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How do Apprentice Painters and Decorators on the Irish Standards Based Apprenticeship Experience their Learning?

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material, which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of **Masters (M.A.) in Third Level Learning and Teaching,** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the above named award.

Future students may use the material contained in this thesis provided that the source is acknowledged in full.

Signed……………………………………………….

Date…………………………………………………

Abstract.

This thesis research set out to examine the learning experience of apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish Standards Based Apprenticeship. It focussed on three painting and decorating apprentices from the Dublin Institute of Technology who were coming towards the end of their four year apprenticeship. As such the participants had experienced the full range of possible learning on the programme. The main aim of the study was to explore the learning experiences of apprentices on the standards based apprenticeship in their own words. This would provide for unique insights into that learning experience.

The research design was interprtivism informed by a constructionist epistemology. As it was exploring the real life experience of the participants it was phenomenological in nature. The research method was one on one semi structured interviews and the data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analyses. An extensive literature review of college based modules and work based modules was conducted as these form the two primary aspects of the Irish standards based apprenticeship.

The findings reveal the multi-faceted aspects of the learning experience that apprentices undergo with three strong themes emerging from the analysis. Firstly, it is clear that the apprentices engage in a complex relationship with their employer. Secondly, there is a perception among the participants that the college based modules are where learning occurs. Lastly, the participants revealed the transformative power of learning as it helped to transform their sense of self.

The study concludes with recommendations for policy makers with regards to improving the future learning experiences of apprentices.

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List of Abbreviations

AnCO   An Comhairle Oiliuna

BERA   British Educational Research Association

CAO   Central Applications Office

D.I.T   Dublin Institute of Technology

FAS   Foras Aiseann Saothair

IT   Institute of Technology

IPA   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

NAAC   National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee

NFQ   National Framework of Qualifications

SBA   Standards Based Apprenticeship

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CHAPTER ONE

Context of the Research

1.1 Introduction

To begin I will introduce myself and contextualise this research. It will become obvious that my background has had a major impact on this research. I began my career in the construction industry. I am a painter and decorator by trade and served a four year apprenticeship in the early 1990s. Upon completion I set up a small company and became an employer undertaking all types of contracts from domestic redecorating to apartment complexes. After several years I had the opportunity to begin teaching the trade I loved. I began my teaching career in 2000 working on the Level 6 National Craft Certificate programme which delivers modules on the painting and decorating apprenticeship programme. In a sense I have come full circle as I now teach in the Institute I attended as an apprentice. This a great source of pride for me as I work alongside the people who made such a big impact on me as an apprentice learning my trade from them.

As well as teaching on the Level 6 National Craft Certificate I have also taught on a Level 6 Buildings Maintenance Certificate, a Level 7 Bachelor of Technology in Architectural Technology and a Level 8 BA(Hons) in Architecture. I have the full technical ability to carry out the tasks associated with all aspects of my trade. However teaching on a variety of courses at different levels highlighted my need to continue with my own professional development and throughout my teaching career I have sought to do so. Having started my career as an apprentice I feel that, through my commitment to lifelong learning, my term as an apprentice will never really be finished as it is a living ethos and ambition of mine to continue upon this path.

Throughout my own apprenticeship I was learning all the time. This learning occurred as work based learning through the instruction of my colleagues and employer and during day release into a Technical College for further instruction. Attending college involved learning about the areas that an apprentice would be unlikely to learn from an employer. The apprentice attended college under a day

release scheme which involved attendance for one day per week from September till June. Exams took place in June each year. As the system was based upon the length of time served rather than a set of objective standards these exams were optional. Throughout my apprenticeship I was constantly employed. This constant employment and learning helped me to evolve and develop as a skilled tradesman.

When it came to a research topic for this thesis my interest was naturally drawn to apprenticeship. My experience serving my apprenticeship was characterised by many challenges, many colourful characters, and plenty of learning. Apprenticeship has always been characterised by learning. Indeed the word apprentice comes from the Old English word 'aprentis' which is itself a derivative from an old French word 'apprendre' which meant to learn (Allen, 1990: 52). In the time elapsed since I was an apprentice the apprenticeship programme itself has undergone a radical change. Apprenticeship education in Ireland has changed from an inherited UK system of time served to a standards based system incorporating mandatory periods of work-based and college based learning (O'Connor & Mullins, 2005) and is now known as a Standards Based Apprenticeship (SBA). This system brings new challenges to both the apprentice and the master. One major aspect of this change is the attendance by the apprentice at an Institute of Technology for a series of ten week blocks in which assessments must be undertaken and passed. This is radically different to the old time served system where there was no requirement to achieve pre-set standards of skills, ability or knowledge (Steedman, 2010).

It is my contention that the new SBA has implications for the apprentices' learning. Having regular contact with apprentices through my current teaching means that I am able to glean some idea of the effects these changes have. With this in mind I would like to ask, *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?* As this research question will examine the experience of the learning that occurs it is phenomenological in nature. This will be explored further in Chapter 3. In order to examine the question of apprentices' learning it is important to put apprenticeship into context and examine its evolution to its present state. The next section will look briefly at how the Irish Standards Based Apprenticeship has reached the point it is at today.

1.2 Evolution of the Irish Apprenticeship System

Apprenticeship is commonly regarded by most countries as a 'significant part of their education and training systems and, as such, a potential vehicle for achieving social as well as economic goals' (Fuller & Unwin, 2003: 42). There is evidence of formal apprenticeships being in existence in Britain as early as the twelfth century (Snell, 1996). Snell (1996) identifies three broad periods of apprenticeship characterisation over the last 800 years. The guild apprenticeship was the first such formal apprenticeship which lasted from the twelfth century until the fifteenth century. This was followed by a statutory apprenticeship period lasting approximately 300 years and finally voluntary apprenticeships which started around 1814. In Ireland the training agreements regarding apprentices were regulated in the same manner as those in Britain (Field & O'Dubhchair, 2001). When Ireland gained independence from Britain in 1922 it inherited an apprenticeship system that was a time served system with no obligatory measurement of competence (O'Connor, 2006), non-regulated, voluntary and dependent on the backing of employers (Nyan, 2009).

That apprenticeship training programme in Ireland has evolved and changed since the foundation of the State in 1922. The Apprenticeship Act of 1931 was introduced to 'make better provision for the regulation of apprenticeship in certain trades' (Government of Ireland, 2010). As a result of this Act, apprenticeship committees were set up to make rules and regulations relating to the training of apprentices. However, the committees were obliged rather than required to make rules regarding employer's obligations to train apprentices and in effect this Act was not very useful for apprentices (Coolahan, 1981). It was the Apprenticeship Act of 1959 that required employers to send apprentices to training courses. These training courses were flexible in their delivery with day release, block release and part-time release being options for apprentices (ibid). The new National Apprenticeship Board stipulated what type of instruction should be provided as well as the awarding of the qualification. In 1967 An Comhairle Oiliuna or AnCO the Irish Industrial Training Authority was established (Garavan, Costine & Hearty, 1995) and became responsible for all aspects of industrial training including apprenticeship.

AnCO brought changes to the apprenticeship system. One of these changes was a levy system introduced in an effort to move employers to a system whereby the industrial sector 'accepted responsibility for its own training, while simultaneously fostering a systematic approach to training and development' (Garavan et al, 1995: 68). Despite the 1967 Act giving AnCO the power to compel employers to release apprentices for their period of off-the-job training the reality was that up to 40% of apprentices were not released by their employers (Nyhan, 2009). These developments from the 1967 Act represented a move away from the voluntary aspect of apprenticeship and a formalising of the responsibilities of employers with regard to the training of apprentices.

Nyhan (2009) argues that the availability of funding from the European Social Fund from 1973 onwards effectively let the employers off the hook regarding their responsibilities regarding off-the-job training of apprentices. Employers no longer had to pay for certain aspects of an apprentice's training. AnCO funded the first year of an apprenticeships training which was spent in an AnCO training centre (O'Connor & Harvey, 2001). The apprentice was then expected to have an employer and be released for one day a week into a Technical College (which later became an Institute of Technology). Nyhan (2009) points out that the separation of the employer's responsibility to such a degree meant that AnCO had to design a new curriculum based upon systematic training principles which was fundamentally different to traditional apprenticeship training. He states that 'the rupture from classical holistic apprenticeship […] was compounded' (2009: 460). Snell (1996) argues that a similar process occurred in Britain throughout the history of apprenticeship whereby the focus turned towards training and therefore moved away from any cultural aspect of apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship training sector underwent further changes in the 1980s. A new agency was set up following the Labour Services Act 1986. This new agency was Foras Aiseanna Saothair (FAS) the National Training and Employment Authority. The responsibility of the new agency was broadened to include the needs of the long term unemployed. This new authority shifted its focus away from company based training facilitation towards youth based training as well as community based

training (Heraty, Morley & McCarthy, 2000) while also having statutory responsibility for apprenticeship (O'Connor & Mullins, 2005).

Ryan (2000: 59) points out that the apprenticeship system in Ireland in the 1980s was 'an archaic, publicly unregulated and declining institution.' Employers themselves had been aware of the drawbacks of the apprenticeship system. A report from 1986 indicated that employers felt the existing time served apprenticeship system was not equipped to deal with the fluctuations in the numbers of skilled craft persons required and the progressive nature of the training requirements due to new industry sectors now setting up in Ireland (Department of Labour, 1986). Notwithstanding their reservations about the apprenticeship system then in place Ryan (2000) points out that the public funding of the off the job training was partly responsible for the employer's acceptance of a standards based apprenticeship.

Despite calls as early as 1986 for a move towards a standards based system the apprenticeship training remained largely the same until the 1990s (Garavan et al, 1995). Rainbird et al (2004) state that the certification and recognition of workplace learning only becomes significant in a particular set of circumstances such as the process of industrialisation and social partnership. Certainly social partnership was a key element in the introduction of the SBA (O'Connor, 2006). The 1993 Apprenticeship Act saw the introduction on a gradual basis from 1993 of a new standards based apprenticeship (O'Connor, 2006) which made standards based training mandatory for 14 craft and technician apprenticeships and this has now been expanded to 26 (Steedman, 2010). See Appendix D for a full list of designated trades.

1.3. The Standards Based Apprenticeship

The Standards Based Apprenticeship involves the apprentice undertaking 'structured training in the skills and knowledge of your chosen trade, and undergo specific tests and assessment to ensure that pre-set standards of ability and competence are attained' (Department of Education & Science, 2010) and is generally four years in duration (O'Connor, 2006). Ryan (2005) points to some fundamental principles of the Irish apprenticeship system such as mandatory educational content, joint external regulation and full public funding of vocational preparation outside the workplace. What is most significant is that the new system represented a requirement for every apprentice to be assessed and to be successful in that assessment so as to be recognised as a genuine tradesperson (FAS, 1993). In effect the apprenticeship programme moved from a time served programme to a competency based programme. It should be pointed out that there is criticism of a competency based model (Fuller & Unwin, 2003) as it can be restrictive for an apprentice and have a narrow focus on learning. While FAS has statutory responsibility for apprenticeship it is advised on apprenticeship related matters by the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) (O'Connor & Mullins, 2005). The NAAC is made up from FAS, trade unions, employers Institutes of Technology, Department of Education & Science, Department of Finance and the Department of Trade, Industry and Employment (ibid). The SBA consisted of seven phases of training. Each one of these phases has an assessment which must be passed in order to progress the apprenticeship.

Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 are work based training provided by the employer. The work based training has to be assessed by the employer and the results provided to FAS. The exams themselves are a standardised set of exam specifications drawn up by FAS (FAS, 2007). The apprentice must be competent in all of these tasks in order to progress further. Phases 2, 4 and 6 are off-the job training. Phase 2 consists of a twenty week course in a FAS training centre. Phases 4 and 6 are each ten week courses in an Institute of Technology (IT) (Department of Education and Science, 2010). Once again these phases are assessed by standardised test written by FAS. The current qualification of the National Craft Certificate is placed at Level 6 on the

National Framework of Qualifications (NFQI, 2010) and is therefore recognised nationally and internationally (Department of Education & Science, 2010).

1.4 Motivation for the Research

I served my apprenticeship under the old time served system and my learning experience of my apprenticeship was rich and personally fruitful. It instilled in me an appreciation and a love of the trade I had undertaken. I now teach on the SBA and have been doing so for ten years. Throughout this time I cannot help but compare the two systems. I recall my apprenticeship as being a time of personal development helped by my work colleagues and college teachers. The learning environment was helpful and there was space to learn. Teaching on the SBA I hear the apprentices complaining of the congestion on the programme where it seems everything is compressed.

I would like to explore the learning experience for apprentice painters and decorators under the new system. I am keen to determine if apprentices experience a rich and fruitful learning journey or whether the new format is detrimental to this. As a teacher I would also like to investigate if there is anything I may do in my professional career to improve the learning experience of the apprentices I teach. The undertaking of this course of study shows my commitment to ongoing professional development which is an indicative attribute of what it means to be an excellent teacher (Skelton, 2005). It is my hope that in pursuing this research I may become just such a teacher.

I will now explore more fully the precise aim of the research.

1.5 Aim of the research

There has been a dramatic downturn in the construction industry over the last couple of years. There is a predicted drop of 63,000 people in the construction industry from 2008 to 2015 (Behan & Shally, 2010). The number of apprentices starting with employers was down 59% in 2009 with construction related trades taking a bigger drop with a 69% drop (FAS, 2010). The standards based apprenticeship stipulates that each phase must be passed for progression. FAS (2010) issued a press release on the labour market showing that while unemployment is up across all sectors it is up a massive 25% in craftspeople and manual workers. Having no employer means that the work based phases cannot be completed. The apprentices cannot then complete their apprenticeship. It is clear that the construction industry is presently going through a very difficult time.

It is the intention of this research to try capturing the experience of an apprentice painter and decorator going through the standards based apprenticeship programme. The construction industry is going through a period of flux which represents an unprecedented occurrence. The statistics are issued with frightening regularity and it would be easy to become numb to such exposure. The current economic situation has an impact on apprenticeship learning. Steedman (2010: 29) points out that 'those in apprenticeship and especially construction related apprenticeship are also severally affected by redundancy before completion.' Being made redundant puts an end to an apprenticeship until a new employer can be found. Working under such economic pressure as Ireland is now experience may affect apprenticeship learning. For example, an employer may have to reduce wages which may decrease the motivation of the apprentice to learn. The employer may have to make redundant qualified painters and decorators this possibly hampering the learning environment and the potential work based learning of the apprentice. I would like to explore and possibly reflect what these straitened times mean to apprentice painters and decorators. I would like for their voices to be heard amidst the impersonal voicing of the latest numbers and percentage drops.

The focus of the research will be on the complete journey of the apprentice including work based and college based learning. Essentially I will be asking, *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?* I would like to capture a full, holistic experience with the participants own words. As such Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) will be utilised. IPA is a relatively new method which privileges a phenomenological, idiographic and interpretative analysis. IPA will be further explored ion Chapters 3 and 4. It is a further aim of this research that it may help to inform policy makers regarding any future adjustments to the current system by providing insight from the main stakeholders. By examining the experiences of the apprentice in a standards based apprenticeship it may be possible to influence future possible changes that may occur. This research could potentially highlight the outlook of an apprentice and the real impact on a person rather than just a set of numbers or a set of data that is impersonal.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations should form the bedrock of research and relates to the rights of the participants taking part in research. History is peppered with examples of unethical considerations in research and has led to declarations to protect the rights of those involved. The Nuremberg Code of 1946 was in direct response to the crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis in medical experiments (Fisher & Anushko, 2008). The Nuremberg Code has ten points designed to protect the rights of individuals taking part in human experimentation. The first of these points is 'the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential' (Office of Human Subjects Research, 2010). This primary consideration will inform this research throughout.

The voluntary consent of the human participant is a principle that should apply to all research. Indeed, Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007: 51) define informed consent as a 'bedrock of ethical procedure.' The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2010) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Education Research will inform this research where applicable. Some of the principle ethical features of this research are explored further below.

Voluntary informed consent: all participants will be asked for voluntary informed consent (BERA, 2010). Informed consent means that the participants are fully aware and informed about the research in which they are taking part and agree to that participation (Jupp, 2006).

Right to withdraw: participants will be made fully aware of their right to say no at any time and as a result all participants will have the right to withdraw at any time for whatever reason (BERA, 2010). If any participant were to withdraw an attempt will be made to replace that participant where possible.

The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data (ibid: 8): The participants will remain anonymous and will be informed of this. There will be no requirement to identify any of those taking part in the research. No personal information or data will be disclosed to any third parties through this research. Participants confidentially will be assured. Privacy of the participants will be guarded at all times by ensuring that personal data unique to an individual cannot be matched to a participant (Cohen et al, 2007).

Disclosure: the participants will be debriefed on completion of the research and provided with a copy of the publication (BERA, 2010).

Misconduct: I will endeavour to maintain the highest standards throughout the research and represent the educational research community to the highest standards. With this in mind the research will be conducted fairly and equitably and the results will be presented in the same manner.

1.7 Organisation of Chapters

This chapter has set this research in context and explained the background and the reasons for carrying out this research. This chapter will now conclude with a short outline of the organisation of the remaining chapters. Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to work based learning and college based learning. Chapter Three examines the research theories and methods underpinning this thesis. It explores the range of research theories and justifies the stance adopted by this research. Chapter Four presents and discusses the research findings. Chapter Five discusses the research findings. Chapter Six draws together the individual chapters into a holistic overview of the research. It offers some recommendations regarding the future of apprentice learning.

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research is asking *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?* One of the motivations for this research is the learning experience of the researcher on the previous time served apprenticeship and an urge to explore the impact of the newer Standards Based Apprenticeship. Under the previous system, the main requirement of a time served apprenticeship was the amount of time served regardless of the level of competence (O'Connor, 2005). Under a time served system not all apprentices got the opportunity to develop their skills and related knowledge particular to their trade in a structured manner (ibid). As such it would be difficult to ascertain if the apprentices produced could meet the skills need of the industry as there was no measuring of ability or skill or indeed of any learning involved. Traditional apprenticeships had problems with many apprentices simply serving their time and not taking any qualifications (Unwin & Fuller, 2005). However, there was also more time available for college-based learning and there was a more expansive learning environment which will be explored later as well as less pressure due to the absence of compulsory examinations.

The Department of Education & Science (2010) defines apprenticeship as 'a method by which a person works for an employer in a chosen occupation and learns the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to become a qualified craftsperson.' The key word here is *learn.* The apprentice must learn in order to become a master of the craft. It is the experience of this learning that this study is investigating. It should be noted that apprentices as learners come from a wide variety of academic abilities and qualifications and are not as homogenous as other groups (Sneyd, 2005). However, a recent study found that at least half of those entering into an Irish apprenticeship have completed the upper secondary school cycle (Barry, 2008). This is equivalent to a Leaving Certificate. The minimum requirement from FAS is that apprentices must be at least 16 years of age and have a minimum of grade D in any five subjects in the Junior Certificate or equivalent (FAS, 2011).

This statistic would seem to indicate that the majority of apprentices have a history of education that they carry with them into the SBA.

The apprenticeship programme in the construction industry is split into seven phases. Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 are work based and Phase 2 takes place in a FAS training centre with Phases 4 and 6 taking place in an IT. For the purpose of this research work based learning refers to a period of the apprenticeship which occurs with the employer while college based learning occurs in an Institute of Technology. Unwin & Fuller (2005) state that in the traditional apprenticeship model work based learning and college based learning were conducted with stereotypical duality of practice and theory, with no explicit attempt to link the two types of learning experience. Hodkinson (2005) argues quite reasonably that there is a false discrimination between work based label and college based label. He contends that a college is also a work place. Billett (2002) draws the similarity between educational institutes and workplaces. In workplaces there is the intention for work practice as well as goal directed activities coupled with judgements about performance. Although apprenticeship has been described as a holistic approach to learning whereby the personal and job specific development of the apprentice is the aim of the programme (Fuller & Unwin, 2003) this research will conduct a literature review by separating out college based learning and work based learning. The SBA itself is split into separate, discreet sections of work based and college based modules and as such ties in with such a distinction. To begin there will be an exploration of the college based modules followed by the work based modules.

2.2 College Based Modules

Mullins (2005: 168) states that apprenticeship takes place against the 'inescapable need at all times for the student to be engaged in actually doing or making some artefact that is required in the outside world in a similar way.' This researchers' experience is that much of the theoretical learning available in college can seem obtuse to an apprentice and therefore not reflective of the real world they will operate in. International research highlights that employers believe a trade should be learned in the traditional manner through production and getting the job done

with much less emphasis on the theoretical aspects of the trade (Sligo, Tilley & Murray, 2011).

Miers, Coles, Girot & Wilkinson (2005: 187) state the importance of 'conceptual understanding in moving back and forth between theory and practice in transferring learning.' Brockmann, Clarke & Winch, (2010) point to a move in Britain away from any educational element included in a proposed new Apprenticeship Framework. Ryan (2005) states that mandatory educational content is one of the fundamental principles of the Irish apprenticeship system. Hodkinson (2005: 526) states that 'many professional skilled workers need high levels of theoretical knowledge'. This is what is available in college based learning. In any structured learning programme it is imperative that the learning in the classroom and on the site is complimentary (O'Connor, 2005). Unwin & Fuller (2005) point out that from an apprentices' point of view there is often little connection between the on-the-job and off-the-job parts of a training programme (Unwin & Fuller, 2005).

