resolution. A key argument of this thesis is that there is another way; involving practitioners and beneficiaries in policy formulation processes will lead to a collaborative, multi-voiced formulation with the space to think and question the process, a Freirean conscientization of sorts, before the 'already said' becomes empowered as the truth, as Foucault postulates. If policy on assessment concedes that it requires quantifiable measures of results, then policy makers have an obligation to use the best models available to them. Rather than assume the only model available to them is the traditional aggregated one, based on GDP, research into more recent, broader measures such as HDI, discussed later in the chapter, could be considered.

The formulation of policy in literacy education

Policy is a discourse which can often adapt a level of power in its formulation and implementation almost separate to its influences. Reification in policy making has always concerned me, in that evolution of practices without time to question them can result in policy decisions being made without reflexivity, leading to the objective of the policy superseding its subjective value. The adoption of FETAC (now QQI) modules as a vehicle or framework for delivery of adult literacy education is one example. With the majority of literacy provision now taking place through a 'FETAC course', my professional experience is that the experiential and cognitive learning of the participant can sometimes take second place to the objective of delivering Specific Learning Outcomes (SLO) required for certification. There was some liaison with tutors on module writing initially but there was no debate between management and tutors (not to mention learners) prior to adoption of the practice and I feel discussion, prior to implementation and resulting evolution of modules, would have highlighted then what is now a difficulty in some centres around the enmeshment of literacy education and module delivery, with module delivery taking precedence.

Hamilton & Barton (2000), with particular reference to literacy policy making, have raised the justified criticism that currently "policy is driving the research and not the other way around" quoting the policy behind the 1997 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) survey which in turn set off a myriad of reports further influencing

research and policy (Lisbon, 2000, EAEA, 2006, OECD, 2013). So what is the "already said" out there and how can we ensure the "never said" finds its voice in policy making? Hamilton (2012) asserts a discursive approach involving multiple stakeholders to 'practical policy making' rather than a rational, technical approach. Furthermore, as Taylor (2010) indicated in his case study, policy submissions and papers are only one of the early steps in policy formulation. The necessity for monitoring and checking systems must be put in place if policy proposals have any hope of useful implementation. The CDETБ has already seen an attempt at an assessment tool fail, with the tried implementation of an assessment process known as Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ). Hearing the never said this time around, for the Progress Framework, from multiple stake holders is essential to its success.

Existing policy

In 1997, the IALS survey revealed that twenty five percent of Irish adults had severe literacy difficulties. This embarrassing revelation in the 'land of saints and scholars' led to the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) which in turn secured funding for the Adult Literacy sector. Heavily influenced by a social justice model, purporting to value citizenship and personal development with economic activity given less imperative, Carrigan (2010) recognises the influence the paper has had on unfolding practice;

In contrast to the strong neo-liberal perspective pervading lifelong learning in England, especially, and Scotland, the Irish White Paper (2000) sets out much wider goals for lifelong learning... 'Rather than being merely a tag on to the economic rationale for lifelong learning, the White Paper prioritises the issue of social cohesion through personal, community and cultural development' (p.65).

The evolution of the Adult Literacy Service, from its roots in social justice movements, and also slow policy making in adult literacy due to the DES prioritising primary, secondary and tertiary education, has meant an almost protected section of Irish education from external policy.

Of current concern to organisers in the Adult Education Service is the influence of SOLAS on this sacrosanct ground. SOLAS has a 'Corporate' plan for 2014-2016 focussing on training which raises alarm bells for those involved in literacy provision, with the concern that a business model could not appreciate an educational model. One example of the discord is having been asked for quarterly returns, the services are at

present trying to negotiate with SOLAS for recognition of the nature of literacy education. SOLAS lack understanding of the fact that literacy provision runs for essentially seven months of tuition, with a rolling intake, immediately lacking two of the requested quarters and ever changing numbers. As will be mentioned in the findings, one Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO), explains the impact of this drive for numbers is her having to spend increasing time on accountability rather than her usual role of the daily running of a large education service. Furthermore, learners often have to do some pre-literacy work, confidence building and/or learning to learn, prior to actually seeing improvements in literacy skills. Bailey (2006) reaffirms Carrigan's recognition of the uniqueness of literacy practice in Ireland but raises consciousness of the 'incremental creep' (Grummel, 2013) of neo-liberal policies grounded in business models:

The approach to adult literacy work in Ireland, which is beyond a skills approach, may be threatened by an overriding narrower focus on up skilling the labour force. A critical factor in achieving common goals within the EU is that all involved can agree on priorities for future action. (Bailey, p 30)

Recognising the influence of external EU, OECD and World Bank policy making on the development and implementation of literacy policy here is key to understanding why academic voices in the field of literacy (Hamilton, Barton, Tett, Derrick, Merrifield, Street & Bailey) continue to question policy decisions on a macro level. Ball (1999) termed what he saw as a 'policy epidemic', that the influence of EU wide or global policy makers was insidious in that these policies were now influenced by a business model, seeing it in a market form and related to performativity of relative 'products', often generically applied to countries with varying degrees of difference in economies and education systems. Certainly in the FET strategy, SOLAS (2013) has stated;

SOLAS will sustain funding, as appropriate, for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy provision until a sufficiently robust evidence base exists that will allow for more informed decision-making with regard to the type of FET provision where embedding of literacy and numeracy education is the more appropriate and effective option. (p.102)

Embedded in what? Where does SOLAS see this 'embedding' happening? Outside of primary and secondary education, there is nowhere to embed literacy learning. There is certainly room to embed literacy skills improvement in Further Education (FE) courses from level five onwards, room to help those in vocational education improve their skills for coursework or life, however that is not the student the literacy service is primarily focussed on. The literacy learner is more often an early school leaver with insufficient

skills to take on further education or training. More importantly, the literacy learner is often from an area of social disadvantage and experiencing social and economic exclusion. SOLAS further states its objectives in relation to the literacy services;

[there should be a..] Focus on data collection and analysis with intensive feedback to providers to support evaluation and programme review.Develop more reliable and fit-for-purpose screening and assessment systems by conducting research to identify and develop effective screening and assessment instruments to systematically identify the literacy and numeracy problems of those who come into contact with **training**. [my emphasis]

(FET Strategy, p.102)

SOLAS has a skills approach to learning, which may be relevant for those accessing training in the Further Education Colleges and ex FAS training centres. Students accessing training expect to learn new skills. However, SOLAS must recognise the history of Further Education in Ireland, which has been involved in the provision of education as well as skills. Learners who need basic education are indeed acquiring new 'skills', as in functional reading and writing skills, but they do not acquire them in a training environment and they are intrinsically linked to their situated social practice, situated in their communities as espoused by Brookfield (2005) and Lave & Wenger (1991). How they apply those skills outside of the learning environment is of paramount importance to the service and tutors, and to see this kind of learning as training moves away from the social justice model advocating 'care' for our citizens (Freire (1998), Lynch (2005), Nussbaum (2011), Feeley(2014)). As will be shown in the findings, participants argue that a continued move away from the social justice element of adult literacy work will lead, in their opinions, to a negative impact on the broader nature of the practice and the impact this has on learners' lives.

This piece of research aims to highlight the holistic educational nature of literacy education and influence the policy making around assessment in the literacy services to ensure that the literacy services can approach the Department of Education and Skills (DES), fulfilling their requirement for assessment and encouraging the Department to remind SOLAS that, in its provision of funding to the literacy services that we are education and not training.

Existing Measurement Tools and Policies in the Irish Context

As a method of assessment, which it was, IALS left unanswered questions on its validity. Hamilton & Barton (2000) made claims of cultural bias and Tett (2009, 2013) questions its methodology. Another contested finding is the OECD's (2003) statement that people often over-estimate their abilities in literacy tests, however this is in marked contrast with Adult Literacy Organisers' experiences in Ireland who report an under-estimation of learner's skills, often due to nervousness (Carrigan, 2010, p.6). However, few would argue that the test revealed an urgent problem and that its results led to funding the sector. Taylor (1996) and Freire (1993) raise the questions of who holds power over literacy, that literacy education should do the opposite to eroding power. As can be seen below from Carrigan's report, services were holding the power over initial assessment by withholding results from students. This has to be negated in any new assessment tool, sensitively due to the nature of perceived failure on the part of literacy students.

Historically, the assessment method on entry to the service was self reporting during an informal chat with the Literacy Organiser;

The importance of this initial interview is stressed in the guidelines and there is evidence from international literature that assessment embedded in conversation is more likely to yield information regarding new learners' needs.

(Looney,

2008 cited in Carrigan 2010, p.16)

The learner was placed with a tutor who then, through observation and discussion, further unravelled the specific needs of the learner. So why do we need assessment procedures developed and integrated into policy? Carrigan (2010) found that of twenty-nine VECs she surveyed, only four gave the results of the outcome of initial assessment to the learner. Carrigan (2010, p.55) notes "that if an assessment is *for* learning rather than *of* learning, then feedback is of critical importance."

If we as a service are to be transparent and accountable, which every publicly funded service should be according to Merrifield (1998), and ensure that the learner is the main recipient of an assessment which influences their learning, we must be congruous and coherent in our assessment methods. Dorgan (2009) in his evaluation of literacy services in Ireland also called for assessment policy to be highlighted as a management priority and applied congruently nationally;

An integral element in the proper management of literacy training programme is a student assessment system, which can be applied uniformly throughout the country and is calibrated with the NFQ...(p.28)

Dorgan (2009, p.17) emphasizes the stagnation of funding per literacy student in comparison with other sectors of education in the years 2000-2008 and goes further to highlight the lack of national policy on literacy education in general and the resulting consequences;

The absence of an overall objective, which could function as a motivation and a measure of progress, is a major shortcoming of current policy. In terms of stimulus, the IALS results, with their stark simplicity, were very effective in getting literacy policy moving. What are now needed are a destination and a road map.(p.23)

Carrigan's research (2010, p.3) found that "various screening and initial assessment tools do exist but no instrument has been standardised against the Irish National Framework of Qualifications".

Mapping the Learning Journey

Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) is one such tool. It was a comprehensive tool for initial and formative assessment developed by NALA in 2005. MLJ was holistic in its aspirations;

(It) acknowledges that progress in literacy is about more than developing the technical knowledge and skills. It involves personal, social and emotional development. By including the three 'process' cornerstones as well as knowledge and skills, the framework provides a way of affirming and recording the growth in confidence, self-belief and independence that learners demonstrate in a huge variety of ways. This gives a much more rounded picture of progress than an assessment based solely on the technical knowledge and skills involved in literacy and numeracy.

(Mapping the Learning Journey, 2005, p.8)

Any adult literacy practitioner is aware that a technical skill gained in the classroom is of no benefit to the learner if she sees no social application for it in her lived experience, or if the learner lacks the confidence to attempt to apply the skill. MLJ was a comprehensive attempt at trying to capture these elements and measure them. However in trying to capture every nuance of literacy education, the tool itself was complex and difficult to use. Tutors were required to assign the learning to a task (such as writing an address) at a particular level, then assess the learner on her fluency, application and

critical awareness of the task, which was assessed on a three point 'proficiency' scale and then on a nine point 'progress' scale. To say tutors felt a little flummoxed after MLJ training is an understatement. What MLJ had tried to do was commended but its practical application seemed impossible. Needless to say, it fell by the wayside.

Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education

Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) is probably the singularly most comprehensively used assessment tool by tutors in the literacy services across Ireland. It was developed in 2006 by the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) as part of an intensive education program for literacy learners. Until then, traditionally learners attended two hours tuition per week, sometimes attending a second two hour class in numeracy or information technology skills. ITABE provides funding for six hours tuition per week for fourteen weeks. Learners can attend up to four programs, essentially two years tuition. Alongside a tuition budget, it also allocated administration hours for assessment and planning and a healthy materials fund. ITABE programs must be applied for annually by ALOs and are conditional on the reporting of pre and post course assessment.

