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Editorial

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In this Volume

In our first paper, Colm O' Doherty and Tom Farrelly from the Institute of Technology, Tralee employ an action research approach and examine the complexity of designing and developing an innovative and user-friendly approach to professional social care education that incorporates advances in educational technology. Their project has recently moved to an operational stage following an 18-month period of consultation and reflection. The paper represents an outline of the development phase and a progress report of the first eight weeks of delivery.

Our second paper from Diana Nicholson at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada describes a research study on aggressive behaviour among students in a middle school which was initiated in response to concerns held by the school administration. Diana conducted survey research on aggressive behaviour followed by interviews with a sample of students. Student interviews highlighted a number of very important issues to consider when assessing and responding to aggressive behaviour in a school: school crowding, the playing out of dominant masculinity, involving students in finding solutions to identified problems, and considering the role of the whole school culture in sustaining aggressive behaviour.

Our third paper sees a return to the IoT domain (Institute of Technology) and presents findings from a longitudinal study which investigated the characteristics of 578 computing students entering the first year of their programme in the IoT sector in Ireland in 2001. Their study interlinks qualitative and quantitative elements and spans the four years of the students' academic life. The purpose of their paper is to present a profile of the student cohort based on the questionnaire administered to them on entry to their first year course and to present key findings based on students' responses to these questions. Relationships between objective variables such as

students' demographic, academic and socio-economic background are presented and patterns of association within the data are outlined. Also, where applicable, patterns of association between the entry characteristics of these students and the characteristics of the entire student body entering higher education in 1998 are compared and discussed.

Next, we include a paper from Northern Ireland from Michael Murray where he notes that as part of the UK's National Health Service modernisation agenda, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland set up a Service Improvement Unit (SIU). The aim of the SIU was to identify key areas in the Health and Social Services that needed improvement and to provide a structured framework in which to achieve the necessary developments. A key area identified was the interface between children in care and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. It was believed that a lot of work needed to be undertaken to identify those children and young people in the 'care system' that had 'mental health' difficulties and to ensure they received the necessary interventions in an appropriate and timely manner. In order to take forward this improvement, a multi-disciplinary project team was set up under the SIU scheme to look at this issue. The project's title was 'Knowing to Care!' which reflects the basic notion that the more we know about the children and young people the better we are caring for them. During the early stages of the programme when a 'process mapping' exercise was undertaken, it became evident, that those responsible for the care of the children and young people, i.e. Foster Carers and Residential Workers, were best placed to make improvements in assessing the mental health needs of children and young people in care. It therefore became the project's *raison d'être* to find ways in which carers could assess the mental health needs of children and young people in their care. Michael's paper outlines the process on how this was achieved.

We stay in Northern Ireland where Wendy Cousins and Sharon Milner comment on the trend in recent years where drug abuse has been recognised as a growing problem in that jurisdiction. Their paper examines the family backgrounds of a group of young children (n=388) who are being looked-after by social services and looks specifically at a group (n=162) whose family lives have involved adults who misuse drugs. They found that children from drug-abusing families did not show greater levels of recorded abuse or neglect than the other children in this 'looked after' population, nor were they more likely to leave the care system. They caution that this should be considered against a background of families who are all involved with child and family social work teams and who are experiencing multiple difficulties. Drug abuse in this population was found to be significantly associated with alcohol abuse, mental health problems and offending behaviour within the family. The implications of this are discussed and an approach to family needs assessment is proposed.

South Africa is our next exotic location and this paper from Sinead McEniry, a student from the Institute of Technology at Tralee, which includes a brief commentary from a practicum undertaken with children and families affected by HIV/AIDS. Although a short piece, it might provide other students with the travel bug!

Staying in the southern area of Ireland, Emma Walker of the Cork Institute of Technology, provides case study evidence and drew on multiple sources to construct an illustration of Prader Willi Syndrome. The primary source of data was derived from in-depth interviews with the parents of a 3-year-old girl who has Prader Willi Syndrome who was diagnosed during the third week of life. The evidence of this study suggests that non-specialist medical staff is not generally familiar with PWS. Training in relation to diagnostic criteria for chromosomal disorders would be extremely beneficial to them and to families that are affected by the syndrome. This study

highlights the need for parents to be their own child's advocate in obtaining desired support services in their area. Support Services in the North East region have been greatly increased due to the setting up of the North Eastern Health Board (now known as HSE North East Region) Early Intervention Services (EIS) in 2000.

The penultimate paper comes from Ann McWilliams, Siobhan Quinlan and Niall Hanlon at the Social Care Education and Training Project at the Dublin Institute of Technology which is a four-year project funded by the Department of Health and Children. The project has increased the number of students enrolled in social care courses at that Institute and delivers Continued Professional Development courses for workers in the specialised residential units. Their article describes an induction model developed and delivered by the project team to new workers in the specialised residential units in the Dublin region although the course is suitable for all residential care settings. The evaluation suggests that the majority of participants found the induction module worthwhile because it had a positive effect on their professional practice and increased their self confidence. This supports the need for formal induction training for all new workers to ensure they perform their professional duties as effectively as possible in their new working environment.

The final paper comes from a secondary school youth named Rhys Evans which is an imaginative piece set around a central character, Lucien, a photocopier and the US. It shows the writing talent our youth have. It is fitting to end the journal with views expressed by a young person.