Mullins (2005) argues that the act of education in a formal educational environment is an implicit agreement between the teacher and the student predicated on the premise that the activity being engaged in is a meaningful activity. Feathers (1982, cited in Biggs & Tang, 2007) expectancy-value theory says there needs to be a value on the outcome of a task and an expectation of success in the carrying out of that task. Apprentices need to see the value in college based learning as well as have an expectation of being able to manage that learning. However, Walsh (2002) points out that students in the workplace will place more value on learning in the context of the workplace. This is understandable for an apprentice as they may see more value in work based learning than college based learning as there is a direct link between work-based learning and the real life world experiences that will make up a career. Nevertheless the learning in college is equally important as it usually carries a high theoretical content. Generally the apprentice will spend far more time in the work place than in college. As such the time available for the college based phases could present some issues for the learning of the apprentices.

2.2.1 Time Restrictions

The Institutes of Technology operate to a curriculum provided by FAS who have statutory responsibility for the SBA. The SBA in painting and decorating involves two periods of ten week block release into an Institute of Technology for Phases 4 and 6. During these ten weeks the Phase 4 apprentice painter and decorator has eight exams while at Phase 6 there are six exams. The lecturers in the Institutes of Technology are operating in an intense, exam packed ten week course. The old system of apprenticeship meant that a teacher in an IT had a class for one day a week over the academic year. This allowed time to build relationships among the apprentices. The radical reformatting of the whole process may well have undermined the local knowledge that had been accrued by teachers over the previous years. Skelton (2005) refers to this local knowledge as being drawn from daily practical experiences. This invaluable knowledge is no longer applicable with the instigation of an intense 10 week block release system which changed the daily landscape in which the lecturers found themselves.

Fitzmaurice (2010) points out that teaching involves the building of a relationship based upon care and trust between a teacher and a student. The revised format of the SBA means that time available on a Phase 4 and a Phase 6 course is extremely compressed at ten weeks apiece and there may simply be insufficient opportunity to engage in such teaching practices. Miers, Coles, Girot & Wilkinson (2005) research indicates that the relationship between the lecturer and students is central to the effectiveness in mediating learning. More specifically, the respectful relationship whereby the teacher is modifying the teaching based upon an analysis of such things as age, gender and experience. Such modification of teaching would require time to be implemented as well as knowledge to be built around the students. Time is a major factor and is in short supply on a ten week college based module. As Fitzmaurice (2010: 53) says '[…] at its core teaching is a matter of human relations.' These human relations may be difficult to foster given the condensed time period of contact between the teacher and student. Such a restrictive time period may also influence the approaches to learning engaged in by the apprentice. Research shows that time pressured environments can have a detrimental impact on

students approach to learning and metacognitive development (Case and Gunstone, 2003).

2.2.2 Approaches to Learning

Approaches to learning can be broadly categorised as a surface approach or a deep approach to learning. Surface learning and deep learning are phrases associated with research by Marton and Saljo (1976, cited in Smith & Colby, 2007). Surface learning is denoted by information being memorised for assessment purposes and there is a focus on unrelated parts of a task (Atherton, 2009) whereas deep learning is characterised by understanding the underlying concepts (Biggs & Tang, 2007). From a student's viewpoint having to complete the college based learning in ten weeks may pre-empt deep learning. A student that is overloaded with coverage rather than depth is more likely to engage in a surface approach to learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

Sneyd (2005) states that the curriculum within the SBA lies within an instructional paradigm. This particular paradigm is characterised by high levels of teacher-student contact time, excessive course material, little opportunity to study subjects in depth, frequent assessment, lack of choice in how and what is studied. Sneyd (2005) states the combination of all these factors will promote a surface approach to learning from the apprentice.

There are criticisms of the deep and surface approach classification of learning. Kember (2003) cites the case of Asian students who outperform their Western counterparts in academic performance and yet engage in surface learning. Webb (1997) criticises the notion of surface and deep learning citing the 'simplicity, universality and power of the deep/surface metaphor, made the message appealing, acceptable, practical and generalisable' (ibid: 199). Entwistle (1997) supports the surface and deep approach and maintains that such a simple theory is the ideal starting point and 'conveys complex pedagogical principles in readily accessible ways' (ibid: 214). From my experience I have seen students displaying multiple facets of surface approach to learning where they simply want to pass the assessment and therefore learn only to recite. In order to try improving the approach

to learning of the apprentices it is important that appropriate teaching takes place. For the apprentice trying to learn in college it is important that the teaching is of the best quality. As such college based teaching is vital for the learning of the apprentice.

2.2.3 College Based Teaching

It is important that apprentices attending college receive quality teaching from expert teachers. According to Hattie & Timperely (2007) monitoring and feedback is one of the features distinguishing expert teachers from their peers. Hattie & Timperley (2007: 81) define feedback as 'as information provided by an agent [...] regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding.' A students understanding would have to be assessed first to determine its level. This would require time which is in short supply on this college based course. By its duration the college based course may serve to inhibit good teaching practice which is the student's loss in terms of a learning experience. Further, Fitzmaurice's (2008: 348) research indicates that from a teachers perspective 'it is clear that thoughtful reflection on practice [...] is seen to be valuable in terms of developing a clearer understanding of teaching and learning.' Once again this would require time to implement. It should be noted that reflection is important for a student also. More time for students to engage reflectively with content should be part of any course of study (Ford, 2007). Fuller & Unwin (2003) also point to time for college based learning and reflective practice as being essential for providing a better learning environment for apprentices.

It has been stated that the structure of the college based learning lends itself to a 'banking' model of education where the expert teacher is depositing knowledge into the students' accounts (Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008: 61). This is not effective teaching. Hattie and Timperely (2007) point out that effective teaching is made up of many things. They cite imparting information and understanding to the students and also making the next lesson appropriate to the student's current understanding. It is vital that the students understand the material they are learning. However, this evaluation of the students learning requires time to be carried out. Speaking as a teacher on the SBA I know from personal experience that this is not possible. In

effect there is not enough time. This is detrimental to the students' experience of learning as research indicates the positive effects of feedback e.g. Hattie & Timperely 2007; Hattie, 1999; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996.

The end product of an apprenticeship is to become qualified at a trade and ultimately to master that trade. Apprenticeship emphasises the growing independence of the learner from the master in the exercising of new understanding (Mullins, 2005). The neo-behaviourist Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of learning attempts to link internal and external behaviours and in particular his psychomotor domain is concerned with 'moving from an ability to give an overview of a task up to mastery of a skill through practice, integration and automatization' (Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008: 28). This process moves from procedural task knowledge through various levels up to mastery which involves a level of automaticity in carrying out the task. Such mastery may not be possible in certain aspects of the SBA. For example, the college based modules of the painting and decorating curriculum deal with some aspects of the trade that highly specialised. Such specialised tasks include imitating timbers such as mahogany and oak (see Appendix). These tasks are not commonly carried out in industry and as such an apprentice may not get time to practice these. The time spent in college is more akin to an introduction to these highly specialised tasks. The end result may be that the apprentice does not get to achieve 'mastery of a skill through practice.'

Biggs (2003) argues that traditional teaching methods including lectures do not lend themselves well in providing much support for higher learning processes. As such college based teaching may not provide the end result it is intended for. In looking at the teaching that occurs in apprenticeship Harford (2005) calls for a shift away from what he calls a closed paradigm in which the apprentices are passive recipients of knowledge. In this closed paradigm teachers employ a didactic teaching methodology to enable apprentices 'master specific chunks of knowledge and this produces surfaces learning' (ibid: 176). Harford contends that a closed pedagogy brings a focus on the products of learning rather than the learning process and recommends a broadening the apprenticeship curriculum to include core and transferable skills which will facilitate lifelong learning. The closed paradigm is very similar to what Sfard (1998) termed the learning as acquisition metaphor. In

this metaphor of 'learning as acquisition' the focus is on the transmission of codifiable knowledge from expert to learner followed by testing which usually consists of written tests. This is what happens in the college based teaching of the SBA.

Scott (2005) states that within the higher education and training sector the traditional emphasis has been on the instructional paradigm where the aim is to simply provide instruction to the student. There is some criticism of the format that is used in traditional instruction design. Noe & McConnell Dachner (2010) point to the role of an 'expert' instructor carrying all the learning responsibility from design to implementation and assessment, as a contributory factor to a passive learner. This echoes Harford's closed paradigm and is similar to what Mullins (2005) terms the transmission model of education where there is an information exchange and the learning processes become subordinated to learning outcomes. In this model the learner is passive, exams are regurgitating information, and educational practice turns into an input-output model. Scott (2005: 189) calls for a shift from an instructional paradigm towards a learning paradigm where the 'method and the product are distinct and the responsibility for learning rests firmly on the learner.' Certainly a shift from merely an instructional paradigm would be positive for a learners' experience. A more positive outcome to learning activities can occur if apprentices are exposed to a variety of learning environments (Sneyd, 2005).

From an apprentices viewpoint there could be a disjunction in their perception of college teaching. A potential problem may be the perception of college based teachers. Unwin & Fuller (2005) point out that many apprentices perceive college teachers as being separate to their main sphere of learning activity which the apprentices perceive to be the workplace. This could be detrimental to the apprentice coming into college. From the researchers experience many of the college teachers teaching crafts are craftspeople first and college teachers second. It may well be that this craft background is not evident to apprentices whereas it is clearly evident from their peers in the work place.

2.3 Work Based Modules

An apprentice is expected to continually learn throughout an apprenticeship programme. The structure of the Irish Standards Based Apprenticeship means there are exams at every phase including the work based modules. Work-based learning is built into the programme. While there is some disagreement in the literature regarding the definition of work based learning and this label being regarded as too simplistic (e.g. Chisholm, Harris, Northwood & Johrendt, 2009) nevertheless for the purpose of this research work based learning refers to the period of an apprenticeship which is on-the-job training. During on-the-job training phases of apprenticeship the competence of the apprentice has to be assessed to pre-specified standards by the employer (FAS, 2011). These assessments have to be graded and recorded and returned to FAS. Policy makers are focussing on workplace learning at an organisational level as well as a national level as a means of improving performance and economic success (Rainbird, Fuller & Munro, 2004). This serves to highlight the importance of the work based learning aspect of an apprenticeship.

Walsh (2007) draws an analogy between work based teaching and college based teaching. Walsh cites Biggs (2003) and his method of constructive alignment where the aim is to ensure that teaching is effective in actively engaging the students in learning. Walsh (2007) compares this to work based learning and highlights the similarities. Such similarities include the learner engaging thoughtfully with a new task and then reflecting upon feedback to improve performance. There are two issues here I would like to explore briefly – work based teaching and reflection.

In terms of teaching Billett (2002) points out that the coupling of qualified teachers with learning is commonly held to go hand in hand. This would imply that only qualified teachers in an educational forum are capable of fulfilling the learning needs of students. Billett (2002) contends this assumption and argues that although there may be no written curriculum for some work based learning there is nevertheless an inherent pedagogical pathway through workplace activities. Billet cites Lave (1990) as providing an example of tailors' apprentices and the provision of increasingly complex tasks which framed their workplace learning. The Irish SBA is constructed in just such a fashion with increasingly complex task becoming

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the norm as an apprentice advances through the phases. Therefore, the SBA framework would provide for meaningful learning in the workplace.