ITABE has been revolutionary in Adult Literacy, intensifying and speeding up the learning process for learners. As an assessment tool though, it has its limitations. It was developed with three levels and three tight parameters of measurement within each level. Essentially, reporting on a learners skills, the options would be to determine which of three pre-defined levels they are working at, and then at which of the following three 'stages' on predefined literacy tasks: needs a lot of help, needs some help, needs no help. There is some scope to measure skills acquisition but not the emotional and social dimensions, also the parameters are so tight it does not allow for a broader recording of reading and writing skills. It has become dated also in that digital literacies are not measured, which were measured recently in the PIAAC research findings (OECD 2013). It was not developed with the NFQ in mind, which is recommendation by the DES. Also, not everyone can avail of ITABE tuition as there is a finite amount of programs granted annually, which must be fairly distributed throughout the country. As an assessment tool, to say it is reductionist in comparison to MLP would be fair, but ultimately it has proven much more user friendly.

The Progress Framework

The Progress Framework, a tool for teaching and learning developed in 2012 by the CDETB, is the focus of this piece of research. It built on the early aspirations of MLJ but simplified the recording process. It visually looks like ITABE in order to ensure user-friendliness. Importantly though, in terms of the DES review recommendations, it has been developed and mapped onto the NFQ (now QQI). It does however include a level prior to level one, known as entry level, recognising that some learners have had no formal schooling at all, which is more often the case with immigrant literacy learners. It recognises prior learning and includes extensive guidance for initial and ongoing assessment.

The CDETB also created a new role, that of Support Tutor, to support the teaching and learning and the recording of progress in alliance with the Progress Framework. The tool is essentially an assessment for learning rather than an assessment of learning. This distinction is important, focusing on formative rather than summative assessment procedures. It is non-prescriptive, encouraging only measurement of the tasks the learner is working on relevant to their lives. It aligns numerous task with pre-defined levels (meaning the tutor or student can disregard levels and focus on tasks) and encourages assessment through discussion with the student on the dimensions of their learning. The cognitive skill can be observed and recorded but it is the feedback on fluency, independence and social application (setting) from the learner which reveals the true nature of progress. Brice Heath (cited in Hughes *et al*, 2009, p.9) discusses "any event where a written text is involved in a social situation" being termed as literacy 'events', and resulting feelings about those events in turn influence literacy practices. The two are inseparable and therefore assessment without accounting for both is a half picture. The tool therefore is inclusive, rather than a measurement taken objectively by the tutor or organiser. However, the tool is also being used to draw an aggregated measure of student performance for reporting purposes. It is this element of the tool which is causing concern among practitioners.

International Experiences of Assessment

What is counted becomes what counts

As the move towards a national assessment tool in Ireland is in its infancy, it is worthwhile reviewing the experiences of international policy making on assessment in

order to influence its creation and implementation here. Juliet Merrifield and Jay Derrick have collaborated on a number of research projects on assessment in Adult Basic Education (ABE). Merrifield has extensive experience in ABE in America, Canada and Britain, while Derrick has expertise in the British education system. Merrifield advocates for accountability but forewarns of the pitfalls;

What is counted becomes what counts. Many examples of the hazards of counting the wrong things exist....For accountability purposes, it is crucial that we collect data that are relevant, adequate, and important. To do so, we need tools - indicators and measures - that we believe in and use well. (1999⁵)

What is counted becomes what counts. This powerful statement is at the heart of this research. Merrifield does not argue against measurement and accountability, but argues for a thoughtful and purposeful collection of data, ensuring that when capturing data we believe it is reflective of what is actually happening as a result of literacy education. She goes further in her research to call for mutual accountability, not only for the service provider to be accountable to the funders, but so too must the funders be accountable to the service and its learners;

Congressional representatives stand for taxpayers in exercising accountability over the adult education system which is supported by public money. Legislators are often not held accountable by learners or educators for providing adequate resources and policy guidance to the system. (1998, p. vi)

Merrifield, in moving the goal posts, lifts some of the weight of measurement off the shoulders of the learners and service providers and asks in return that government departments take some responsibility for measurement also, in providing good policy and resources and to be answerable in return if failing on their part. This broader question of state responsibility to the learner is explored in the section on the state below. Merrifield also refutes the value of standardised testing, currently used in Britain and the US for both initial and on-going assessment.

Yet standardized tests, the most widely used tools for measuring learning, have been criticized both by researchers and practitioners because they do not demonstrate what has been learned. They are also incompatible with new research-based conceptions of literacy as social practices rather than isolated skills. (1998, p. vi)

Irish Adult Literacy Services have thus far resisted standardised testing and the Progress Framework tool continues this resistance.

⁵ *Performance Accountability: For What? To Whom? And How?* (1999) No page numbers available.

Business models and education

Although SOLAS seem to have a business model approach to education and skills delivery, Merrifield (1998) highlights that not all aspects of business models should be approached with suspicion. She argues that there are innovative models of practice in the corporate world worth looking at, moving away from linear measurement to a more discursive approach. In interview with the author Maggie Feeley, she also advocated for a more imaginative, dynamic approach to policy making in education. As reported in the findings, she too looks towards successful businesses as possible models to influence educational policy making;

...if we all just did what we were paid to do and expected to do, businesses wouldn't work. The good ideas happen when people are sitting having a cup of coffee, on their break , when they're not doing what contracted to do. And the firms that are successful like Google and Facebook, are the firms that recognise that and resource that, they resource group time and resource social time for workers because that's when the ideas happen...

Feeley also recognises that private enterprise is often better at recognising the human aspect of the workplace than the state and in imposing requests for numbers is by default adding an additional workload and lacking an understanding of the relationships on the ground;

They're often much better at recognising those care elements than others are, like the equality framework as well, you know, and resource and respect and power. Like you could say that those assessment processes don't work in terms of that, that people are not resourced to do them, they don't respect and recognise the actual work that's done. They don't cover that, they are imposed by an authoritarian regime that just wants numbers from people, and they are devoid of care.

Researchers and practitioners in adult education are not anti-measurement, they are anti-unimaginative, useless, or sometimes damaging measurement. In the section on the state below, the literature around the changing nature of economic measurement is reviewed. Over the past twenty years, economists have begun to recognise the benefits of measuring economic activity including human dimensions. Businesses are starting to recognise the benefits too, and education policy making needs to move towards re-embracing the human stories in measurement.

Measuring the wrong outcomes

Derrick (2006) has shown the damage measuring the wrong outcomes can do. Reporting how, in the 1990s, Adult Literacy policy making in Britain hinged on the premise that

adult literacy and numeracy were "key determinants of National Prosperity and Social Equity" (Hamilton (2006), cited in Derrick 2006, p.141). Compounded by the International Adult Literacy Survey (1997) policy, introduced by the then Conservative Government led to the Skills for Life strategy, was then continued unquestioned by successive Labour Governments. Returning to my point about reification in policy making, the Foucauldian notion of the power inherent, accepted and unquestioned in 'already said' is evident here. The Skills for Life Strategy continues in the UK today.

Derrick (2006) argues that Skills for Life policy making assumed three basic principles; firstly that the purpose of education is qualifications, secondly that assessment should be external to maintain standards and marketability and thirdly that league tables drive up standards. However, his research shows that targets lead to lower productivity and falling standards of teaching. This is due to practitioners focussing on meeting targets over immediate needs of learners, moving away from a learner centred model. Where funding was linked to externally imposed outcomes, it was found that this had a detrimental effect on the ethos of a service. Managers and teachers were found to be selecting learners who were most likely to achieve on those courses rather than those most in socio-economic need, feeling "their only options consist in trying to organise their programmes to suit performance measurement rather than learners" (p.144). Also, in Britain the national tests for literacy measure only reading. A claim to measure 'literacy' based on a reading score diminishes the years of research demonstrating the situated, multi-faceted, social aspect of literacy. In his presentation at the ALOA conference (2013) Derrick used a quote by Goethe to demonstrate awareness of the usefulness of measurement tools, and like Merrifield, requests that we do not allow the tools and measurements to become the bigger picture;

Hypotheses are like scaffolding erected in front of a building and then dismantled when the building is finished. They are indispensable to the workman but you mustn't mistake the scaffolding for the building.

He emphasises that diagnostic assessments and frameworks for assessment are 'useful but not sufficient', warning that external models and rubrics ignore the professional status of the practitioners who are often working towards the best response, often the most just response, for the individual learner.

Distinguishing between means, process and ends, Derrick (2006, p.11) argues that measuring the process is really only measuring an output indicator, such as improved literacy, and genuinely measuring the outcomes of an educational programme focuses

on externalities such as health, employment, in essence more capabilities in society. It is these 'externalities' which practitioners are more concerned with. Policy guidance in Adult Literacy Education is severely lacking, the White Paper has not been updated since its publication fifteen years ago, nor has policy been put in place to implement its recommendations. Merrifield (1999) and Dorgan (2009) are correct in asserting that the State has a responsibility to formulate well thought out policy on literacy education.

The Progress Framework tool has moved in the right direction but needs continued discourse to ensure that a move to use it summatively will not result in the only process indicators being measured, as Derrick (2006) states is the case in Britain. Also as the US model displays, querying who we are accountable to and why (Merrifield, 1999) should be taken into consideration to ensure a learner centered practice rather than a results driven practice. As the OECD's (2014) report on the inequalities slowing economic growth, and an evolving discourse on the impact ignoring these inequalities has had on development, so too should educational evaluative tools take into consideration what they might omit in the rush to gather data.

The Learner and The State

Power, politics and policy

Hegemonic thinking and policy making in the OECD and EU has become the prevailing dominant discourse. Gramsci would argue that every hegemonic relationship is educational (1970, p.350), regardless of whether it is between teacher and student or amongst nations. He does not say that every educational relationship is hegemonic however, advocating as Freire (1996) did, that the teacher must remain the learner also. Instead, he portends through hegemonic practices, we pass on often uncontested knowledge and in turn the passive receiver has been educated by the dominant discourse. Returning to Foucault's 'never said', the power evident in the 'never said' is the power that Gramsci believed could make any class become the ruling class. To appropriate this to adult literacy policy making then, the power to define the teaching, learning and assessment procedures should and could lie with the learners and practitioners. The findings will show that some participants lament the lack of understanding of the issues of literacy education displayed by those in powerful, decision making positions.

Gramsci (1970, p.357) separates 'becoming' from 'progress' and herein lies the historical difficulty with literacy assessment. Literacy education and practice is more interested in the philosophical concept of becoming rather than the ideological concept of progress. Progress in literacy is acknowledged when the student declares they have enough skills to function in their lifeworld, this is purely subjective of course and literacy educators accept that declaration. Tett advocates a distance travelled assessment procedure saying;

"the system should assess progress through changes prioritised by the literacy learners themselves rather than by passing or failing tests that may have no direct relevance to them".

(2013, p.137)

EU policy makers however have little interest in philosophical 'becoming' (although the White Paper did), and current policy makers in Ireland should push hard against the rhetoric of measurement from Europe. Since IALS, the EU and OECD reports have increasingly linked social and economic exclusion with literacy levels. It has been argued that the links between human capital (Schultz, 1961) and productivity are now more important than ever. The OECD states;

Recent studies have found a strong link between investment and human capital (of which adult learning is a part) and economic growth. Altogether, the emerging reconsideration of the place of adult learning in public policy, of which this thematic review is a sign. There seems to be a clear agreement among OECD policy makers that a lack of basic skills of the sort revealed in the IALS may impinge on the well-being of the population and the issues related to democracy and citizenship.

