

EXPLORING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF BRICK & STONework APPRENTICES IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND ON THE IRISH STANDARDS BASED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME.

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This paper is derived from a broader study examining the experiences of apprentices on the Irish Standards Based Apprenticeship which forms part of the thesis requirements for a Doctor of Education (EdD) in Queen's University Belfast.

My sincere thanks to my primary supervisor Prof. Dina Belluigi, Queen's University Belfast and second supervisor Dr Andy Biggart, also of Queen's University Belfast.

MY BACKGROUND

- Served a 4 year craft apprenticeship in the early 1990s in Painting & Decorating.
- Started teaching on the apprenticeship programme in 2000.
- Went on to complete an Honours Degree; Masters Degree and completed my Doctorate in 2022.
- Now teach across a broad range of programmes both full time and apprenticeship.
- At every opportunity I have researched the lived experience of apprentices!

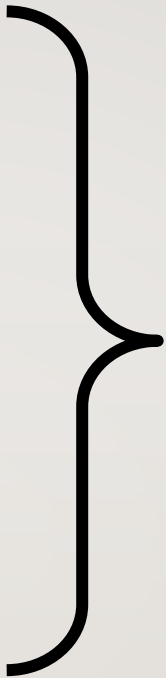
OLD APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

- Each year attended college one day a week September to June for off the job training.
- Exams were optional as it was a Time Served Apprenticeship
- Employer was expected to pay the apprentice for the day in college.
- Issues in industry on quality of training.
- System changed from the mid 1990s to a Standards Based Apprenticeship.

IRISH STANDARDS BASED APPRENTICESHIP

- Relates to Craft Apprenticeships e.g. Painting & Decorating; Carpentry & Joinery; Bricklaying; Plumbing & Heating; Electrician etc.
- Changed from day release to block release with concentrated time in training centres/ universities.
- Government now pay for the off the job training.

IRISH STANDARDS-BASED APPRENTICESHIP

- Phase 1 Employer.
 - Phase 2 ETB training centre.
 - Phase 3 Employer.
 - Phase 4 TU Dublin for 10 weeks.
 - Phase 5 Employer.
 - Phase 6 TU Dublin for 10 weeks.
 - Phase 7 Employer.
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- 7 phases take approximately 4 years

Every phase has exams which **MUST** be passed before progressing.

Solas are the Awarding Body; we are sub contractors for Phases 4 and 6

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

- Feedback from full time students – Q6 process; Q5 and Faculty Action Plan
- National survey carried out for all full time students.
- No attempt to take feedback from apprentices at any level!
- Several curricula were rewritten but never implemented.
- Supposedly industry ready but curricula is 20 years old!

AIM OF THE STUDY

- ... to explore the learning experiences of apprentices on the craft trades of Brick and Stonework, and Wood Manufacturing and Finishing on the Irish Standards Based Apprenticeship programme in their own words and through their lived experience.
- This presentation focusses on the Brick & Stonework apprentices

Twenty participants were recruited and twelve took part using semi-structured interviews utilising a framework of Practice Architectures to structure the interview schedule. Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

THE STUDY

- In constructing the interview schedule, I sought a framework that could be useful for mapping and understanding the complex relationships that occur within the apprentice's experiences.
- In my research I came across the notion of Practice Architectures.

PRACTICE ARCHITECTURES

- Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) developed a theory of practice that is embedded within what they called 'practice architectures.' Practice architectures evolved from practice theory and Lave and Wenger's 'communities of practice'
- Practice architectures refer to the sayings (language), doings (the material) and relatings (social relationships) of a practice that hang together in projects.
- These projects then shape and are shaped by practice traditions that act like a 'collective memory' allowing that practice to be reproduced



PRACTICE ARCHITECTURES

- Resonated with me and my experience of being an apprentice.
- Constructed 30 question semi structured interview schedule around this.

For example –



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Cultural-discursive theme (language):

- Starting out as a first year – was it difficult to understand what you were being told/asked to do?

Prompts –

Were there names for tools and materials that you did not understand?

Were there slang terms that you did not understand?



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Material-economic theme (doings):

- What was your situation when you started your apprenticeship?

Prompts:

School leaver? Single? Relationship? Children?

Live at home? Own accommodation?



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Socio-political theme (relationships):

- When you began your apprenticeship did you work under a foreman?
Someone in charge?

Prompt:

What was your relationship like?



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Apprentice Input

- Following any phase of your apprenticeship, were you asked for feedback about your learning or your experience as an apprentice?

Prompts -

Were you asked for feedback on anything such as assessments? Feedback on how you managed?

Work-based phases? Off-the-job phases?



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Finishing Up:

- Is there anything I have missed that you would like to include?

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- As it turned out the themes that emerged really bore no overlap or link to the three areas of Practice Architectures!
 - So while it resonated with me, it didn't seem to emerge from the analysis!

- The apprentices were drawn from those who have attended a specific centre for the Phase 6 of their programme. As there is only one centre that deals with those levels of the apprenticeship programme there was no participants potentially missing out on taking part.
- Participants were recruited through emails, phone calls, and calling into classes or workshops while some groups were on campus. At all times I observed all the safety protocols in place around the corona virus. A total of thirty-nine potential participants were contacted. This report focusses on the twelve participants from Brick & Stonework.
- Recruitment hindered by recent data hack of Irish Health Service.



INTERVIEWS

- Due the corona virus interviews could not be carried out face to face.
- Interviews were carried out using Microsoft Teams app
- Challenges – they didn't have the app; cameras not switched on; quality of the connection; could not engage in the interview the way I would normally!
- Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and line numbered by me.
- All of participants were assigned random pseudonyms as a means of humanising them in the analysis
- Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

WHAT IS INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)?