In terms of reflection Cox (2005) argues strongly for structured reflective practice to be part of work based learning. Her contention is that 'without the conscious will and determination to learn from our encounters at work, errors of judgement, poor attitudes and dissatisfaction continue to recur and to cause us distress and loss in our working lives' (Cox, 2005: 459). Cox is arguing for learners to be given time to stop and think about learning that has occurred or that has not occurred. Cox (2005) points out that reflection has been discarded in favour of measurable outcomes such as NVQs. NVQs are competency based qualifications where a candidate is marked as competent or not yet competent (UK Government, 2010; Brockmann, Clark & Winch, 2010) and are similar to a standards based apprenticeship. In an effort to facilitate deep learning Cox had her students keep reflective diaries and provided them with a model of structured reflection. Cox reports some confusion among the students but overall a very positive response and a possible enhancement of their learning through one to one tutoring and feedback. She also highlights the use of reflection for helping students identify gaps in learning for personal and professional development. There is no such practice in a standards based apprenticeship and yet it could provide a valuable learning tool for the enhancement of work based learning.

2.3.1 Situated Learning

Situated learning has been referred to as learning that is situated within the workplace (Billet, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This is an integral part of SBA programme. Hansman & Wilson (2002 cited in Yoong Ng & Cervero, 2005: 499) say that the application of situated learning should 'take into consideration the context of power relations in learning, not just the context of learning and practice.' This is extremely valid in terms of apprenticeship as the power relationship can determine whether or not any learning takes place. The employer is the ultimate arbitrator of the situated learning that occurs and it is important that the employer facilitates the apprentices' learning. For example, an employer may designate a particular apprentice to a repetitive task in which there is little to be learned. Or

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indeed from which the apprenticeship cannot progress. This would not be conducive towards the work based learning of an apprentice.

Rainbird et al (2004: 2) express a concern about the idea of situated learning which assumes 'that all knowledge is situated, and that the knowledge needed to do particular jobs is embedded within the associated tasks, processes and those who are already competent.' This stressing of the situated nature of knowledge 'fails to recognise that there are types of knowledge, such as theoretical ideas not connected to specific contexts, which are not always accessible on-the-job' (ibid: 3).

Unwin and Fuller (2005: 110) proposed a 'learning territory' as a way to denote the different range of learning opportunities individuals can avail of. They classify a territory as being made up of various regions such as formal learning and qualifications and informal learning such as learning at home. By utilising such a denomination they hope to be able to identify the key learning experiences in the workplace and assess the impact of that learning. Such a view challenges the assumption behind the theory of situated learning in which novices proceed on a linear journey towards being an expert with the journey facilitated by experts. Indeed this classification of a learning territory speaks to my own teaching in which I see some apprentices having an expertise in some areas while not in others. It is evident that their learning journey has not been linear at all.

2.3.2 Power in the Work Place

In the workplace, the nature and focus of strategic decisions, power relations and the employment relationship are central to understanding the opportunities and constraints on learning (Rainbird, Fuller & Munro, 2004). Such concerns are beyond the remit of an apprentice and involve many complex factors which an employer has to take account of. Billet (2002) points out those who are denied the opportunity to engage in new tasks and left without access to goals and understandings are more likely to have more limited learning outcomes than those who do participate more fully. Yoong Ng & Cervero (2005) examined the relationship between organisation ownership, power and learning in the workplace and in practice. They looked at the relationship between the ownership of an

organisation and how that ownership shapes the learning of its workers. Essentially, for those learning through practice their learning can be pre-determined by the owner as it is the owner who decides who gets to learn what in practice. It should also be pointed out that this power relationship could exist between an apprentice and work colleagues. In such a situation it would be vital also that this power over the apprentices' learning is used positively. This resonates with apprenticeship as the employer is the person who gets to determine the learning. Despite this research relating to media ownership the authors nevertheless assert that as ownership determines the way goods are produced then the findings are applicable to learning under any organisational ownership (ibid: 503).

The manner in which a workplace affords opportunities for individuals to engage in activities with guidance from co-workers is a key component in the quality of learning in the workplace (Billett, 2002). Certainly if an apprentices' co-workers look upon themselves as mentors to the apprentice then this can only provide for a positive outcome to the learning experience of the apprentice. One way to broaden employees' access to knowledge is to expand opportunities for boundary crossing and interaction between different specialisms (Rainbird, Fuller & Munro, 2004). This may only be possible in large companies but should also be implemented where possible. Therefore, the attitude of the employer and/or the organization is vital in terms of the work based learning that may available for an apprentice. Fuller and Unwin (2007) found that effective apprenticeships stem from an organisational commitment to wide range participation of apprentices in various learning opportunities. In an Irish context O'Connor (2006) findings show that there are some employers who are providing excellent work based training for apprentices.

A particular workplace's goals and practices will determine much of the structuring of learning activities, the nature of the task and their standards (Rogoff, 1995). Rainbird et al (2004) point out that it is important to understand the extent to which the organization of work influences workplace learning. Benefits such as progression and self confidence can gravitate towards those who have access to a wide variety of learning opportunities. In contrast 'those employees whose knowledge and skills remain tacit are more likely to have their competence underestimated and their contribution to the organization undervalued (ibid: 3).

Hodkinson (2005) argues that even though the content of learning between learners is the same it is often the case that some fail to participate in a workplace. The multiple purpose of a workplace could contribute to this. For example, it has been questioned as to whether there is effective learning occurring in the workplace when there are conflicting goals between production and learning (Brooker & Butler, 1997). Indeed research from Britain indicates that few employers would support a furthering of the educational content of apprenticeship programmes in any sector (Ryan, Gospel & Lewis, 2006). If the company has not set out a map or plan regarding the apprentices learning it 'is much more likely to be driven by organizational and commercial expedience' (Fuller & Unwin, 2003: 43). Such expedience may not include the quality of the learning for the apprentice.

It has been stated that some employers simply see the apprentice as additional labour and employ them on task of a repetitive nature (O'Connor, 2006). In an unregulated market economy low quality apprenticeships are rife where employers, particularly small employers, are attracted to apprenticeship as a source of cheap labour and offer the apprentice only incidental learning (Ryan, 2005). There is potential here then for poor work based learning experience and also poorly qualified trades people. It should not be left up to the individual employer in the workplace but rather a common standard so all apprentices gain the full range of the learning that should go into a craft apprenticeship. Walsh (2002: 82) points out that student's learning in the workplace need a 'clear indication of learning expectations and the way to achieve these.' Such a procedure would also highlight the employer's responsibilities and may provide apprentices with the knowledge to enable them to demand such learning. It can be seen that there is an obligation on the employer to correctly structure and teach apprentices during this element of the apprenticeship programme and further, the attitude of the employer/organisation is fundamental in the provision of the learning opportunity. This attitude should manifest itself as a willingness to teach.

2.3.3 Work Place Standards

From an assessment point of view the work place provides throws up some questions. There is plenty of criticism of the lack of proper assessment procedures from employers for the on-the job phases (Field & Dubhchair, 2001; European Social Fund Evaluation Unit, 1999, O'Connor, 2005). The assessment of work based learning is problematic in any context as it is embedded in the production of goods and services (Ryan, 2005). It is often the case that apprentices who I teach are unaware of this aspect to their training which would indicate that it is not occurring. O'Connor (2005) asks how an employer deals with assessment if that employer is not engaged in the particular type of work which is to be assessed. This is a serious impairment to the effectiveness of the SBA in producing fully rounded qualified trades people.

O'Connor (2006) states that work-based learning is the weakest link in the system of apprenticeship. Indeed, there is criticism of the Irish apprenticeship system for its inadequate quality control in work based training (Ryan, 2005). O'Connor (2006: 36) contends that there is a lack of 'external moderation of the standards in the workplace.' The manpower to carry this out may be a factor contributing to the lack of external moderation. International research (Vaughan & Cameron, 2009) points to the dearth in number between trainers and assessors as a factor in moving work based assessment away from formative assessment to checking off competencies. Ryan (2005) refers to the low visibility from the outside of work based training and states that this poor visibility hampers the external regulation of work based training by a public agency or indeed by markets. However, to provide a full learning experience for an apprentice employers need to fulfil their role in terms of assessing work based learning. Research carried out by O'Connor with a large cohort of apprentices indicates that some respondents suggested site supervision by FAS (O'Connor's (2005). This would ensure proper assessment of work place learning but would also incur costs.

The employers' role is crucial to the work based learning of apprentices. A recent review (Viktória, 2010) found that employer involvement at FÁS regional and local levels is insufficient. While FÁS claimed lack of employer interest at local level employers felt that FÁS regional offices made arbitrary decisions on the funding of training (including apprenticeship) and were not sufficiently responsive to the range of needs in a region (Steedman, 2010). Better accountability and transparency based on a range of relevant data and indicators was needed and better data would increase employers' trust in FÁS procedures (Viktória, 2010). Other research (O'Connor, 2006) indicates that stakeholders in general are unhappy with the lack of monitoring of the work based element and the lack of structure put in place by employers to facilitate the formalized work based training.

2.4 Summary

Lave & Wenger's (1991) work examined the how leaning occurs in a community of practice. They offer the concept that learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation. Through this social participation a newcomer completes simple but nevertheless productive tasks for the community of practice. Over time, and depending upon things like the power structure and social dynamics, the newcomer gradually accrues more learning and will eventually replace the old timer or more experience practitioner. This system sees the learning as occurring in a social practice rather than within the minds of individuals. The authors use apprenticeships as case studies. Having come from an apprenticeship background this researcher can see the value in this point of view. Learning certainly does happen in this manner. However, this type of learning is not sufficient to provide for a full and broad understanding of a modern apprenticeship. The college based modules are essential to provide for a fully rounded trades person. O'Connor (2006) says the linking of the off-the job learning to the work based learning is crucial in producing high quality craftsmanship.

The next chapter will look at the research design that underpins this thesis.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER THREE**</div>

<div align="center"># Research Design</div>

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin with a brief outline of the research design and then progress into a fuller discussion of possible alternatives. To begin this chapter I will explore and state my own ontological and epistemological positions. From there the theoretical perspective and the methodology and research methods used regarding my research will be explored. Alternatives will be explored and the rationale for discounting such options will be discussed. In writing this research I will be broadly following the outline of Crotty (2003) where he indicates four aspects to research design. They are epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods.