(2003, p.215)

Although EU and OECD policy often purports, somewhat mendaciously, that adult education's remit is for democratic inclusivity and citizen well-being, hidden not so discreetly among the rhetoric is the numbers game; the need to up-skill to increase economic activity, to link poverty and social exclusion with poor literacy levels, and most Machiavellian; the notion that somehow the individual is responsible for not only their poor literacy skills, but they too carry the weight of micro and macroeconomic improvement on their shoulders. As if increasing literacy levels is some form of panacea for unemployment. Holford et al (2007) warn however;

'Concerns have been expressed that despite European and national statements that lifelong learning should be a means of increasing equality, the concentration on labour market policies has the effect of increasing social stratification' (p.30).

My biggest concern is how numbers procured from the assessment procedures will be read by SOLAS and the DES. In their review of the economic situation in France, now known as The Sarkozy Commission (discussed below), Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi (2009,

p.7) stated: 'What we measure affects what we do; and if our measurements are flawed, decisions maybe distorted.' Economists have a huge influence on policy making, and Nobel Prize winner Sen has written at length (1999, Stiglitz & Sen, 2009) about incorrect measurement. It is imperative that measuring Adult Literacy learning does not do unintended, unforeseen damage.

The state, measurement and real opportunity

The ETB Adult Literacy Services require assessment for teaching and learning purposes, for formative assessment. SOLAS are requesting measurement to gain a better picture for funding reasons, putting pressure on the ETB ALS to move towards summative assessment. The state requires assessment for reporting on the financial outlay attached to Adult Literacy provision and also the current status of literacy learners in Ireland. Does the state require this information in order to evaluate a 'value for money' measure? Which of course is valid, every tax payer wants to ensure their money is spent well. The practitioners in the findings report they can see that the service is doing an excellent job, helping people to become more included in literacy communities of practice, moving to praxis in helping their children with homework, gaining qualifications, making social connections and gaining new employment, but is this the progress the state wants to know about? Or just a record of the levels learners work at and the progression through those levels? Normative ethics (Nussbaum, 2011) espouses a state which wants to know about the reasons why the learner has presented with unmet literacy needs and find some way to prevent this for future generations. Currently, one third of children in DEIS primary schools have insufficient literacy skills to achieve at secondary level (DES, 2011, p.12). They are possibly the adult literacy students of the future. Normative ethics, explored further below, also advocates a state responsibility to ensure that all citizens have an equal right to a basic education as children and to ensure that those who do not gain it in primary education have a right to access it as adults, free of conditions attached.

The currently proposed system of measurement only measures learners acquisition (or not) of increased ability on literacy tasks. What about the learner's original goals, it does not measure whether they have been achieved and as Tett (2014) asks, 'who are the goals being set by and for what reason?' The state a responsibility to the very citizens let down by the structural inequalities (Lynch, 2009, Feeley, 2013) it imposed and

compounded. Students often relay stories of emotional, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of the state as being the cause of their literacy difficulties. The State has a moral obligation to get it right this time for them.

Care and literacy work

Tutors in Adult Education work on precarious hourly contracts with an ever increasing workload, in a service offering permanent jobs to the Adult Literacy Organiser alone. And yet they stay; why? Working in literacy education is a demanding job, it can only be done if you care for the learner and her community. Folbre (2014) has written extensively on the economic value of non market care work. In defining care Folbre (2014, p.4) states; 'It typically conveys a sense of emotional engagement and personal connection that has a direct implication for the service provided'. Folbre explains the patriarchal roots of neo-liberalism have resulted in a competitive rather than collaborative approach, and a work ethic valuing pecuniary reward only. She goes further (2014, p.5) to note however, workers involved in traditionally feminised employment, such as teaching and nursing, often complain of poor working conditions and yet rate highly their job satisfaction, leading her to acknowledge the virtuous aspect of the work they engage in, and how they reap non-monetary reward.

Noddings (1984) also extols the virtue of this care, as does Feeley (2014), although both lament state blindness to the value of this care. In *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century*, Noddings (2013) too calls for a return to collaborative rather than competitive approaches in education. The increased bureaucracy and 'specialisation' (p.viii) has led to teachers only teaching within their remit and Noddings decries an education system devoid of communities of teachers working together on the 'whole person' development of the learner. Feeley (2014, p.159) in her research with survivors of institutional abuse, particularly notes the value of instances of care had on the literacy learning of children in institutions. Those who were shown even marginal expressions of care, including care expressed by older children within the homes, had the ability to attain more literacy skills than those children whose lives were devoid of any outside familial contact or care. Care in teaching has a value, not only for the ability to learn, but then by default the future capabilities of the learner.

The practitioners are concerned about the measurement tool because they care about the learner. The interviews will show that the practitioner worries about the impact the

numbers will have if they do not report the whole picture of learners achievements in literacy education, in short they worry about a single, abstract, aggregated measurement. The 'already said' has been given too much power, it is time to transgress against single quantitative measurement systems and hear what humans have to say about their lived experiences. As will be discussed below, leading world economists are finally taking stock of the human dimension in development economics. The practitioners in this research raised the importance of those in power taking account of human dimensions also when measuring the value of the literacy services.

The Human Development Approach

Amartya Sen has been writing for some years about the Human Development Approach (2001, 2010) to measurement, also known as the Capabilities Approach. Typically, GDP excludes many human aspects but evidence has shown there are ways to include these indicators. In 1990, along with Mahbub ul Haq, the Human Development Index was suggested as a measurement of quality of life in a country, it accounted for not only economic measurement as GDP did, but asserted the value of measuring other indicators such as health and education, in short the 'well-being' of individuals. Sen compared two states in India, Gujarati and Kerala, with similar Gross National Income (GNI) and asked why literacy levels (as well as health and political engagement) were so much higher in Kerala than in Gujarati. The Kerala model showed that local government policy in Kerala included 'human indicators' in policy making as well as a focus on economics. At the time, global obsession with GDP was increasing and The Kerala Model led to questioning by forward thinking economists such as Sen about the disaggregated data behind a single measurement.

In 2008 French President Sarkozy, arguing that GDP was not reflecting all he knew about the quality of life in France, tasked Sen and twenty four other world leading economists to look at GDP in France but to take account income per household and capabilities within a household (eg, if one member had a disability and the impact this had on the household). Furthermore, to take account of capabilities of citizens to achieve given the opportunities afforded to them. Essentially, GDP as a single measure of the wealth of a nation was found to be lacking and a new measurement Human Development Index (HDI) was advocated as a better reflection of not only the wealth of a nation, but the sustainability of that wealth and social progress too. The resulting

report, (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009) increased real 'GDP' (accounting for distribution of wealth and capabilities of citizens) in France by seven per cent against the US as a measure. The report essentially argued that aggregate measures of anything were defeatist of their purpose and hid too much to be useful. What was recommended in this report, and what was almost heretic in the field of economics, was to measure human well being, and put human lives front and centre of economics. This research suggests the possibility of encompassing this approach in literacy evaluative tools

Martha Nussbaum (2011), has furthered developed Sen's economic theory into a normative social justice theory, asking questions about what contract, if any, should exist between a state and its citizens. If a social contract model exists, the citizen and state owe each other something. But the Human Development model says that the state must recognise that some citizens are at a distinct disadvantage and need more support than others, and in terms of funding, these individuals should be prioritised so that they too have the freedom to make choices about their lives. The theory makes an assumption that all things being equal, people would be *free* to make informed choices on health, education and political matters. According to Nussbaum, the state should operate from a position of justice, of what is morally the right thing to do. Noddings (2013, p.5) also advocates operating from a social justice perspective. She claims state interventions such as breakfast clubs and free school dinners are moral and democratic if their intention is to feed hungry children, not if their intention is to feed them so that they can learn. She goes on to insist a democratic society does the ethical thing without conditions. Relating this to literacy education would imply a just society would provide basic education to its citizens without attachments relating to outcomes on league tables or employment.

Appropriating the Capabilities Approach to Literacy Education would mean the State becoming more imaginative in its quests for numbers, and what to do with them. If, as Derrick (2006) says, we focus on the process, we omit the picture of the means (capabilities, or lack of, given by the state and society) and lose sight of the important ends (the outcomes of the learning process, quality of life related to increased integration in family, social and economic life). What business is it of the state to measure the literacy skills of individuals who have been at the behest of state inequalities all their lives, without asking why and how to improve that? If we use the Capability Approach in literacy policy making, we are forced to take stock of the social justice element, forced to look at the inequalities bestowed upon individuals prior to

accessing the services and use measurement tools only as a formative assessment tool. Summative assessment should be on the ends, the state should assess itself in that providing literacy education is providing the means for adults to achieve the ends the White Paper purported all along, education for social, economic, personal and liberatory reasons. Trickle down economic policies do not work, it is recognised they do not work both in theory and practice (Thomas Sowell (2012), Paul Krugman, (2005)), even the OECD (2014) acknowledges that the gap between rich and poor is so vast that it is holding back economic growth. The adoption of the HDI system of measurement is testament to the recognition that a change is imperative when measuring in order for economic growth. Literacy assessment in Ireland has a chance to use the Human Development approach, to be innovators globally, in literacy assessment and measure the correct outcomes.

The focus of the literature review originated in policy decisions on assessment in Ireland. As no national tool exists presently, reviewing international experiences of assessment guided the review to question assessment methods conceptually. It looked at where the drive for measurement might have originated, concluding that it may have its roots in neoliberal business models. Finally, the literature reviewed aspects of democratic educational theory, arguing for inclusion of human dimensions from acknowledgement of the concept of care, and the other learning outcomes currently omitted by focus on output indicators by the state.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

"The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?" (Foucault, 1982)

I am open to learning on this research journey. I had no idea the journey it would take me on, and as Foucault queried, why would we undertake work if we knew its result at the outset? To become something different, altered as a result of learning has been my personal experience of this piece of work. It is this notion of becoming which appeals to me most about literacy work, which I aimed to discover if others felt its importance too. The Progress Framework, as a measurement tool, is in its infancy. I felt the time was opportune to ask questions of other practitioners, in the hope that the findings might be taken on board when discussing the usefulness of the tool with the DES and SOLAS by the CDET. So early on in the research, my questions were around the technical use of the tool, but as interviews progressed questions they evolved around the usefulness of measurement itself, driven by the participants discussions on the democratic values espoused by literacy education which were possibly being clouded by the quest for numbers.

Ontological Reflection

As a child I attended what is now labelled a 'DEIS' primary school, a disadvantaged school in a disadvantaged area in Dublin. The new school I moved to at secondary level wasn't in a disadvantaged area, nor was it what would be considered a middle-class school today but at the time it had a great reputation, situated in South County rather than City, populated by the daughters of skilled and professional families. I noticed the cultural and academic differences from day one. Having done very well academically in primary, I fell into average grades at this point, not that my ability had changed, but the bar was higher in this school, expectations were higher. So at thirteen years of age, without the vocabulary, I understood something about class and expectations, and the impact this had on a child's learning. I understood a little about different value systems, in what I thought at the time was different 'areas'. Without the word for it, I understood the essence of inequality, I understood some people have a fairer shot at achieving than

others. Unaware of structural inequalities at the time, I attributed this unfairness to the schools and localities. I knew the friends I had in primary were at a distinct disadvantage to the friends I made in secondary.

This awareness of the injustice of an unequal start, and the structures which continue and compound such inequities, has always stayed with me. I tell this story because I work today in the same 'DEIS' area in which I attended primary school. I work within the local Further Education college and out in the community with parents of school children in the school I attended. Some of the learners were my own classmates as children. When recording 'progress' of the learners on a measurement tool, I often look at the numbers and wonder what they reflect, and what they do not reflect of the learners' progress and achievements given their opportunities or lack of. I often think of the rich human lives, and looking at the flat numbers trying to reflect literacy attainment am disconcerted at best, but mostly dismayed by the lack of democracy in an area of education which needs, I would argue even more than most other areas, a participative and respectful approach.