IPA is a relatively new method which privileges a

- phenomenological – looking at life as it is lived by the participant.
- idiographic - unique to the individual
- interpretative analysis – researcher brings perspective on data.

Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Theory, Method and Research*. London: Sage Publications.

DATA ANALYSIS

Having used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in a previous study I was aware of its ability to shed 'light on experiences as they are lived by an embodied socio-historical situated person,' (Eatough and Smith, 2017, p.195).

IPA ANALYSIS

- I. Data immersion



IPA ANALYSIS

- 2. Initial noting.

This step explores the semantic content and language use with an open mind and begins to identify specific ways in which participants talk about their experiences. A degree of interpretation occurs here as I sought to understand the way in which the participants talked the way they did.

I looked at the language and the context of their responses and sought for a pattern of meaning in what they said. The aim here is to produce a comprehensive set of notes on the data.

The researcher is looking for deeper meaning in the responses of the participants that can be summarised in a phrase or short sentence. These notes then went on to develop the emergent themes.



IPA ANALYSIS

- 3. Developing Emergent Themes.
 - Look at my descriptive comments....Are there any themes there that show up repeatedly?
 - Developing a theme meant producing a concise statement of what was important in descriptive comments – it was me distilling the data down.

Emergent Theme

My concise statement ...

Participants words...

Employer as a friend Darren	53	Got a summer job with a chap I know form my GAA club and enjoyed it
	237	I was his first apprentice... learning experience for him as well.

IPA ANALYSIS

- 4. Searching for connections across emergent themes - superordinate themes:

The emergent themes have been looked at chronologically as they occurred in the interview. This next step involves attempting to map those emergent themes to fit them together. This step aims to allow the researcher to look at the most interesting and important aspects of the data.

At this point, several of the emergent themes may be left aside depending on the strength of their presentation. For example, some emergent themes could be present at several points in the data and so emerge strongly.



Themes	Line	Key words
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Defending his employer Stephen	105	Can't complain
	167	He knew that I had done it

Employer did not fulfil obligations Colm	168	Not really no
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Becoming qualified Colm	221	Felt like was out of me time...
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Moving beyond boundaries Darren	350	artistic, more than a painter
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Employer as a friend Darren	53	Got a summer job with a chap I know form my GAA club and enjoyed it
	237	I was his first apprentice... learning experience for him as well.

Moving towards qualification Darren	257	becoming a painter
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Employer did not fulfil obligations Stephen	357	you're supposed to be learning
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Look back and laugh Stephen	247	You'd start panicking a bit (laughs good naturedly)
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Apprenticeship was a deliberate workstyle/career choice

Themes	Line	Key words
Knew the requirements of the job	58	I would have known what was involved in it before I started
The job was good for the mind	35	it's just good to clear the head
Pursued the legitimate qualification	270	I was on good money but it wasn't the money I was after it was the paperwork

DATA ANALYSIS

- Repeat steps 1 – 4 for each participant.
- The last step involves looking for patterns linking each individual case.
- Are there any similarities between super ordinate themes?

NEGATIVE IDENTITY AS A LEARNER

This super ordinate theme was made up of individual these of –

- Negative experience of second level school
- Outsider on campus
- Voiceless learners

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE OF SECOND LEVEL SCHOOL

The majority of the participants talked about their orientation towards practical learning versus 'academic' learning while in secondary school.

There was a clear pattern of the teaching and learning they experienced in secondary school not being best suited to the type of learner they saw themselves as being.

For example, among the replies,

- 'I am not too academic'
- 'not into books',
- 'not being one of the clever lads'
- 'not a big fan of secondary school'.



OUTSIDER ON CAMPUS

This feeling of being a outsider relates to the time the participants spend off the job and attending their college phases. During these phases they experienced a perception of exclusion in terms of their participation as members of higher education communities.

For example no participant joined the Students Union -

- 'I think they told us we could but I just I just never thought I could really join it, I thought I'm only an apprentice... I thought I'd never really have a use for it'



OUTSIDER ON CAMPUS

This divide is stated more clearly by three other participants who talk about experiencing discrimination on campus.

- ‘you see people looking at ya and it’s actually very uncomfortable ya know It makes you feel like you’re not welcome there kind of,’
- ‘we kinda felt like sometimes they were looking at us as if to say like they’re only apprentices like ya know, and em do ya know I, I suppose yeah do ya know devalued a small bit...’
- ‘we are pinpointed as you shouldn't be here because you're an apprentice compared to a college student...’



VOICELESS LEARNERS

- The apprentices were asked whether they were canvassed for feedback throughout their time on their relevant apprenticeship programme. This question was asked to illustrate potential differences between full time students and apprentices regarding feedback
 - 'I don't think they care because you see, we're... we're only there for ten weeks. And we are not, we're not... em. We're not em... We are not big money to em'
 - 'It's like they just care about them (full time students) cause they're paying more money'
 - 'I can't work that out too much but like maybe it's because they're paying more money'
 - more attention is given to third level and degree students'



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEME: 'NEGATIVE IDENTITY AS A LEARNER'

1. A structured orientation day similar to what undergraduates are provided with when starting their programme. This would include a specific webpage with an FAQ section.
2. Staff appointments to programme chair and year head roles similar to existing roles on undergraduate programmes.
3. The provision of feedback mechanisms for apprentices.
4. The appointment of a class representative among each group of apprentices.

TANK YOU ! ANY QUESTIONS?