Ideally in research the question should come first and then the methodology will follow afterwards (Antonesa, Fallon, Ryan, Ryan,& Walsh, 2006). Crotty (2003: 13) states that 'We typically start with a real-life issue that needs to be addressed, a problem that needs to be solved, a question that needs to be answered.' Grix (2002: 180) would seem to agree as he warns against 'method led research' and instead steers the researcher towards question led research. This direction is preferable, he states, as the research question points to the most appropriate research method. This research is based upon a sound research design as it is a question led approach. This research is asking *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?*

Briefly, this research design is following an epistemological assumption that is constructionists in nature, an interpretivism theoretical perspective using a case study methodology informed by interpretative phenomenological analysis and using semi structured one on one interviews as the research methods. These positions will be justified and to begin the ontological and epistemological positions that underpin this research will be explored.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology can be defined as 'what is out there to know' (Grix, 2002: 175) and the assumptions about existence underlying a theory (Gillies, 2010). It is the 'study of being' (Crotty, 2005: 10) and is concerned with the structure of reality and nature of existence. Ontological assumptions are what researchers believe makes up social reality. Grix (2002: 177) believes that ontology is 'the starting point in all research, after which one's epistemological and methodological positions logically follow.'

Grix (2002) sees ontology as having two perspectives. They are objectivism and constructivism. Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2007: 6) identify this position as the 'nominalist-realist debate.' Objectivism is a position that states there is an existence separate to an individual. There is a reality that exists outside of ourselves and does not depend on us for its existence. Alternatively, constructivism believes that meanings and phenomena are produced by social interaction. This is in contrast to Crotty (2005) who sees objectivism and constructivism as being part of the epistemological position rather than solely ontological. Crotty (2005) sees no problem in having ontology and epistemology in the same category. He deliberately does not include it as an individual perspective in his framework for research design as he believes it can be dealt with through a researcher's theoretical perspective rather than as a discrete entity itself. Creswell (2009: 6) seems to be of a similar opinion to Crotty as he uses the term 'worldview' rather than epistemology or ontology. He defines worldview as 'a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds' (ibid). He further elaborates on this definition by stating that 'worldviews are shaped by the discipline area of the student' (ibid).

Epistemology can be defined as 'a way of understanding and explaining what we know' (Crotty, 2005: 3). Jupp (2006: 92) defines epistemology as 'a field of philosophy concerned with the possibility, nature, sources and limits of human knowledge.' Crotty (2005: 3) further elaborates on epistemology as 'the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology.' While Grix (2002) argues convincingly that ontology must be kept separate to epistemology, for this research I will be following Crotty's (2005) outline where he infuses ontology throughout the research design. This, I believe,

will lead to a more coherent and transparent research design. Crotty (2005) then sees epistemology as having three broad categories. They are objectivism, subjectivism and constructionism.

3.2.1 Objectivism

Objectivism asserts that meaningful reality exists separate from any consciousness (Crotty, 2005). Meaning already exists and human beings are simply discovering it. Occurrences or events have causes which can be discovered (Opie, 2008). Once these causal links are discovered the researcher can explain the occurrence in terms of its antecedents as well other circumstances that contributed to the object (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Once this information is in place it is up to researchers to formulate laws that provide an explanation for these occurrences. These laws can then help to account for the events in the natural world and provide a foundation for prediction. Classical social scientist would like to see human phenomena research restricted to social experiences from which scientific generalisations can be drawn (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Montuschi (2004) states that, in an effort to be objective, tensions will arise when natural science methods are applied to the social sciences.

This epistemological view of objectivism leads to a theoretical perspective of positivism. Or as Crotty (2005: 27) puts it 'Positivism is objectivist through and through.' Creswell (2009) defines positivism/postpositivism as the scientific method, that is, the traditional form of research with methods associated with quantitative research rather than qualitative research. Positivism advocates the application of natural science methods to the study of social reality (Grix, 2002). Montuschi (2004) points out that being scientific is treated as the model to aspire to and therefore should be copied by any discipline seeking to produce reliable information about its object of inquiry. Positivism has a long history but even today it is still the stance most linked to empirical science (Crotty, 2005).

The positivism position asserts observation and reason as the way to understand behaviour (Grix, 2002) and draws a clear line between what is objective and empirically verifiable and what is subjective and unverifiable (Crotty, 2005). In terms of this research it is difficult to associate the experiences of individual apprentice painters and decorators to a hard, observable objectivist viewpoint.

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) point to the elusive quality of social occurrences and the complexity of human nature as a problem for positivism to get to grips with. It is not possible to apply objective and empirically verifiable procedures to the lived experience of individuals. Each will have a different experience and will therefore be unique. Guba & Lincoln (2005: 208) state that objectivity is an illusion that never existed except 'in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower.'

3.2.2 Subjectivism

Subjectivism takes an opposing stance to that of objectivism. Knowledge is seen as belonging to an individual and is the outcome and end result of the perceptions and thoughts of that individual (Opie, 2008). The subjectivist position values the perspective of the individual over the collective (ibid). Some account of the researchers' own assumptions and preferences will inform this perspective (Jupp, 2006). Subjectivism is often mistakenly identified for constructionism by researchers (Crotty, 1998).

3.2.3 Constructionism

Constructionism maintains there is no objective truth and rather meaning is constructed (Jupp, 2006: 38). Meaning emerges through the interaction of consciousness and the interpretations of that consciousness. Therefore this meaning cannot be objective or even subjective as the process is one of interchange and exchange. The process of meaning making is constructed. Creswell (2003: 8) points out that the aim of this research 'is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied.' This epistemological perspective is best suited to this research design as the individual perspectives will differ among the participants. It is unlikely that each participant has shared an objective positivist reality. It is rather more possible that each has constructed their own meaning from their interactions with social reality. Constructivism research focuses on the contexts of people's lives and work situation while being aware of the researchers own position in interpreting the research (ibid).

3.3 Theoretical Perspective

From a constructionist epistemology, interpretivism will then inform the theoretical perspective of this research. An interpretivism approach 'looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty, 2005: 67). Merriam (2002: 4) states 'Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them, is considered an *interpretive* qualitative approach.' Creswell (2009) points out that constructionism is often combined with interpretivism. Characteristics of interpretive qualitative research include trying to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences and how people make sense of their experience (Merriam, 2002). This aligns with the research question currently under discussion. It is the experience of the participant which will make up the bulk of the research although the interpretive lens of the researcher will obviously impact on the understanding and presentation of the data. The literature has many examples of differing research design. For example Grix (2002) sees interpretivism as an epistemological position rather than a theoretical perspective. I believe this research is still valid as Grix nevertheless aligns interpretivism with constructionism and as such this research design is not compromised.

3.4 Methodology

Research methodology is the 'strategy or plan of action' (Crotty, 2005: 7). It is concerned with how individuals can go about acquiring knowledge (Grix, 2002). It refers to what kind of research to undertake (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) and includes areas such as ethnography, survey research, grounded theory and discourse analysis (Crotty, 2005). This list is not definitive but merely illustrates the range of methodology's available. This research has the option of several methodologies, for example phenomenology and case study. A case study research methodology has a number of features which would contribute to the research question. Yin (2009: 18) defines case study as being 'an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context.' Case study research can 'portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007: 85).

Phenomenology is a term that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be (Kvale, 2007). A case study informed by phenomenology will be the methodology undertaken by this research. As such both methods are deserving of more exploration and explanation.

3.4.1 Case study

A case study involves intensive knowledge about a single case or a small number of related cases (Antonesa et al: 2006) and is of great use for understanding complex social phenomena and allows the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful features of real life occurrences (Yin, 2009). A case study is particularly useful for this research as cases are bounded by time and activity and in which researchers collect detailed information (Stake, 1995). The context of a case study is very important in providing insight into how and why events occur in the manner they did (Antonesa et al: 2006).

One of the main criticisms of the case study method is that individual cases are not sufficiently representative to provide for more broad generalisations to other situations (Jupp, 2006). Yin (2009) counters this by pointing to the same problem associated with experiments. Yin points out that 'scientific facts are rarely based on single experiments' (2009: 15). Rather, the process involves multiple sets of experiments with the phenomena under investigation being replicated under different conditions.

Yin (2009: 8) identifies three aspects of case study. They are explanatory, exploratory and descriptive. He posits reasons for following each type of case study. Explanatory case studies look at explaining events and their causes. Exploratory case studies are done as a preliminary investigation into a topic and may be followed up afterwards with other research methods. Finally a descriptive case study will provide a full portrayal of the phenomena being investigated in the case study. This research will be a descriptive case study informed by phenomenology.

3.4.2 Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is perceived as the founding father of modern phenomenology (Giorgi, 2010) as he was the first to give a systematic form to phenomenology at the start of the twentieth century (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Creswell (2009: 13) defines phenomenological research as 'a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants.' Phenomenology is predicated on the principle that 'experience should be examined in the way it occurs, and in its own terms' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009: 12) and is always questioning the 'way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings' (van Manen, 1997: 5). Husserl believed it was possible to identify 'essential' qualities of an experience which would transcend circumstance and their appearance and might illuminate a given experience for others (Smith et al, 2009). A fundamental aspect to phenomenology is the notion of 'reduction'. This reduction is the bracketing of our own experiences in order to allow us to connect directly with experiential lifeworld of the participant (Adams & van Manen 2008). As Finlay (2009: 481) points out one of the great strengths of phenomenology is 'the way it capture the richness, poignancy and ambiguity of lived experience, allowing readers to see the worlds of others in new and deeper ways.' As this research is asking how apprentices experience their learning on a standards based course it can be seen that phenomenology is thus ideally placed to facilitate this question.

3.4.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) evolved from phenomenology and aims at gaining a deeper and richer understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday lived experience and as such does not offer theory but rather offers insight (Van Manen, 1997). It is this insight into the learning experience of the apprentices that this research is exploring. IPA aims to understand experience through the insights provided by those best suited to provide them – the research participants themselves (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Its aim is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 1995). Idiographic research focuses on the particular and the individual in

attempting to understand individual behaviour (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007) and as such IPA is idiographic in nature. Idiographic studies consider the participant on his or her own terms which serves to stress the importance of the individual as a unit of analysis (Smith, Harre & Van Langenhove, 1995). The attempt to make sense of a participants experience makes it an interpretative endeavour and is therefore informed by hermeneutics (Smith et al, 2009). Due to the hermeneutic nature of IPA the recommended bracketing by Husserl is seen as less relevant because researchers are inevitably intimately involved in making interpretations (Finlay, 2009). In fact there is a double hermeneutic at work as the participant tries to make sense of the experience and relay that through the interview while at the same time the researcher tries to make sense of the participants account of that experience. In essence the researcher is making sense of the participant making sense (Smith et al, 2009).

There has been some discussion in the literature regarding the validity of this relatively new approach. Giorgi (2010) recently expressed concern with the scientific standing of IPA. Smith (2010) responded robustly to this criticism refuting the fact that the criticism was based upon two book chapters aimed at a foundation level introduction to the method. Indeed, Smith first articulated IPA as a research method in the mid 90s. (ibid). Based upon this researchers reading of Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) IPA was deemed to be the research method most suited to this research question. As such, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) will be utilised in this research as it 'allows for a detailed picture of the psychological processes and rich descriptions of how individuals think and feel about the challenges they face' (Smith, Brewer, Eatough, Stanley, Glendinning & Quarrell, 2006: 487). More details regarding data collection and the interpretation of that data using interpretative phenomenological analysis will be explored in Chapter 4.