Epistemology

Inequality in education

Over forty years ago, in *Deschooling Society* (1970), Ivan Illich wrote about the huge monetary investment in schooling in America and yet continued poor educational results for those in working class communities. He concluded that schooling alone could not improve education in poorer communities and therefore the investment was at best, blind mismanagement and misdirection, and at worst a regurgitation of the status quo. Bourdieu (1990) might say a concerted effort at regurgitation of the status quo. Lynch and Baker (2005) quoting Foucault's theories on power examined inequality in schools, conscious of Bourdieu's assertion of the reinforcement of social and cultural capital through schooling, to advocate for a democracy which challenges the privileged within its society.

To confront the reality of class inequality in education, as it operates through selection and grouping, would also require the democratic institutions of the state, as well as schools and colleges, to confront organized upper and middle class interests.
(p.14)

Foucault (1978, p.95) stated that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather, consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." Lynch and Baker (p.16) are arguing for those in positions of privilege, not to relinquish or concede their powerful positions but at the very least, to recognise the power inherent in their positions and call for a discourse within education systems on social class issues to challenge inequality in education. My own knowledge, based on my experiences and my choice of reading, leads me to believe that inequalities are structural and compounded by state and society. Essentially, I believe that what I *know* has been socially constructed.

Social Constructivism

Social construction is a theory of knowledge, knowledge which is created by our rational, interpersonal experiences in the world. To return to my ontology and awareness of inequality as a child, I rationalised my experiences as best I could with the language and knowledge available to me at the time. My approach then as a researcher is to ask questions of the participants with the belief that they will give answers based on their truths, their rationalised experiences. In order to hear the stories, the social constructivist approach begins with the subjective experience of the participant and builds the research findings around the emerging themes. Mason (cited in Burgess, 1984, p. 102) asserts lived experiences as valid data and the means to collecting this data being 'conversations with a purpose'. This research aims not only to hear experiences, but in choosing their stories as valid data, as opposed to the quantitative data the literacy tools aims to collect, I hope to show that the stories reveal themes that the quantitative research design may not. Listening to the unheard is one of the driving forces of this research, and it is imperative to me to design a method to collecting data which does just that.

Using a social constructivist methodological approach sees 'knowledge which creates as well as describes the world' (Banister et al, 1994, p.9). However, using this philosophical, humanistic approach to the research does not prohibit my use of critical theoretical positions as a lens through which to interpret the findings too. Foucault, Freire, and Noddings were no doubt influenced by Marx, and it is impossible to discuss social phenomena without acknowledging the neo-liberalism driving the insatiable need to measure humans as capital. Again, transgressing the boundaries between social and

critical theory is, as Fairclough (1992) posits, a recognition of the cyclical nature of language created by social context and in turn creating social phenomena. Using critical theory to analyse the discourse allows not only interpretation of the meaning of the stories disclosed by the participants, but also to place these findings within a broader social context. Thus, macro level institutional policy and power relations will have an impact on my interpretation of, and elucidating meaning from, the findings.

What increasingly revealed itself in the course of interviews was the concept of 'care' and in particular, what Feeley (2014) would label, 'learning care'. There emerged a resistance against the bureaucracy of assessment for statistical reporting at the expense of good teaching through both the literature (Derrick, 2006) and the findings, with one participant arguing that her time was better spent creating teaching materials than measuring (See Patricia, p.40). This theme sent me on a discovery of new knowledge in the theoretical area of care. It was something I felt existed in the feminised field of teaching, but that increased professionalisation consequentially led to downplaying care. Tutors revealed that the assessment tool was not over-riding their existing teaching philosophies, that they were sidelining it. Theorists such as Noddings and Feeley see this as an act of resistance;

"We may have to be quietly persistent in doing things the way we know they should be done, adopting a form of non-violent resistance" (Noddings, 2013,p.ix)

"We do it because we care. We do it because we want to." (Feeley, 2015)

Literacy education is not about skills, as Freire (1996, 2001) discovered in his earliest days teaching, it is about facilitating the learner to find ways to learn, to teach themselves, to become aware, to change their world by becoming active participants in it.

"Indifference to the integral education of the human person and the reductionist mentality that talks only of training skills strengthens the authoritarian manner of speaking from the top down. In such a situation, speaking "with", which is part and parcel of any democratic vision of the world, is always absent, replaced by the more authoritarian form: speaking to".

(Freire, 2001, p.103)

The epistemology underpinning this research is that 'teaching is a human act' and reducing it to skills, and reporting on those skills, is an affront to democracy.

Paradigms

In her chapter 'Moving On' (2000, p291-306) Oakley makes a convincing case for the cessation of bi-polarity within the constructivist and positivist fields. Arguing that while methodologists contest dualisms, the 'paradigm wars' have led to delays in getting on with the business of looking for solutions to social issues. Promoting 'the right tools for the right job' rather than an elevation of one method over another, she is not alone in the recognition that the 'wars' not only cause delay, but can impact negatively on the design of research itself;

"To suggest that there is a right and wrong way to understand and apply these theorists is to misinterpret the role of theory in research - the latter should never be made bow down to the former"

(Murphy, 2013, p.7)

Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Creswell (2003) argue for a transgression against the limits of paradigm boundaries also. Foucault's (1977) particular interest in transgression as a form of resistance is relevant to my methodology as power is an enduring ethical factor to be cognisant of in any research design, and raises its head in the literature review alongside an emerging theme in findings, participants refer to power and how they mitigate or transgress it;

"It is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses"

(Foucault, 1977b, p.34)

Arguing for a relaxation of the line between the methodologies and a new approach blending both initially made sense to me. As my precursory propellant to this research area was statistical reports on learners' literacy attainment, I have to acknowledge the impact the positivist data had on my decision to use a qualitative method to dig deeper. Without the numbers, I would not be driven to find out more about them. I have to admit, I believed on the outset of this journey that the quantitative data was not essential in literacy assessment procedures but conceded that if it had to exist, it may need support from the qualitative stories. It began to emerge in the discussions though, that participants saw a practical use for quantitative data, but that they were concerned that it was not only omitting another reality but possibly deflecting from it (see findings chapter).

Method and Methodology

..the act of knowing is an extremely complex endeavour; not only do human beings know different things, bringing different values, beliefs and perceptions to what they know, but the act of knowing and what is known is often irredeemably fused. Knowing itself is the problematic.

(Oakley, 2000, p.291)

Oakley eloquently explains social constructivism as I understand it; each participant brings different views based on their own experiences, and the difficulty that the researcher might have in teasing apart what is known by the participant and subsequently understood, in an act of knowing, by the researcher herself can be problematic. A semi-structured interview I hoped would give the space for the participant to engage with the questions, but also leave room for me as the researcher to introduce new questions as I knew, and understood, more in relation to their responses.

The interviews

In trying to hear as many versions of what people know and as many perceptions of literacy assessment as I can, I have used purposive sampling. This reflects all aspects of face to face contact with learners, albeit for different purposes.

- A semi-structured individual interview with two tutors
- A semi-structured individual interview with three support tutors
- A semi-structured individual interview with two Adult Literacy Organisers

The design of the semi-structured interview was a loose set of questions around the objectives set out below. I held a pilot interview, to ensure my questions were clear, and to get over my own nervousness due to inexperience. The earlier interviews with the tutors were inclined to follow the questions asked and not detour too much, however I feel that was due to my inexperience as a researcher, in that I was fearful of asking for expansion of answers in that I may have been leading the participant. By the third interview, which was the first interview with a support tutor, I was more confident and asked for clarification and allowed the interview to take its own course led by the participant. These interviews were less technical in response and much richer in terms of underlying fears relating to the assessment tool. I chose semi-structured interviews, as opposed to a focus group for instance, for confidentiality for the practitioners. I was

unsure how honest practitioners could be about a tool they were expected to use amongst their colleagues.

Where is the learner?

Initially, I had intended to include students in the research. I had planned asking some students how they viewed success and how they made meaning of assessment. Essentially, I undertook this research to broaden my knowledge on literacy assessment. As a practitioner, with some reservations about literacy measurement, I wanted to explore other practitioners' experiences. In order to prepare for such discussions, I needed a robust knowledge of existing national and international policy on literacy assessment. Within the timeframe and word limit of this research, I felt I could not include the learner without compromising her voice. Certainly now I understand that a master's research piece is more exploratory than definitive. The recommendations I make as a result of the research are confined to future policy relating to the assessment tool. I am aware that the voice of the learner should be heard in formulating policy affecting them, however I will discuss this in more detail in limitations and recommendations for further research in the concluding chapter.

Objectives of interviews

The broad questions, which the interviews hinged on were;

- At management level, is the tool collecting real meaningful data for initial assessment?
- At management level, is the tool collecting real meaningful data for reporting purposes?
- According to tutors, is the tool meeting its remit as a teaching and learning aid?
- According to tutors, is the tool capturing the progress of learners observed in daily practice?

To ascertain whether I was alone in my discord with the measurement tool, I thought the first place to start would be with the tutors. I spoke to two very experienced tutors practicing over ten years each. Each centre in the CDETb also has a 'support tutor' whose role is to liaise with the volunteer and group tutors. The support tutor also collates the data from all students. I decided the support tutor, with a breadth of

knowledge about tutors and students, could reflect back to me not only their personal feelings, but so too a broad sense of other tutors opinions on the tool.

I wanted to query also the experience of managers of centres in relation to the tool. Their only involvement with it is for initial assessment, so I saw this as an opportunity to feedback the findings from the tutor/support tutor sample and to record responses to that. I interviewed two Adult Literacy Organisers. However, prior to meeting with management I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Maggie Feeley, author of *Learning care lessons: literacy, love, care and solidarity* and discussed with her the findings from tutors. Her insight and ability to name the issues the tutors raised, helped formulate new questions for the managers around the assessment tool in relation to structural inequalities, affective care and recognition of this care.

Ethics

Ethics are of profound interest to me personally as a researcher here, not just generally. I am a colleague, an employee and a teacher within the organisation I am researching. I will meet everyone involved in the research on a regular basis again. As management level have requested the findings of the study, I worried initially that, although I was not going to allow that to shape my questions or findings, it may subliminally affect what I hear. I decided very soon into the interviewing process that my consciousness of the power hanging over me when I concerned myself with regional interests, and the impact it was having on my thinking, that I would exclude regional management from the research and focus on local centre management. This freed me up to question my own organisation's ethics in regard to assessment; "We can only be ethical if we can be unethical. To transgress." (Freire p. 101).

It is essential, that I am aware of not only hearing what I want to hear, to actively look to hear what the participant is saying. I hear myself on recordings recurrently saying "let me just get this clear", "what you're saying is...am I correct"? I do my utmost to clarify ambiguities, however I am not oblivious to my own frames of reference and the impact they might have. To negate this, I ensure all participants are clear about my motives for this research and assure them of my quest for integrity. Kincheloe (2008) talks about "oppressive cultures", and the culture of measurement may or may not be impacting on the service, but my research originated from my own personal experiences with

measurement tools which do sometimes feel oppressive, curtailing time for creativity. I wanted to be sure that I did not convey my own reservations about measurement to the participants.

After initial contact with participants, I gave them a number of weeks to think about my research area before approaching them again to set a date and consent to an interview. My reason for this was that I wanted participants to have ample time to weigh up their participation in a piece of research within a small department, which may read the findings on conclusion. To explain confidentiality here, tutors have complete confidentiality, however managers and support tutors may have anonymity rather than complete confidentiality. This is due to the small number of both existing within the organisation and the fact that most were open in inviting me to their centres for interview. Other members of staff at their centre knew I was doing research, so thus may deduce they are participants. Once participants consented to an interview, I also informed them that they were free to withdraw their consent right up to the time of publication. I knew such a late withdrawal would have implications for the findings, however more important for me was that my colleagues felt they could opt out at any time. Dr. Feeley waived her anonymity.

Reflexivity

I have chosen the research area, the method, the methodology, the interview questions. I have chosen the participants, the lens through which to make meaning of the answers and the theorists to relate the findings to. I am in a position of power regardless of how egalitarian I aim to make the process. I know all of the participants involved, some know me for ten years, some only since I was given the position of support tutor four years ago. I am very conscious of my position as researcher and then returning to my role as colleague and tutor, that I will be as honest and open about the research as possible. I remained open to having my own bias' challenged and it is fair to say that my opinion on the usefulness of the tool has changed, I am aware that participants felt that is a valuable teaching and learning tool. I had not expected to hear that and have made recommendations as a consequence accordingly. I have offered transcripts to all participants, all of whom took me up on the offer bar one, who took her own notes and mailed them to me. This research is of particular interest to the tutors, who rarely have a

voice at management level. I want to ensure that I focus on the concerns that they want heard. Themes which emerged, as discussed in introduction, were the themes of care and social justice. Participants saw literacy education as more than just skills attainment, and in highlighting this, they urged the direction of the study to include the work of theorists on social justice. Dr. Feeley further explained the alternative to neoliberal policy making driven by economic models, raising my awareness of the work of Amartya Sen. Without doubt, the participants influenced greatly the reading I undertook beyond my initial existing policy remit.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

Literacy is not like any other skill that you may not have mastered, it is something that has made them feel outsiders all their lives, sometimes from when they were very young, and the confidence comes from finally feeling part of the learning community and from the fact that they are enjoying learning for the first time in their lives.(Claire)

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the research participants began to tell a story I had not anticipated hearing when enquiring about a technical assessment tool. In trying to understand the issues around why, or why not, it was being used, a more pertinent issue arose about care for the learner and the tutor's place in doing so in an increasingly positivist drive for data collection. It emerged as a more important theme, in my opinion, due to two reasons; one that I had not had a research question on care, that it arose naturally as a result of a question on what the tool cannot capture (discussed below) which implies secondly, that the notion of caring for the person, rather than just the literacy skills of that person, was something the participants felt needed to be heard. Care for the learner was discussed in the broader context of what an assessment tool might omit, and therefore may as a result diminish in importance. Thus this chapter presents the emerging themes from the interviews, from discussions about the tool, to caring for the learner and queries about broader ideological positions of government departments or state policy on literacy education and assessment.

Perceptions of the Measurement Tool

Initial assessment

All participants agreed literacy assessment was important, giving a clearer picture for teaching and learning purposes, ensuring too that the learners' prior learning is recognised. Also, its necessity for the service, in order to plan and respond to immediate needs presented, was seen as imperative. The new tool has made changes to the initial assessment in both approach and information gleaned, one ALO explained;

I think before I relied on my own intuition for placement, hugely, and my experience of talking to people and of where they're at and where they have gone in their education and how it had been for them.But, yeah definitely you get a very good feel for where someone is at when you actually sit down and ask them to read a piece and write a piece (Claire)

Another ALO offered a similar view;

Definitely(changed the way I assess), I would ask the person, up until we had the new materials, which we've worked on which are great, I would have asked a person to fill in a form. Now I've rejigged that as a result of our work...It's interesting, it gives a clearer picture definitely .(Joan)

From the interviews, it emerged that initial assessment had become more uniform without losing the ability to remain learner centred, resulting in richer information.

Formative assessment

Tutors involved in initial assessment also echoed the ALOs' experiences of using the new tool, but went further to discuss its formative application. One tutor believed the assessment tool led to reflective practice;

...for the service as a whole, I think it's really good for the service to be able to check in and see well....is what we're delivering..is that working?(Angela)

Reflecting on other assessment tools, such as MLJ and ITABE, participants remarked that the new tool aspired to record soft skills, often seen as of equal importance to the cognitive skills in the field of literacy practice. One participant saw the deficiencies in the older tools compared with the new Progress Framework tool;

I'm using the ITABE assessment regularly, and initially I thought it was quite a good scale, but now in comparison to the new tool, I find that it doesn't have enough scope for showing progress for the students and it's difficult to chart their progress. (Maria)

Participants agreed that the tool was 'the best one yet' (Angela) in terms of recognising skills that other tools may neglect to record or acknowledge as being important in formative assessment;

I think it's the best tool we have to date that reflects..where their literacy as a social practice is, what it's all about, the importance of it, and that within a framework where we're not just seeing are they progressing through the level, that we're actually seeing a person, how their learning has impacted on their lives. (Maria)

On technical questions arising out of Carrigan's (2010) study and the Department's (2013) suggestions for a new tool, participants were in agreement that the tools presented no cultural bias, as materials for assessment could be selected to suit the individual learner. All agreed it also recognises prior learning in the initial assessment, endeavouring to place students in a learning environment to meet them where they are

at in terms of reading and writing skills. It was agreed that it gave a better indicator of QQI levels and ensured standards across the services, and tutors such as Angela welcome such guidance;

I think at the same time I welcome some kind of external sense of ...that we're all in the same....that we're all singing from the same hymn book and that, so that a level one task is a level one task for everyone and that sort of stuff..(Angela)

Technical Challenges

Use of the tool

Some practitioners would like it to see it replace other methods of assessment, namely ITABE, however one tutor explicitly raised the complexity of language used in the new tool preferring what she saw as more straightforward language in the ITABE tool. Referring to the language in the new tool;

I just think ITABE is a bit more concrete....do people actually need to know 'this is a noun', just to read a piece? At level two? I think it's too technical and there's technical terms brought into something that I think should be much more simple.
(Patricia)

Although only one participant discussed the technicality of the language (which she did so at length), I felt it worth including as a possible deterrent to its use. She explained her conclusion was drawn due to the number of tutors she was supporting using it who found it difficult. Difficulty using it did come across from other participants.

Interviewer: Are tutors using the tool?

..generally they need a prompt, they need a deadline, they need to be told you have to do it by this day or that day and em..... they come and say 'can you remind me again, how do I do this'? (Laughs) Which is fine, but I know myself if nobody was hounding me for it, I probably wouldn't, I mean I probably wouldn't but some of the volunteers liked it because they thought 'now I'm getting some guidance as to what I should be doing'
(Angela)

If the tool was created primarily as an aid to teaching and learning, surely then such a tool would be of benefit to lesson planning and formative assessment. Why then was it not being used voluntarily? Participants acknowledged that the work undertaken to make it more user friendly had gone some way to making it more user friendly but that issues remained;

(It is) still big and heavy and awkward... you did a fantastic job, that one task per page is brilliant...then that's all you take out...(Angela)

Interviewer: Is the new tool guiding the tutors?

I don't think so because I just don't think they have time..... To me it's a time issue. ...I think we have a tutor who actually left, because I had got her to do it in a previous situation, and she was doing it for all her [students]... and she was an excellent tutor. And I just feel, oh my God, that is such a loss to the service, it wasn't the only thing, but it was one of the factors, that she was sitting at home, poring over these notations and forms, and was very sceptical about what it was telling her in the end. Eh, so are the tutors using it? Not out of choice. (Patricia)

Having time to devote to the tool arose on a number of occasions with one tutor emphasising the number of measurements needed to be taken;

So I would definitely say time is my main reason why I haven't used it, that there seems to be so much paper work, in so many areas that have to be accounted for and I'm just one of those people unless it's mandatory, it's very ... easy to say oh next week, next week, next week... (Maria)

Other tutors agreed with Maria, that time was a factor in using the tool;

I think they're incredibly time consuming. I think it takes from the time you're actually teaching them I think it puts a kind of 'grade me, grade' on the student and I think that makes them very anxious. (Helen)

No, my time is better served developing good materials, for my student to learn plus to assess them. I'm happy that my student is learning, I know they're learning, I know they're progressing and why can't everyone else just believe me! (laughs) (Patricia)

Summative assessment: Fearing final statistics

This was the turning point for the interview in some cases, the participants began to talk about issues around capturing data and their resistance to it. Organisers, Support Tutors and Tutors all referred to the numbers being sent back to management. Only one of the participants saw the numbers as being harmless, others queried the motivation behind gathering the data, as one support tutor declared;

I believe that some form of assessment or “checking in” is necessary in the literacy service especially with one to one tutors and learners. But the issue around assessment is, what are we assessing and for what purpose? Presumably we are assessing learners literacy levels but if we look at the definition of literacy it is very broad and incorporates more than just the knowledge and skills needed for reading and writing. When a learner is matched with a tutor it takes time to build up trust and confidence. This may take weeks or months to achieve. I don't believe that the

present assessment framework captures this progress, particularly in the final statistics. (Maevé)

Essentially, this idea of capturing 'final statistics' is the dominant concern of the majority of participants. The idea that a set of numbers is being collected across the CDETb was disconcerting for some and extremely worrying for others. One tutor explained;

I think an awful lot gets lost. I think numbers cannot reflect humanity or human progressions. Numbers are for statisticians, numbers can say anything and can be used in any way to do whatever people have a wish to do, whether that be cutting funding, increasing funding... I suppose my feeling is in this day and age it's always the opposite. It's cutting of funding rather than increasing. (Patricia)

Another Support Tutor also queried the value of the statistics, as in her experience the richness of the qualitative story is lost in the final numbers;

I feel as a support tutor that the conversation I have with tutor and learner produces a huge amount of valuable information about progress made which is then distilled into a final set of statistics losing the richness of the information gathered. In effect, converting qualitative information into quantitative figures. (Maevé)

The idea of the 'whole person' was beginning to emerge in discussions, and the feeling that the final statistics hid a story about a more holistic progress, one not solely based on a measured literacy skill;

..you see you're talking about a whole person and all that is going on in the complication of...I see a person as non-linear whereas I see this (the tool) as a very kind of linear progression and you can't nearly say enough on it in one way as well...It's an indicator, I think it's only an indicator of progress (Patricia)

Interviewer: Does it reflect anything we know about our students?

No. I would say no it doesn't, except that there is some teaching and learning going on if there's progress made, and if there's not progress being made, why is there not progress being made? Because as I said, the person, there's an awful lot more we know about the person and I think the people we are teaching are particularly complicated people, in the first place, why are they here? So there's an awful lot has gone on in their lives, various things, health, learning difficulties, familial problems, alcohol and drug problems..... for the ordinary person that comes in... I think the statistics don't show that. (Patricia)

Maria felt that literacy learners' progress could not be measured in the traditional sense, moving up in levels, that the Department had a responsibility to acknowledge the different kind of learning which she described as 'spiky';

..it's not just a linear or a ladder progress and I think that the Department needs to acknowledge that, that it's a different journey for literacy students than maybe it is for mainstream education or even other adult education programs.

Caring for the Learner, Caring about your Work

Once the shift from the technicalities of the tool to the idea of the 'whole person' was made, participants seemed much more passionate about the tool, in that they were passionate that the tool collected the kind of learning they saw as important and relevant to their learners. At the moment, data (or final statistics) are being returned to management as requested. However, participants seemed to relish the opportunity to voice their concerns around the tool's ineffectiveness as well as its merits. They could simply comply with management requests, why care or worry what impact the collection of data will have? My impression of all participants is that they care hugely not only about the integrity of the services, but about the people they meet as learners in their daily practice.

Affective care in literacy education

Maggie Feeley's interest and acknowledgement of the importance of affective 'learning care' in education as a whole, but especially in literacy education, is something she discussed in interview;

So the affective is....when you tune in you can hear it in a lot of places, that it's important, you know? If it's happening or not happening, you can see there's an ethos of affective care somewhere, in that people are considerate in that they do the work, they follow through, you don't stop working because it's four o'clock and everybody else is leaving the building.