3.5 Research Methods

The research methods are the 'concrete techniques or procedures' that will be used in this research (Crotty, 2005: 6). There are various options available such as quantitative and qualitative methods. Crotty (2005) points out that a distinction occurs at the research methods level between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods are 'usually based on theory testing using variables, measured with numbers, and analyses with statistical procedures, to determine if the predictive generalisations of the theory hold true' (Gillies, 2010). For this research there are no predictive generalisations expected as an outcome. Quantitative methods are associated with 'complex experiments involving many variables and treatments such as measure design and factorial design' (Creswell, 2009: 12). Quantitative research involves the 'collection of data in numerical form for quantitative analysis' (Jupp, 2006: 250) and has as a defining feature of producing numbers as a result of the research.

In this research quantitative methods would not capture the essence of an individual experience. Creswell (2009: 3) points out that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative is often framed in terms of one method using words (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative). It would not be good research to send out a questionnaire and score answers to investigate real life experiences. There are nuances and subtleties that would be missed. As such, this will not be part of the current research question. It can be seen that quantitative methods are not best suited for this research design.

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding an individual's interpretations of reality at a particular point in time and in a particular context (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative methods of research are 'based on building a complex, holistic picture, using words, the reported views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting' (Gillies, 2010). As this research is trying to identify the experiences of the individual apprentices these qualitative methods would be best suited. This research is not trying to quantify the experience but rather to explore and capture the individualism of it. Merriam (2002: 3) point out that the 'key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by

individuals in their interactions with their world.' It is these meanings through interactions that this research is trying to capture in an effort to identify recurring themes.

Qualitative methods such as interviews would capture the information this research is seeking. Kvale & Brinkmann (2008: 1) points out that the 'qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.' Merriam (2002) identifies three major sources for qualitative data – interviews, observations and documents. Documents would not provide the rich personal descriptions this research is looking for. While observations can provide insights into certain areas, Tierney & Dilley (2002) liken participant observations without participant interviews to watching a silent movie. Merriam (2002) recommends the method best suited to the research question. Therefore interviews will be the methods used.

3.5.1 Interviews

Interviews are particularly suited for collecting data when there is a need to gain highly personalised data (Gray, 2004) as is required for this study. Interviews are useful to obtain information and understanding of issues pertinent to the purpose and specific question of a research project (Gillham, 2000). Tierney & Dilley (2002: 455) point to one utilisation of interviews being a desire to improve 'our understanding of the social contexts of learning.' There are a multitude of types of interviews available (Cohen et al, 2007) ranging from highly structured interviews asking specific questions to unstructured interviews where there is a topic but the questions and their order are not pre-determined (Merriam, 2002). Semi-structured life world interviews attempt to understand the themes of the lived everyday world form the participants own perspective (Kvale, 2007). This type of interview is particularly useful as it is close to everyday conversation but it has a specific purpose and a specific approach. Therefore it is neither an open, everyday conversation nor is it a closed questionnaire (ibid). As such, these types of interviews will be employed.

Similar to other interpretative phenomenological analysis (e.g Flowers, Knussen & Duncan, 2001) the interview schedule was not used rigidly but rather was a check list of topics and issues to be covered within the interviews. One of the strengths of interviewing is its ability to provide opportunities for probing (Gray, 2004) which is required for IPA. Throughout the interviews I attempted to play the role of an active listener and be flexible in the schedule to follow the concerns of the participants.

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain rich and deep accounts of the learning experience of the participants. Throughout the interviews there was a strong orientation to the fundamental questions of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1997). The interviews were semi-structured life world interviews which provides for a 'planned and flexible interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008: 327).

Summary

This theoretical perspective of this research is interpretivism informed by a constructionist epistemology. It will be comprised of a phenomenological case study methodology. One on one semi-structured interviews will be the research methods. The data will be analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The next chapter will present and discuss the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from this research. The data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological interpretation. IPA aims to have fairly homogenous sample to enable the examination of convergence and divergence in some detail (Smith et al, 2009). This research therefore used three painting and decorating apprentices from the School of Construction. Reduced numbers of participants can provide for a richer depth of analysis than a larger number (Smith et al, 2009). The data was gathered using a one on one semi-structured interview. See Appendix 3 for the interview schedule. The interview questions were open ended and related to various learning experiences. Similar to other IPA studies (e.g. Flowers, Hart & Marriott, 1999; Shinebourne & Smith, 2008, Shinebourne & Smith, 2010) the questions were flexible, open ended and attempted to gently probe the participant.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted in a quiet hotel lobby in a central location convenient for all the participants. The interviews were recorded using a digital Dictaphone and a mobile phone Dictaphone application. Both sets of digital files were downloaded to a computer and were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. This allowed for complete immersion in the data set. The audio recordings were also burned onto compact discs to allow for further listening during long commutes. The line numbered transcripts were printed and then photocopied onto A3 paper which was then bound. Using A3 paper meant that the researcher had plenty of room on both sides of the transcripts for notes during the analysis.

4.2 IPA Analysis

The data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis which involved the following steps adapted from Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009: 83):

1. Data Immersion: the data was read and re-read a number of times while also being interspersed with periods spent listening to the audio recordings.

2. Initial Noting: took place where semantic content and language use were explored. Any points of interest were identified. The aim here was to provide a detailed and comprehensive set of notes and comments on the data itself which have a clear phenomenological focus and attempted to stay close to the participant's explicit meaning. There was also a degree of interpretative noting here as the researcher sought to understand how and why the participants spoke in the way they did. This element of interpretation involves looking at the language used and thinking about the context of any concerns while trying to make sense of a pattern of meaning in the accounts provided. These sets of comprehensive notes were typed up onto a separate document to allow for easier analysis in the next step.

3. Developing Emergent Themes: the data set had grown considerably at this stage. The analysis focused on discrete chunks of transcript which had been identified in the initial noting phase as being of some interest to the research question. Through this process the data set was reduced as items of little importance were discarded. Producing themes from the data set meant producing a concise statement of what was important in the descriptive comments attached to a piece of transcript. In IPA these emergent themes represent the participant's original words and the researcher's interpretation of those words.

4. Mapping Emergent Themes: the next step involves mapping emergent themes directed by how the analyst sees the themes fitting together. Some emergent themes may be discarded depending on the relationship to the research question. The themes were drawn together in a structure allowing for the most important and interesting aspects to be explored. A graphic representation illustrates these

emergent themes as well as the super-ordinate themes that develop for each individual participant.

5. Next Case: this step involves moving to the next case and repeating the whole process again. It is important to that the next case is analysed on its own terms and thus fulfil the idiographic requirements of IPA. This required a bracketing of the themes that emerged from the previous analysis. A rigorous analysis following the steps outlined above ensured that such processes occurred.

6. Cross Case Patterns: the final step involved looking for patterns across the three cases. In this research the individual table of themes for each participant was cut up and spread out on a table. Similar themes were grouped together and links sought among those groupings. This process led to some re-labelling of themes and to a focus on some of the more potent themes in the analysis. These themes were then grouped together into super-ordinate themes.

4.3 The participants

The names of the participants have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

Colm is a 23 year old male who has been painting for nearly five years. He comes from an agricultural background and works in a mainly rural area. He has worked in no other area since beginning painting. At the time of the interview Colm estimated he had about six weeks left of his apprenticeship and then he would be fully qualified. He was working at the time of the interview and has worked for the same employer throughout his apprenticeship. The company employs between three and five employees including apprentices.

Stephen is a 21 year old male from an urban background who has been painting for nearly four years. Stephen started painting immediately upon leaving school and has worked in no other area. At the time of the interview Stephen is unemployed although he estimated he had twelve weeks left on his apprenticeship before he would be fully qualified. Throughout his apprenticeship he has worked only for the one employer. The company employed between two and six employees depending on the work that was booked in.

Darren is a 24 year old male from an urban background who has been painting for four years. Darren did a two year college course after leaving school. Once this was completed he started serving his apprenticeship. Throughout his apprenticeship he had been employed by the same company which consisted of Darren and his boss. On exiting his last college based phase Darren was made redundant but obtained a place on the redundant apprenticeship scheme. This means he is guaranteed to finish his apprenticeship and get his qualification.

The next section will provide an overview of the super-ordinate themes before then exploring each super-ordinate theme for each participant separately.

4.4 Overview of super-ordinate themes

This research asked the question – *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?* The interview scheduled has been structured along two axes – positive learning experience and negative learning experience. These are explored in the work based and college based element of the apprenticeship. In an effort to make the participants comfortable and build a rapport the early questions focus on early learning experiences and the route into apprenticeship.

Three super-ordinate themes emerged from the analysis. The first is the complex relationship with the employer. The second is the importance of structured learning. The final theme is the transformative power of learning. Each super-ordinate theme will be explored in detail and a graphic representation is provided at the end of each section of analysis. As Pringle et al (2011: 24) point out 'the findings of IPA studies are firmly rooted in the evidence of the words of participants'. As such extensive quotes from the interview transcripts will support the presentation of the findings and inform the analysis.

Complex relationship with employer		
Themes	**Line**	**Key words**
Will not criticise his employer Colm	164	Corrected in the right way
Employer did not fulfil obligations Colm	168	Not really no
Defending his employer Stephen	105	Can't complain
	167	He knew that I had done it
Employer did not fulfil obligations Stephen	357	you're supposed to be learning
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.

College is for learning		
Freedom to learn in college Colm	310	Ask questions
	314	Freedom to make a few mistakes
	307	If you did it wrong it be alright
Learning outcome Stephen	419	You knew you were going to learn there
College is for learning Darren	468	You are in college, you go in there to learn

Self is fluid /Transformative Power of Learning		
Moving towards qualification Darren	257	becoming a painter
Moving beyond boundaries Darren	350	artistic, more than a painter
Becoming qualified Colm	221	Felt like was out of me time...
Look back and laugh Stephen	247	You'd start panicking a bit (laughs good naturedly)

Table 4.4 Overview of super-ordinate themes

4.5 Complex relationship with the employer

Colm

Colm is asked whether his employer assessed his work-based learning. He replies,

> *Well he said it would be assessed but ... he didn't really do it you know what I mean (laughs lightly) he would like, you know, say it's wrong or you know he'd tell me in the right way it was the wrong thing but he didn't really assess it if you know what I mean (l.163-165).*

Colm's is engaging in a defence of his employer's responsibility regarding Colm's learning. Colm's employer did not formally assess his work based learning which he should have done. In conceding this Colm seems to be defensive of his employer. Colm admits knowing that his WBL should be assessed (l.157) and goes on to say that although it was not formally assessed he was 'corrected in the right way' (l.164). Colm is wrong as the 'right way' would involve following the steps laid down in the curriculum. When pressed about formal assessment Colm answers 'Not really no' (l.168). This is defensive again as the answer is clear cut – either he was assessed or he was not. His answer would seem to equivocate the situation as if you could answer 'not really, no' to a straightforward yes or no question. Colm is defending his employer even while being aware of his employer's shortcomings. There seems to be an element of fear here as he is reluctant to criticise his employer. This could prove to be detrimental to Colm's career if his employer is not fulfilling his requirements to train Colm appropriately. Colm will need to do something about it and yet in this anonymous interview Colm is reluctant to level a criticism of his employer. It would seem that he would have difficulty in confronting his employer in the real world if he cannot criticise him in the context of this research.