The sense from the participants was that care for their work and their learners was central to their practice. One Support Tutor talked about the tutors in her centre and their use of the tool;

And they are very earnest in what they are putting down on that form is true. They are not filling in this form, just for the sake of it, and get rid of it. They are filling it in and they are feeling bad if it's not reflecting the actual truth aboutand I think they are finding it hard to read the truth just with numbers and notations. I mean they are very earnest about it, they are not laissaz-faire about it. And they just.... I think it's a bit like faith and belief, I don't know that they have the faith in it, that it is actually telling the true story. (Patricia)

Another tutor felt that she could not but care for her learners, she recognised as Feeley (2014) does, that primary (as in basic education) learning, whether that is with a child or

an adult, must take account of the whole person, that their learning journey is in its infancy and therefore needs extra support, both from the educator and the broader state;

You can say caring aspects don't matter and that's not our remit but if you really want good results..it's a bit like good parenting, you put a lot of effort into something and you get good results...but I would think that any model around the world that invests a lot in what is really important in life..like the Scandinavian model, you invest a lot in taxation because you recognise the whole of society benefits... (Helen)

She went further to explain how the care in literacy education helps encourage potential for the individual and their families, not only in terms of literacy skills and personal development, but social inclusion also;

I think people when they have a deficit in an area, live in a very narrow world, and they become very fearful, so I think you actually break down walls, and you allow them to see endless opportunities, or potential opportunities, and you allow them to see themselves in a different way. Because I think their perceptions of themselves tends to be quite negative, they're very hinged on the whole notion of them lacking a skill that they think is like very obvious to the whole world, and it's not, but they think it is. And it can give blocks to them and it blocks them from doing a whole lot of things. It blocks the whole family group as well.

These kinds of statements from the participants led me to ask questions around the elements tutors want recognised as learning. What do they feel is missing from the tool? One participant reflected others' concerns about what the external parties (ETB management and DES) see as the goals of the literacy services;

I also think it's good to have a base line and to work towards a goal, but you have to be very clear about what your goal is. Like, are you really interested in developing the individual or are you just interested in developing their skills, are you interested in giving them an education in areas that they need? Are you interested in making their life better? Or are you interested in having one outcome only, that they get a particular qualification, that makes them suitable for a market that might not have any opportunities in terms of work. (Helen)

Joan, an experienced ALO, is not concerned with the tool being used to capture measurement per se, but is concerned that that particular measurement is not all that is collected to reflect the work of the literacy services;

Well, if we're measuring skills, right we're measuring hard skills and that's fine, but if we also want to say another outcome of literacy, another benefit of accessing literacy services, there are definitely other outcomes which are not being captured and I think we are doing ourselves an injustice if we don't capture them.

The State and Literacy Education

Participants frequently referred to external bodies, whether they saw the external as the organisation, Department of Education and Skills or broader state policy was not always stated. I am allowing all references to external pressures to fall under the state in the findings chapter, however in the analysis I will allocate the external themes to existing policy and theory more selectively as I see relevant. Who is doing the measuring and for what purpose is a theme that arose. Conscious that numbers have a powerful influence, participants were eager to flag this as an imperative discussion point in evaluating assessment.

Assessment for whom and for what?

Well, if we are going to record outcomes, we have to decide what we are going to record and the purpose. Is it outcomes linked to personal goals that the person stated when they came in, that are relevant to them? Or they outcomes linked to externally set goals by government, funders..whatever (Joan)

Initial goals of the learner, the kind of information gleaned from initial assessment, are what the participants are interested in ensuring transpires as a result of learning. The learner sets their own measure, in that they set out their long term goals in the interview. Goals such as being more confident with reading and writing, helping children with homework, gaining employment or simply fulfilling a personal learning goal such as sitting a Junior Certificate examination are regularly reported. If these are the goals, should we as a service be interested in measuring the end outcome of the learners engagement with the service, rather than just the process outputs? Participants were keen to highlight the pitfalls of external measures being set for the learner, as one participant highlighted;

If somebody else is setting the measure and our funding is ever linked to meeting that measure, we may find ourselves in a situation where we may have to look at who we are taking into the service, and the easier to recruit, the easier to retain, easier to move on make good statistical data. But then we're back to the service is moving away from the people it was set up to serve. (Joan)

In discussing this particular theme with Maggie, she recognised it as compliant with her own work on state inequalities. She went further than the other participants in not only lamenting the lack of imaginative measurement (the process indicators as being the only measure of the work of the services), but argued too that the lack of interest in the

reasons why someone presents with literacy difficulties will lead to a regurgitation of the problem;

What you're doing is very interesting for me. What you're doing is focusing on this (the state) and what you're saying, you know, that if this is not in place and if it's not smart, if it's not smart enough or creative and dynamic, the state...if the state is slow and boring and pedestrian and disinterested and so on, then we just maintain the same issues unresolved, homelessness, illiteracy, you know, educational disadvantage, all of those things are just constantly replicated because of the lack of the state duty of care.

It is without doubt that the literacy services and practitioners act with compassion, it seemed frustration with the tool in relation to its collection of 'data' was emanating from the perceived, or justified, lack of compassion when taking measurements. The participants felt much more was happening than was reflected on the tool, so my questions evolved to ask what they saw as the role of literacy education, was it just skills attainment?

What does literacy education actually do?

Participants felt there was a gap between what the state understood as literacy education and the service understood it to be, that there was a lot of work to be done which does not specifically relate to skills attainment.

So the first thing you do is create an environment that is supportive of the student and allows them to relax and I think in highlighting the strengths they do have already, they can start from a platform of knowledge in their own minds and that they are building on that. You are doing what Vygotsky calls scaffolding, knowing what their skills and strengths are and working from there. The first role is to empower them, because empowered people function much better. (Helen)

Other participants talked about how much work had to be undertaken to get the learner to the point where they were ready to start learning literacy skills, that the measurement might reflect a stagnant number in terms of literacy skills, but the tutor and learner know that huge personal gains have been made. One ALO argued for validation of time for this kind of learning;

I think it also needs to be acknowledged that there are a lot of people at a pre-literacy stage. And they've to do work to get to the point where they can build their literacy skills.(Joan)

It became apparent that work is undertaken by the practitioners to bring the learner to a place where they can begin to learn, creating a safe space, modelling group learning, practising an adult learning ethos and recognising that these individuals have always been at a disadvantage.

Well, you are supposed to go in as a tutor to provide an educational program and your goal is to ensure the student achieves that. But you can't achieve that if students are lacking in confidence and so nervous that they can't learn...It doesn't actually work like that. You have to understand all the dynamics going on. (Helen)

One Support Tutor talked about the gap between what the services actually do and how they are seen by administrators, state or organisational;

...I just think we've kind of got lost somewhere in communication and that we're never talking to one another. That maybe the Ministers are not talking to the people on the ground, like you and me, that are actually working, they're not talking to the people, they are not talking about what's going on in their daily lives. (Patricia)

You still get people saying, eight years in school, in primary school, and then even if they only do two more years, and they still can't read and write. What's going on there? That's ridiculous. But they [government departments] don't see what the supports were at home, what the pressure was if you're in a class wanting to learn and the others are calling you names because you do...or if you just don't understand what's going on so you'd rather be the class clown...these are realities for people and we hear these stories every day of the week. (Patricia)

Patricia went on to discuss the human side of unmet literacy needs, the inequalities which resulted in the individual missing out, and why compassion and care are a part of literacy education. She gave an example of the kind of rhetoric she hears when learners first re-engage with education;

'What has made me that I can't read and write? And [do you know] what it feels like for me not to be able to read and write?'...They [the state] can hear about it, but if you are sitting in an office and you're looking at somebody and he's crying, or she's crying, because this happened to them, and they feel embarrassed and they feel ashamed....So those are the real stories and I don't believe the people who are saying we must have an assessment tool are hearing them. Or looking at that person.

Helen to demonstrates an awareness of this sense of exclusion and inequality, and sees it as her role to go some way to mitigate that experience;

But I know a lot of people who come back to education are incredibly fearful, and fearful people don't function well in the world. If any way you can eradicate that fear and bring about confidence in themselves, you're doing a favour for all of society. I think they have often been failed in the past, in a system that was working towards a

population suitable for economics and for the structure of the country, and if they haven't fitted into that system and they come back, they felt they were a failure and they felt very fearful, and you impose this system on them again, for a second time in their life you are telling them they are a failure. (Helen)

Human capital or human capability?

Understanding that there is a bigger picture to literacy education, one which benefits deprived communities and society as a whole by default, and recognising that a state which understands the causes of unmet literacy needs, and goes some way to compensate those who lost out as well as mitigate future damage, are themes which were explicit in some participants' interviews but implicit in others. There was a sense that measuring humans to somehow validate the service was linked to employment activation, but that the practitioners saw employment as sometimes a goal which was not immediate for some learners. Helen discussed a project she was involved in which saw the service make changes to the community it worked within, linked to personal development and social inclusion, as well as a family literacy aspect;

When I started working in [states inner city area], we only had women coming in, most of them came in smelling very heavily of drink, they hardly left their accommodation. As the years went on, we had more and more women coming in, we had younger women coming in, there was a whole pride in the community....by the time I had finished there we often had as many men as women. We had people who were confident, their lives were different. There was an energy about the whole community...That was the value of having the tutoring services in there, and I just think ticking boxes and measuring academics is just not what it's about.

Practitioners see literacy services doing work to alleviate some of the inequalities these learners have faced throughout their lives; poverty, neglect and substance misuse are common problems for some literacy learners. The practitioners want to ensure that measurement does not take from the time allocated to programmes, that sufficient time is allowed to continue the kind of work that practitioners see as central to learning;

When you are measuring something you are measuring it because you have a framework, which means you have made a judgement value on what is important and not important in your society. If your society only values that people achieve a specific grade in a specific subject you diminish all the other skills that people have, it totally dis-empowers them, they disengage, they feel worthless and all the great skills they have, in music, in crafts, in just being kind, it could be in supporting people in their community and none of those things are ever measured...the measurement system is so narrow ...and that is really destructive in the long run. (Helen)

One ALO was concerned that pushing literacy towards a qualifications outcome only, a SOLAS strategy, would result in learners reverting to a similar experience as they had in school, which could possibly result in a similar outcome;

..regarding FETAC, we need to have it in our mind that it is a vehicle for literacy and allow the time to go off on what other people might call a tangent, but I'm calling it a literacy or numeracy tangent. You can go out and take that session to address particular needs even if they aren't in the module descriptor, or can't be used as evidence to meet an outcome. Otherwise we are leading them back through what maybe didn't work for them first time. (Joan)

Maggie too, with her personal and theoretical interests in inequalities, stated;

I think in that thing about the caring state, there's something about the state that cares devises policies, designs policies and sets targets and supports those targets with other structural changes that actually care about people, and we don't see very much sign of that. If you want people's literacy rates to rise you pay them for going to literacy classes and you give them the resources and the recognition that they've been wronged and that there's compensation for them and devise assessment tools that are comprehensive.

One participant lamented the lack of value placed on caring and soft skills, and argued that those in charge of funding should listen to those providing services at the coal face;

I mean soft skills are never valued in society (clarifies to government)... I think the information coming from the people on the ground should be able to inform the people who have the money to spend on it, maybe they are just not listening and maybe interviews like this, and creating a body of work that might or might not be listened to is the only way of informing the government. (Helen)

Finally, participants talked about citizen's rights and their capabilities to achieve their potential, one ALO in particular commented;

'the fundamental thing is, every citizen is entitled to a basic education, is entitled to be satisfied with their literacy level, and have the confidence to go out there and do what they need to be able to do.' (Joan)

In conclusion, the findings argued that the tool was the best model we have for literacy assessment as of yet. In its current format, it may need to be reduced in size and some work undertaken on its language in order that it become more user friendly. However, it was not what the tool *could* do, but what it *could not*, that the participants wished to discuss in more depth. It seems that the findings here support the existing literature on counting the correct outcomes of literacy education, this will be further explored in the analysis chapter.

CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The findings chapter allowed the participants to voice their perceptions of the tool and literacy assessment. The opinions were socially constructed by the participants and themes emerged which I construed according to my epistemology and grouped accordingly. However, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, I am conscious that my ontology as a researcher will impact how I interpret the themes, the literature I have chosen to review and even how I 'hear' the voices of the participant. It was intentional then, on my part, to separate clearly the findings and analysis chapters. This chapter then relates the findings to the policy, theorists and practice overviewed in the literature review.

The Progress Framework tool

Positives of the tool; DES recommendations

In terms of analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the new Progress Framework as a measurement tool, there was unified agreement among practitioners that the new tool meets all of the DES (2013) recommendations for a national assessment tool. Recommendation nineteen (p.89) suggesting that any new tool should recognise prior learning, also suggested by the ESGFN report, is met with the tool according to participants. The CDETb has worked over the past twelve months with a steering group on the development of materials for initial and ongoing assessment. They have been disseminated to ALOs and intention to make them available to tutors is expected at the onset of the 2015-16 academic year. Both ALOs interviewed agreed the new materials have made a difference to their initial assessment method, 'it gives a clearer picture' as Joan said in the findings. This meets recommendation eighteen on guidelines on initial assessment and also recommendation nineteen; negating an over reliance on self reporting. The tool has been mapped on the NQF and meets that recommendation also. Another finding on the language used in the tool being too technical, has already been brought to the attention of management through further interviews, and it has been agreed that changes will be made accordingly before the academic term begins in September 2015.

Recommendation twenty suggests that formative assessment be accounted for in the devising of any new tool. The CDET tool has been built on the excellent earlier work of the formative aspects of MLJ and the practical tasks aspects of ITABE, integrating both to what is now agreed is 'the best tool yet' by all tutors and ALOs interviewed.

Positives of the tool; Carrigan's recommendations

'Screening' for a literacy as suggested in the SOLAS plan, and regarded as inappropriate in Carrigan's (p.68) research findings due to its relationship to a deficit model, was found to be inappropriate too by tutors and managers alike, supporting Carrigan's research. Participants said the new tool strengthened both the interview and teaching and learning process through the conversation with the learner. As reported by Merrifield (1998) and Derrick (2006) in the literature review, any form of standardised testing in literacy work has been found to be flawed and one dimensional. The findings should strengthen the case that any national assessment tool resist a move towards standardised testing or screening.

Carrigan (p.68) recommendations also advocated for a free-writing assessment, culturally relevant to the learner. Merrifield (1998) criticized, as discussed in the literature review, that literacy skills in the US and Britain are measured according to reading levels. As Merrifield, Tett (2014), Street (1995) and Lave & Wenger (1991) argued, literacy is not made up of reading alone, it is made up of a complex interaction between the social, the emotional and the cognitive processes. The ALOs in this research reported that the writing task on new tool has led to a much richer picture of the learner's skills. Claire reported 'you get a very good feel for where someone is at when you actually sit down and ask them to write a piece'. Carrigan recommends that a free-writing task is built into any literacy assessment, the Progress Framework allows for that. Some guidance should be developed for ALOs on the protocol of using free-writing as an initial assessment.

Carrigan also advocated strongly for results of literacy assessment to be given to the learner, something which was not common practice within the VECs. The participants and ALOs during interview talked about how they discussed levels much more openly with the learners. Previously they had avoided 'labelling' learners at levels, due to both 'spiky' profiles and also the sensitive nature of the information. Participants felt learners

were now more included in their assessments, but also that open discussion around levels did not cause difficulty for the learner, that they appreciated the conversation.

The Unintended Learning

In her appraisal of the assessment tool, Joan commended the tool on many occasions but each time she did, she immediately followed with her reservations. She repeatedly returned to the other, sometimes unintended, learning outcomes, saying they too needed highlighting; 'there are definitely other outcomes which are not being captured and I think we are doing ourselves an injustice if we don't capture them.' The other outcomes participants spoke of were increased confidence, care in appearance, dignity, pride in their learning and the work they were completing, decreased substance abuse, familial effects such as family members coming along to join classes, stability and consistency in attendance or increased attendance. The unintended learning and the learners themselves were discussed frequently.

Unaccounted outcomes

Throughout the interviews the participants extolled the virtues of the tool in that it highlighted what literacy practitioners and theorists value in terms of skills. As purported by Lave & Wenger (1991), skills should be immediately relevant and applicable to the learner in order that they may become included, moving from legitimate peripheral participation to full praxis over time, in their relevant communities of family, work and social inclusion. However, how we measure these skills is still debatable by the participants. The pressures from SOLAS to produce numbers has led to the tool being used summatively, and herein lies the concerns of the participants of the research. On measurement of the skills, the tool allows measurement relating to reading and writing tasks only, participants acknowledge that measuring the confidence of the learner on a particular skill, and the ability to 'integrate' (Helen) that skill into real lived experiences is essential for the tutor to ensure she is helping the learner meet their goals in full. However, the holistic learning taking place is going unrecorded. The observable differences in people reported by the practitioners, which they wish to be captured, has no space on the tool. Early on in the research I debated with myself the importance of

capturing this learning. I pondered the importance of recording holistic learning, that if the teacher and learner both experienced its value, why would the state need to be aware if it?

If we imagine a triangle with the state, the literacy services and the learners on the three vertices, early on in my research I believed it was possible to meet the requirements of all vertices equally, the teaching, the learning and the state's quest for numbers. The participants' discussions on the broader concept of measurement led me to rethink my beliefs. The hierarchal vertex is of course the state, and there are many reasons, as demonstrated by the participants and literature, to be wary of that vertex. Below I relate the findings in relation to the learner, the teaching and the broader state issues as discussed in chapter two.

Who is the learner?

In approaching literacy from a skills and training ethos SOLAS fail to recognise the literacy service's work beyond the purely didactic approach of literacy skills classes. The literacy practitioner recognises the service does a lot more due to the nature of the learner presenting. One particular recommendation of the DES (2013) report was to prioritise the unemployed in order that they gain skills at least equivalent to level three on the NQF. Understandably, there is an urge to help those who became unemployed during the recession in Ireland to gain skills in order that they do not remain long term unemployed. There certainly has been a change in demographic in recent years, with Department of Social Protection sending unemployed individuals, the majority being men, for education and training, moving from a service of predominantly female learners (2009 - 339 female to 244 male) to a service now with more men than women attending (2014 - 375 male to 344 female⁶). This move is welcomed, not as a market activation measure, but as a propellant for men to engage with education. However, they are not our only cohort, and the adult literacy services were set up to provide a basic education to all, who for whatever reason, missed out first time around. Joan recognises the capabilities aspect, as discussed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) in chapter two, when she advocates for an education system that recognises the human right to a basic education so that citizens have the ability to do what they need to in

⁶ Figures available from an internal statistical return representing one service within the ETB.

society, but also what they choose to, what they 'need to be able to do.'. Essentially, Sen and Nussbaum both argue that those choices are given to the citizen by the state. A results oriented, market driven literacy service aimed at providing market ready individuals to a jobless market does not tally with White Paper (2000) assertions that adult education is for personal development and citizenship.

Prioritising the unemployed, rather than a first come, first served basis again moves away from the ethos of the literacy service and into the hands of the neo-liberal policy makers. As mentioned in the literature review, there still exists doubt (Holford et al, 2007) that increased literacy levels lead to increased economic activity, formulating policy around an disputed theory could lead to unintended damages to the service, leading to further exclusion of those who need it most (Derrick, 2006). As an ALO, Joan voiced this fear in the findings when she argued that the service may have to be selective, rather than open to all, if it becomes driven by statistical reporting. Her argument is not unlike the argument that Human Development approach makes; Capability Theory (Nussbaum, 2011) would argue against the social contract and utilitarian models of economic policy making, where nations formulate all policy based on economic return. A state grounded in a normative theory of justice would allow all citizens equal opportunities regarding access to education, in the hope then that that said education would result in the freedoms to choose their next direction, their path, whether that is work, further education or active politicised citizenship. A state committed to economic development grounded in justice, would create models of assessment which account for these indicators. The HDI model discussed in the literature review and further below is one such possible model.

Social Justice

The learner who arrives at the literacy services as spent a large proportion of their lives excluded, it 'is something that has made them feel outsiders all their lives' (Claire), and participants commented that there is often pre-literacy work to be done. This work is not explicit in the duties of a tutor, but implicit and practised and discussed regularly. Helen and Patricia both discussed the kind of work they see as part of their responsibilities, creating safe places to learn, confidence building and creating a space where the learners' experiences can be heard. Patricia and Helen have decided, as do the vast majority of

literacy tutors I practice with, to be cognisant of the reasons why someone has been excluded from education, why they present with unmet literacy needs, and to be aware of the inequalities in life that may have contributed to, or directly caused their exclusion. Feeley (2014, p.158) argues strongly for this kind of recognition;

If we accept that literacy is socially situated and a tool in the movement for social justice, then more fully understanding the unequal nature of that social backdrop is a necessary part of that struggle.

Returning to the methodology chapter, and discussions on social constructivism, I have to admit I 'heard' an undercurrent of social justice in all interviews. This was implicit and construed by me as a researcher but also based on my own knowledge. The kind of language used by participants in relation to doing what is 'right', talking about 'care', talking about learners' 'fear' and building their 'confidence' led me to deduce participants in the research had a keen sense of social justice and this was demonstrated in their work ethic.

The Work the Tutor Does

Care and the learner

The interviews demonstrated an understanding on the part of the practitioners of the nature of structural inequities. Tutors, without contractual obligation, include care for the learner as an inextricable part of their teaching. Feeley (2014, p.159) demonstrated through her study with survivors of institutional 'care', that education devoid of care was limiting. Even those who did not suffer direct abuse, suffered as a result of neglect in the area of care and compassion. When a learner tells stories of their first time in education, and the reasons why they did not achieve, the tutor is aware that this is their first time re-engaging with a state education system and wants to ensure a positive experience for her. Noddings (1984) describes the carer and the cared for, and how the carer responds to the cared-for by being open to listening and receptive to their needs, ideally resulting in helping the cared-for. In literacy practice, this translates as being in-tune with their fears with the intention being to help the learner, to alleviate fear and construct an environment congruent with learning. Helen described her role as similar to Vygotsky's theory on scaffolding when teaching children, without doubt adults who missed out on basic education need extra 'scaffolding', to alleviate fear and start the learning process.

Care work; unrecognised and value-less

Nussbaum (2011) would argue that a just society creates opportunity for all its citizens, recognising the unequal start some have may the limit the means they might have to achieve. Differentiating between functioning and capabilities, she argues for recognition on part of the state of the different capabilities people have, what they are able to achieve given the means. The participants too recognised that the literacy learner, starting from a fearful, inequitable place needs care in order to reach a starting point, to be able to relax and trust the environment before their literacy learning begins or accelerates. However, measuring only output indicators (Derrick, 2006) leaves nowhere to capture this learning, and therefore nowhere to advocate for the resources to allow for it.

Participants felt there was little value placed on that care by the organisation. Helen felt the care she put into her lessons was not recognised, she declared it was 'not valued by the service. Because if the service valued it, you would actually be paid properly for the work that you do.' Maggie too reiterated the importance of calling for the value of the caring element in literacy teaching;

If the statistics about what is happening in literacy are based on something which is only partially true or isn't true at all well then, there are knock ons to that as well, if people say well you're doing x,y,z amount of work according to the statistics, we'll resource you for that, then you are never going to be resourced for the work that you're doing.