Later, Colm asserts that the idea of his work based learning being assessed would make him work harder and try to get things done right (l.171). While listing these positive things a formal assessment would have provided he adds '[...] he doesn't come back and look and make sure it's right or you know...he mostly does that but...' (l.174). So Colm can identify the advantages of formal work based assessment but then he admits it is not being done. Having come close to criticising

his employer Colm adds the proviso at the end that his employer 'mostly does that.'
It is evident from these passages that Colm is reluctant to criticise his employer.

Stephen

Stephen said he knew his work based learning would be assessed (l.128) and when
asked if a formal assessment took place he answers,

> *Not like that... If he – if he told me to do something... like the first*
> *time I was glossing a door or... he would have stood behind me*
> *and...[...] tell me what I done wrong but he never... he*
> *never...marked it off or... (l.148 – 152).*

Stephen was not formally assessed. His boss certainly watched his work to ensure
he carried out the tasks correctly but in terms of fulfilling his obligations regarding
his apprentices' learning, he did not, to Stephens's knowledge ever assess him.
From the above passage it can be seen that Stephen is careful about his answer. He
hesitates and seems to grope for an answer that does not overtly criticise his
employer.

When asked how he felt that his boss was not formally assessing his learning
Stephen answers,

> *It wasn't that he was... he knew I... like... basically the stuff is ...that*
> *he, they ask you has he done, they ask the employer has he done this*
> *has he done this, he knew that I had done it, he just didn't have to*
> *stand behind me and mark every bit of it (l.165 -167).*

From his reply it can be seen that this question has caused Stephen some
consternation. He hesitates and is unsure how to answer. He starts along one line of
answer and changes and then changes again, 'it wasn't that he was... he knew I...
like... basically the stuff is... that he.' He is trying to defend his employer by
justifying the fact that he was not formally assessed. He realises that he may have
inadvertently criticised his boss for taking shortcuts with his own learning. Note the
repetition of the phrase 'has he done' where Stephen says it three times throughout
this passage. He is giving a particular emphasise to this question by repeating it
three times. It almost sounds like a mantra. He is building up to a point by asking
the question repeatedly, has he done? He finishes with 'he knew I had done it.' This
eliminates any possibility that the interviewer may see his learning as having been
circumvented. Stephen is maintaining that he is well able for the assessments that

should have taken place on his work based learning but which nevertheless did not actually occur 'he just didn't have to stand behind and mark every bit of it.' If Stephen's employer did not actually stand behind him and mark off his assessments then how was it done? Stephen himself appears to be providing an excuse for his employer in this passage. His employer should have assessed his learning properly and yet Stephen seems at pains to point out that he was able to do it despite not being assessed on that ability.

In another passage Stephen seems quite ready to criticise his employer. When asked what it is like that he is not being allowed to do some tasks, Stephen says,

> *it kind of gets annoying when you're trying ... trying to be able to do these things and you're supposed to be learning but... I get to do it in here [college]. At least I am getting some experience of it and I'm doing it on my own jobs so... (l.356 – 358).*

Stephen can see that he should be learning these tasks from his employer and he is suitably annoyed about this teaching being withheld. In this passage he also contrasts this lack of teaching with his college based learning. He can see the value of his college based learning as he says 'at least I am getting some experience of it.' This is a bad situation for Stephen as college based learning is only one aspect of an apprenticeship. If he comes across a task that he is unfamiliar with it is his employer who is meant to guide him through it.

In spite of all this happening during his work based learning Stephen also defends his employer. When asked about his wages Stephen says,

> *my wages were always cut, my boss didn't have much work so... it was either cut my wages or let me go but...He cut them as much as he could... but... can't complain I had a job, (l.104-106).*

It can be seen that he is grateful to his boss even when his boss cut his wages because of lack of work. His boss kept him employed when he did not have much work and as a result Stephen was able to progress through his apprenticeship to the point where he is now almost finished. In fact Stephen is not only grateful but asserts that he cannot complain. It would seem that getting to this point wipes clean any perceived wrong doing by his employer. Throughout all of these passages it can be seen that Stephen has a contradictory relationship with his employer

Darren

Darren began working in painting and decorating through social contacts. He explains,

> *...got a summer job with a chap I know from my GAA club and just emmm enjoyed it and asked him did he want to take me on (l.53-55).*

From the very beginning of their working relationship Darren and his employer had previous social experience of each other. They knew each other from a sports club and it was through this that Darren started. Darren indicates that he liked painting and decorating and stayed at it for the last four years despite the fact that it started off as a summer job. This implies that Darren did not see this as a career. It was only meant to be temporary. When he started his summer job painting Darren had also qualified with a certificate in television production (l. 52) but never went on to work in that field. I would venture that Darren never intended to stay long at painting and decorating but enjoyed it and so stayed at it. This could be in part down to the relationship he had with his employer. Throughout the interview Darren does not criticise his employer in any way. In fact at one point Darren says,

> *Em, [...] but I have to say, I was his first apprentice so he was ... that's a learning experience for him as well (l.237-238).*

In this passage Darren is identifying with his employer. He is seeing him almost as a fellow student as he points out that having an apprentice was a 'learning experience for him as well.' In this way he can look at his employer as also embarking on a learning journey. It can be seen that Darren does not see his employer in the traditional role of a boss but more like a colleague or even fellow student.

Complex Relationship with Employer		
Themes	**Line**	**Key words**
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	237	I was his first apprentice... learning experience for him as well.

Table 4.4 Complex relationship with employer super-ordinate theme

4.6 College is for learning

Darren

In the following revealing passage Darren talks about how he views his college based learning. This passage comes from a section in which Darren criticises a particular college teacher and his methods of teaching for being very structured with no leeway for individuality from the learner. Darren is asked was all of his learning very rigid and he replies,

> *Emmm, nooo, it wasn't that it was rigid, it was more... like, you are in college , you go in there to learn, that's grand, its college so you know you're going to learn... right? Ok, and they know what they are doing. That's fine I get that, that's the idea of the college part. It's more like this particular teacher did it one way – his way. (l. 468-471).*

This passage is illuminating as it reveals three things. – Darren's attitude to college, his expectation of his own learning and his attitude towards work based learning. Darren's attitude to college is that it is a place of learning. He states quite clearly 'you are in college, you go in there to learn.' For Darren the college has a primary function – a place of learning. Earlier in the interview Darren spoke about going to college after completing school. Darren spoke about his motivation to go to college, 'Emm, I always wanted to go to college for a couple of years and just have the crack' (l.45). He did not say then he was going to learn, he was simply going for enjoyment and fun. He now has experience of college and its environs in the context of that two year course and in the context of apprenticeship. His attitude now is that college is for learning.

While Darren sees college as a place of learning his expectation of his own learning is that he will learn once he is in college. As he explains, 'it's college so you know you're going to learn' (l.469). Darren has an almost automatic assumption that once he is in college it will follow that learning will occur. In Darren's mind it is natural that once you are in college the net result will be learning. He does not put any proviso or limitation on this statement. It is simply stated that you know you are going to learn when you are in college. This passage came after Darren was criticising a particular teaching method. He does not seem to be any doubt that he will still learn despite the restrictive teaching method as he is in a place of learning.

Finally, this passage reveals something of Darren's attitude towards his work based learning. There are several key phrases in this passage. They are 'you are in college, you go in there to learn', its college so you you're going to learn' and that's the idea of the college part.' This particular reference to the college part is revealing because it highlights an unspoken attitude towards the work based element of Darren's learning. He is pointing to the college based element as being designed for learning. By highlighting it in this manner it would seem that Darren does not see the work based element in the same context of learning as college based learning. He is almost at pains to point out that college is for learning, he will learn in college and it is designed for learning.

Colm

When asked if he thought there was more support for college learning Colm answers,

> *Oh there would be yeah, cos you spend more time and you can ask more questions and ehhh cos everyone else is at the same thing and ...you get practice at it too like so ...if you were on the outside like outside working (laughs lightly) you just like go into a house and you've to wallpaper it, it would have to be done the way... the employer wants you to and its probably more interesting in college cos you can ask questions and if you did it wrong it be alright like (l.306-311).*

Colm talks about asking questions in college twice in this passage, at the start and at the end, reinforcing its importance to him. There is an interesting narrative arc throughout this passage. Colm begins by talking about college based learning, moves to work based learning and a criticism of it and at the end comes back to college based learning and praises it. At the start of the arc Colm says 'you can ask more questions.' By stating you can ask 'more' questions would imply the ability to ask questions is present in his work based learning and when in college you get to ask 'more' questions. However, after passing through the different phases of this passage by the end he says 'it's probably more interesting in college cos you can ask questions' (l.310). At this point Colm is saying that in college you actually get to ask questions. He has dropped the assertion that you can ask 'more' questions. This calls into question his first statement and implies that in college you can ask questions whereas in work you cannot.

Colm points out that in college you can 'you get practice at it too' (l.307). Colm does not refer to any one specific task rather he is generalising that in college you can practice. This should also be the case for his workplace learning. If he is not given the freedom to practice his craft then he is unlikely to progress. Following this Colm also refers to the freedom to make mistakes in college without repercussions – 'if you did it wrong it be alright like.' Once again this would imply that in the workplace it is not alright to do something wrong. While mistakes are not to be encouraged they will nevertheless occur while an apprentice is learning the craft. An apprentice should have the freedom to make mistakes as they learn their trade whether this is work based or college based learning.

In contrast to this interpretation of Colm's college based learning is a particular work based learning experience that Colm relates. Colm talks about a task where he was left alone by the boss. The particular task involves new learning that Colm is unfamiliar with – glossing a door. He describes how it felt as follows, 'I was panicking… I knew he was going to go mad like. I was out of me depth doing it' (l.263). Colm realised very quickly he could not do the task and probably more importantly he realised what his employer's reaction would be, 'he was going to go mad.' If this is Colm's experience of his work based learning then it is understandable that the freedom and space in college would indicate that for Colm college is for learning.