The concerns of the participants in relation to the aggregated number being taken from the Progress Framework, as an indicator of the work being done by the learner and tutor, are motivated by care for the learner. A fear expressed in the research was that if the learner does not demonstrate the kind of 'progress' the parameters have set as being worthy of measure, that they may lose time on the course for the learning to learn and personal development elements. Also, the concern is that the wrong elements are being measured in term of what the goal of the learning actually is. Helen, as shown in the findings chapter, worried about who made a judgment about what was worth learning and measuring, and if some learning was not being measured, was it by default then being judged as value-less? The participants concerns are valid, as the literature review demonstrated the value of 'counting' the correct outcomes so that they are ones driving the policy formulation on measurement (Merrifield, 1998, 1999, Derrick, 2006).

The goals of the learner were mentioned by participants, and also who sets the goals. Currently the goals are set by the learner, but will reporting only on the process of literacy attainment lead to policymakers only understanding literacy education as just that, an isolated set of skills acquired? The participants are fearful and warn that stock must be taken now, prior to policy development nationally to ensure the correct outcomes are measured, rather than just indicators or outputs. As Patricia stated; 'I see this as a very kind of linear progression and you can't nearly say enough on it in one way as well...It's an indicator, I think it's only an indicator of progress.' Indicators of literacy progress do not reflect how well the learner is doing on their original goals, and it is these outcomes which Derrick (2006), as stated in the literature review, have proved most important in the research in the British context.

Output Indicators or Outcomes?

Well, if we are going to record outcomes, we have to decide what we are going to record and the purpose. Is it outcomes linked to personal goals that the person stated when they came in, that are relevant to them? Or they outcomes linked to externally set goals by government, funders..whatever? (Joan)

The participant quoted above is again calling for a discourse on what exactly should be measured. This particular participant was particularly complimentary of the Progress Framework tool as a teaching and learning aid, but was concerned about the aggregated measurement being taken from it, requested in the assessment pack from 2014. Again, the Foucauldian 'already said' is evident, in that a measure taken from a teaching and learning tool is being used as a reflection of what is happening in the services. All participants interviewed agreed that it was not reflecting the most important learning, but only indicating the tasks currently being worked on by the learner and tutor, but they were not given the opportunity to be heard before that decision was made at management level.

In the final interview I brought this question to an Adult Literacy Organiser, who agreed that the observable changes in the individual were extremely important, and argued that she has heard many management level practitioners argue over the years for this change in the confidence of the learner to be recognised as one of the significant outcomes of the learning process. She agreed that the 'confidence thing' was so important but could see no way to capture it. This participant has a long career in Adult Literacy management and added that she hoped now the new tool recognised the important 'soft

skills' of the learner. I fed back to her the other participants' views that it did not, that it only recognised soft skills pertaining to a particular reading or writing skill. The confidence and independence of the learner is measured, by learner self reflection, only relating to the skill they are working on, such as the skill of form filling, the skill of understanding a newspaper article. But there is nowhere to measure the difference it makes to a man's self esteem, who can now read the newspaper at his lunch break and discuss the current topics with his work mates. The skill has improved, but the unintended outcomes (in terms of personal development and of social justice) are that he is now less excluded, less ashamed and more informed. On our tutor training course we teach our trainee tutors to be aware of the other learning that happens when an individual learns to read, the critical thinking that begins to happen through reading, responding and conversing (Gardiner, 2011) and yet we record this nowhere. It is this critical thinking (Freire, 1996) which leads to more active citizenship, and literacy for me (as well as many participants) at the core of its practice, is concerned more with that than purely skills attained.

State Responsibilities

It may be recalled from the literature review that the state has responsibilities towards all its citizens, but has a distinct responsibility to create the means for those at a disadvantage to achieve their capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). Sen (1999) goes further to argue that economic measurement plays a pivotal role in creating this more equitable society. Some participants saw a gaping chasm between what the state understands as literacy provision and the practice itself. Maggie argued that the state simply was not 'clever' enough, not 'smart' enough. What Maggie was referring to, and what Sen (2009) argued was for an intelligent form of measurement, one which was not aggregated and which reflected all outcomes of an investment. As discussed in the literature review, Sen *et al* (2009, 2010) advocated for a new form of measurement, one which moved away from GDP and GNP single measures. It was obvious from the Kerala model, albeit a third world development model, that there were tangible results when government was smarter in devolving power and resources to local authorities, ensuring active political engagement and fairer distribution of wealth. What was a communist based model had the results any idealist capitalist proponent (McCloskey, 2014) could only dream of, all citizens lifted on the wave of prosperity. On quality of life indices,

Kerala rated higher than some US cities, a third world country rating higher than one of the richest first world countries.

What is happening here, and was the Sarkozy Commission (2010) and recognition of the HDI system of measurement led to, is a growing awareness at OECD (2014) level that the failures of neo-liberalism, free market economic policies and the growing gap between rich and poor, has been hidden behind a single measure; GDP. If the pendulum is finally beginning to swing back, why is Adult Literacy education in Ireland, which has fought for thirty years for the social, personal and liberatory aspects of Adult Education, folding under the first pressures from SOLAS for returns of quantitative data in single aggregated data form? With all of the evidence internationally pointing towards the damages these kind of numbers do, with the participants of this research calling for recognition of the unintended outcomes of the services, mental health, decreased substance abuse, family literacy, employment, stability, routine, increased self-esteem, overall increased capabilities as citizens of the state; why is the service moving towards aggregated data rather than researching the other outcomes, outcomes which no doubt take pressure off other state agencies such as the Department of Social Protection and the Health Services Executive. A smart service would measure and report on these outcomes, and a smart state would recognise the financial benefit of the Adult Literacy services on a number of indicators, not just a scale of reading and writing.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

'Everyone has their own way of changing, or, what amounts to the same thing, of perceiving that everything changes. In this matter, nothing is more arrogant than trying to dictate to others. My way of no longer being the same is, by definition, the most unique part of what I am.' Foucault (2000)

As well as an opportunity to platform practitioners reflections on measurement tools in literacy education, this research journey has been one of immense personal discovery. I have used Foucault's quotes at the beginning of some chapters as he was one of the discoveries along the route. I related to his abstract notions on power and his resistance to finitely define his thinking, his theories remain fluid and open to interpretation. I cannot say that Foucault underpinned this research in any way, but I can say he accompanied me and influenced my interpretation of readings. To say that we change on a journey is true, I cannot see the point of undertaking it otherwise. Below I discuss that journey relating to my own sense of justice, the research findings and literature. I ask what the limitations of the research are and finally, make recommendations for further research and dissemination of results.

Personal learning; Affirmed Sense of Justice

On many occasions during my career I have had reason to doubt my own knowledge, which was often based on a sense of justice, whether that sense was learned or innate I do not know. What I do know now, is that feminised professions are often care-full and that care, in a quest for professional recognition of the work, has been sidelined and silenced. My understanding of how power operates, in silencing and voicing, has given me encouragement to voice my own reservations about the changing nature of literacy education. I discovered, as the months went by, that essentially my beliefs were nothing new, theorists had been researching and writing for decades on assessment and education, and yet the drive towards measurement continued.

Finding the writings of the economist Amartya Sen helped me understand the neoliberal economic ideology which has, without doubt, influenced education systems. Sen's writings (1999, 2009, 2010) do not argue against development and production, and

measurement of both, but for a human approach to them all. What purpose is production and development if not to benefit all of those involved? His work on the Human Development Approach explains, for me, both the justice and economic elements of measurement. Nussbaum's (2011) development of his theory into a purely normative social justice theory, Capabilities Theory, led me to understand that a just society has obligations to its weaker members, to ensure equality of opportunity, but without conditions attached. That human beings are given the freedom to choose what they *do* with the opportunities given to them is so important for our freedom as individuals. Education is a human right, the state is obliged (a just state would *want*) to provide it without a social contract, without a utilitarian aim.

Implications for Policy Making

The objective of this research was to query the perceptions of the CDET B Progress Framework tool, in order that DES policy making on a national tool may consider this tool as a valid contender. The tool itself, according to the findings, is a good tool, mindful that adult literacy learning is not only about skills but social application of those skills, mindful too that adult literacy learning is often, for a long period of time, horizontal rather than vertical. The findings have led me to make the following recommendations, tentatively and within the realm of this research:

Recommendations

1. The Progress Framework tool is recommended to the DES as a tool for initial and formative assessment nationally.
2. Further work on simplifying the language used in the tool is needed to ensure user friendliness.
3. The tool is primarily regarded as a teaching and learning aid, to promote formative assessment within the services.
4. Guidance on free-writing exercises for initial assessment should be formulated.
5. Regarding summative assessment, management should research the impact statistical reporting on output indicators has had on literacy services internationally, to avoid external measurement frameworks being imposed.

6. Reporting on summative assessment should include outcomes such as initial learning goals being achieved. This also ensures that the goals are set by the learner and not externally imposed.
7. Adult Literacy continues to provide basic education which is based on broad educational attainment, mindful of the well-being of the learner, rather than literacy skills acquisition alone.
8. Adult Literacy continues to provide first come, first served basic education for learners. Market driven selection could lead to a results oriented service.
9. Adult Literacy funding allocation remains detached from results, as this too may lead to selective participation.

Limitations

This was a small scale piece of research within one ETB. It aimed to discover how assessment processes in one ETB are viewed by practitioners involved in assessment. This research could be replicated across other ETBs, possibly on a larger scale. Any further research in the area needs to include the voice of the learner to be truly democratic, decisions based on research about assessing individuals should include their voices. Concerns about generalising about the findings on any piece of qualitative research is valid, due to both the small sample and nature of 'realities' and knowing, as discussed in the methodology chapter. However, the strong research in the literature review regarding the pitfalls of measurement, alongside the concerns of the practitioners, cannot be disregarded either and this research makes recommendations for further research accordingly.

Further Research

Research into learners' goals and their perceptions of achievement within literacy education might give a clearer picture of whether the learner values purely the literacy skills attainment or also the soft skills. The consequences of taking part in literacy education could also be measured in a model based on the Human Development Approach, consequentially research into developing such a model would be very interesting. It might take into account weightings for well being and decreased social

exclusion, as well as increases in literacy levels and employment. This would give, according to participants on this study, a better reflection of what the service actually provides. Of particular interest to future research on this topic is the movement towards care and well-being in measurement and education. As Feeley (2014) showed in the literature review, care in education leads to a better learning environment for the student. Research into the area of didactic versus care-full literacy education might be useful in arguing for recognition of that care work. Of personal interest to me, as a result of my learning, would be research into the economic value of this care, building on the work of Folbre (2014) and Sen (2009) and formulating indices to capture that value.

Dissemination

As agreed with the participants, I will contact them on publication and make the results of this research available to them, this will be done in person as I will see most participants through the course of my work. Those who I do not meet regularly I will email to let them know results are available to them should they wish to receive a copy. Management are interested in discussing the findings of the research and a date soon after submission has been set to meet.

Conclusion

During the course of the research I have been privileged to hear the concerns of compassionate, caring and dedicated professionals. The findings led to me, as a researcher, having to read much broader theoretical writings than I expected at the outset. Measurement is powerful, as conveyed in the literature review, and as Foucault (1984, p.343) would argue something to be wary of; 'not everything is bad, but everything is dangerous'. This research found that measurement can have positive outcomes, IALS led to funding the sector and the findings of this research found that the Progress Framework has led to richer conversations with the learner on their progress as well as more insightful lesson planning. But the dangers of measurement are evident too, and the research findings on the whole called for those in positions of power, those in a position to influence policy making, to consider the dangers before embracing the gleaning of aggregated numbers from this tool as a reflection of summative learning. I

hope that this research goes some way to adding to the body of knowledge existing within Irish Adult Literacy assessment currently.

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