Stephen

Stephen identifies college as a place where learning is meant to occur. He begins this next passage by describing college,

> *Well, it was… very easy to learn I suppose. You could ask questions and you knew people weren't going to go off the handle about the question (l.415-416).*

Stephen identifies an important factor that contributes to his ability to learn. It is the ability to ask questions without fear of repercussions. This should also be the case for his work based learning but from his descriptions of his employers histrionics when mistakes are made it can be seen that is not the case. Stephen further elaborates that in college 'you had space to learn [...] you knew you were going to learn when you're here' (l.418-419). Space to learn is important for any apprentice

learning their trade and employers should be providing this. It is also significant that Stephen implies that he had an expectation that he would learn whilst in college. When asked how did he know he would learn in college he responds, 'Well, it is college for one thing' (l.421). This is a very strong indicator of Stephen's orientation towards the perception of the learning environment. For Stephen it is clear that college is for learning. He fully expects to learn simply because he is in college. It would seem that Stephen has an image of what happens in college, which is learning, and thus he learns while he is there. When asked directly would he expect to learn more in college Stephen answers, 'absolutely' (l.428).

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">**College is for learning**</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Themes**</td><td>**Line**</td><td>**Key words**</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Freedom to learn in college
Colm</td><td>310</td><td>Ask questions</td></tr>
<tr><td>314</td><td>Freedom to make a few mistakes</td></tr>
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<tr><td>Learning outcome
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<tr><td>College is for learning
Darren</td><td>468</td><td>You are in college, you go in there to learn</td></tr>
</table>

Table 4.5 College is for learning super-ordinate theme

4.7 Transformative power of learning

Darren

Darren talks about doing a task on a job with a very particular and fussy customer where the task had to be carried out so 'it's very nice and smooth' (l.249). When the task was completed he describes how it felt,

> *Em... felt like I was ... becoming a painter, [...] taking it up to the next tier like (l.257-263).*

This task is a 'step up' (l.270) from previous work so it is more difficult than what went before. When he talks about the effect this new learning experience had on him he says 'felt like I was ... becoming a painter' (l.257). This is a very powerful image. Darren sees himself as being an apprentice who has yet to become a painter. It is clear that Darren saw this task as having a transformative effect on his identity as an apprentice. He could now see himself as a painter, fully qualified. He expands further on this notion when he says that he was 'taking it up to the next tier' (l.263). This transformation is moving Darren to the next level of his journey to qualification. He is also seeing this new learning as a promotion as he says 'I'm stepping up here so be doing more and more, I'd get more responsibilities' (l.275). In this instance Darren is now seeing himself as moving beyond the parameters of his old self and moving up onto the next tier. The next passage shows further evidence of the transformative power of Darren's learning.

When asked about college learning experience he expresses a very potent sentiment,

> *... I'd say... it made you feel good when you stood back and look at your finished graining product and you look back and jeez that looks pretty good, you feel artistic, more than a painter (l.349 – 351).*

This is a very powerful statement in numerous ways. Firstly, it can be seen that Darren likes the acknowledgement of his own work when he says 'jeez that looks pretty good.' Coupled with this are two very strong statements pertaining to the transformative power of learning. Darren says he felt 'artistic'. This portrays a highly skilled creative individual who can produce an item of beauty and value. Linked with this iconic image of being an artist is Darren's assertion that it made

him 'more than a painter.' Earlier he talked of becoming a painter but now, with this artistic element introduced, Darren is moving beyond even that. He is surpassing his earlier assertion of becoming qualified and moving past that point. Darren's learning experience has transformed his self image.

Colm

Colm provides a good example of the fluidity of his identity when he talks about a specific learning task. His boss had brought a spray gun to the job and instructed Colm in its use. Throughout this phase of learning Colm's employer was very attentive and ensured that Colm understood everything about the task. When talking about how this 'technical' (l.214) learning made him feel he described it as follows,

> *Well, like… I felt like was out of me time really… like …emmm… it was great for me to do this cos like not many fellas do the spraying and ehh… I knew I could do it so… (l.221-222).*

It can be seen from this passage the transformative power of learning. Colm was carrying out spray painting. Such a task changed his sense of self as he no longer felt like an apprentice. Learning this 'really good stuff' (l.213) was empowering for Colm. Also the fact that the boss showed him and not the other employees (l.224) contributes to Colm feeling positive about this experience. He points out the uniqueness of the task and also the fact that he knew he could do it. This confidence followed on from a period of structured learning where his boss ensured that Colm could manage this task. This learning has brought Colm to the point where he can look back and assert 'I knew I could it.' This learning experience stands out for Colm. He refers to it as 'not the usual stuff' and 'more technical' (l.214). The result of this learning is that Colm felt like he was a qualified tradesman. This learning event has changed Colm perception of his own identity, he has become qualified and 'out of his time.'

Stephen

Stephen talks about the change that he underwent as an apprentice. The first time he glossed a door he was working with his employer a couple of months. His boss stood behind him while he carried out this task. Stephen describes the likely outcomes from his employer if Stephen made a mistake,

> *So...if you were doing something wrong he'd start to panic and then it'd make you panic so (laughs) especially when you were first starting it was... it was a lot harder but, once I got into it he didn't, he didn't have to ...stand behind me...(l.173-176).*

Stephen begins this passage by talking about the panicky reaction of his boss to a mistake being made. Stephen indicates that his employers panic would cause him to panic also but most especially when he was first starting as an apprentice. Stephen talks about how difficult it was at the beginning but once he 'got into it', meaning that once he progressed further in his apprenticeship, his boss did not have to stand behind him and check he was doing the task correctly. On first reading this it would seem that such a reaction from an employer is less than ideal for an apprentice starting out. It seems over the top and histrionic. For an apprentice who is learning a trade this is a fearful manner in which to be taught. This is not a learning environment which is conducive for the learner. Being fearful of mistakes and the over-reaction of the employer can be negative. For an apprentice starting out this is not a positive learning experience. The mentor should be confident and helpful rather than starting a feeling of panic.

However, if we probe a little deeper there is a nuance to this passage which can be explored. When Stephen talks about his boss panicking and thus causing him to panic he laughs. He is now four years further along in his career and when he reflects upon the spreading panic his employer incited in his younger self he laughs at it. He is effectively laughing at his younger self. This passage shows the transformation that Stephen has undergone.

This interpretation is further substantiated later in the interview. Stephen is once again reflecting upon his work based learning. Once more he talks about his employers reactions to mistakes being made,

> *He wouldn't shout now, his voice would just go high pitched and it seemed like everything just fell apart in his life and he'd nearly start crying and so... you'd start panicking a little bit (laughs good naturedly) (l.247-249).*

In two separate passages he has now referred to his boss' panicky reactions as a young apprentice. Even though he was a young adult at the time he was modelling his behaviour from the authority figure of his boss. His younger self was almost childlike in that he panicked when he saw that authority figure panicking. His sense of himself as a young apprentice was dependent on his employer. However, it is now four years later and he is looking back and he can laugh. Stephen's reminiscence the second time around in the interview brings out a stronger reaction in his laughing as he reflects upon the past. He is no longer the young apprentice that can be panicked by his employer's reaction. He has grown beyond that to such a degree that he can look back upon his younger self and laugh at his younger self's reaction.

Self is fluid /Transformative Power of Learning		
Themes	**Line**	**Key words**
Moving towards qualification Darren	257	becoming a painter
Moving beyond boundaries Darren	350	artistic, more than a painter
Becoming qualified Colm	221	Felt like was out of me time...
Look back and laugh Stephen	247	You'd start panicking a bit (laughs good naturedly)

Table 4.5 Transformative power of learning super-ordinate theme

4.8 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of this research using IPA as the method of analysis. The interviews that were conducted were rich and meaningful and contained many other sub ordinate themes. The limits of this dissertation meant that such themes could not explore. The themes presented here were the ones that most strongly reflected the fundamental question of how the apprentices experienced their learning. These were the themes that came through the strongest through the analysis. The next chapter will discuss the research findings.

Discussion of the Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

This research has asked the question, *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?* As it was questioning the way the participants experience the world it was phenomenological in nature (van Manen, 1997). It is important to note that findings from a phenomenological research cannot be generalized to a wider population they can still prove relevant to other people and other settings (Finlay, 2009). The data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. IPA is an approach that emphasises the importance of individual accounts (Pringle et al, 2011). However, identified common threads across accounts coupled with a critical commentary can lead to useful insights which have wider implications (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). In IPA studies it is recommended that the researcher should think in terms of 'theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability (Smith et al, 2009: 51). In such a case the researcher aims to provide an account which links the analysis with a personal and professional experience as well as the claims in the extant literature.

To begin the discussion the theme relating to college is for learning will be explored. Following that the theme relating to the complex relationship with the employer will be discussed and finally the theme relating to the transformative power of learning will be explored.

5.2 College is for Learning

The perception that college is for learning is evident from the analysis. Darren says that 'you are in college, you go in there to learn.' Talking about college Stephen says 'you knew you were going there to learn' and Colm talks about the freedom to learn in college where an apprentice can ask questions and has the freedom to make mistakes. Both Darren and Stephen highlight the idea of learning in college simply because it is a college. They both therefore expect to learn in college. Billett (2002) argues against just such a stance. He proposes the terminology of learning environments contributes to a situational determinism whereas learning should be 'inter-dependent between the individual and the social practice' (Billet, 2002: 56). If the apprentices could see that such social practices included their work place activities then this could help with regards to an expectation of their learning. Specifically, the notion of learning could be extended to include places outside of college such as the workplace.

It could be that the apprentices see the college as an educational institute and therefore have an expectation of learning within its environs. Zimmerman (2002) talks about the learning that occurs in reaction to teaching. The teaching that occurs in college is much more explicit and visible for the apprentice than teaching that may occur in the workplace. The college based assessments are part of the structure and are timetabled into the college based module. Similarly the assessments are timetabled and as such are highly visible to the apprentices. In essence the vernacular of the college based modules is all about learning and assessment. This may not be the case with their work based modules. The focus on the work place as a learning environment in any business organisation is of secondary importance to the goal of making profits for the company (Yoong Ng & Cervero, 2005). This is understandable given the requirements of any company. Nevertheless there has to be a balance struck and the needs of the apprentice should be considered also. As O'Connor (2006) points out some employers see apprentices as cheap labour. Such cheap labour may not have the chance to avail of all the aspects of an apprenticeship as it is likely that they will be used on menial, repetitive tasks. This will not provide for a comprehensive learning experience nor will it produce a fully

rounded and capable tradesperson. Perhaps more importantly it may contribute to the perception that learning will only occur in college.

Learning will not simply happen to an apprentice in the structured environment of a college only especially considering the structure of the SBA is designed for learning. Indeed the very foundation of the SBA is for learning to occur throughout the term of apprenticeship. As Scott (2005) has said the learners must take some element of responsibility for their own learning. For the apprentice to adopt such responsibility would contribute to self regulation with regards to their learning. Zimmerman (2002) defines self regulation as a self directed process of learning. The self directed student views learning 'as an activity that students do for themselves in a proactive way rather than as a covert event that happens to them in reaction to teaching' (ibid: 65). Such a self directed view and proactive perception of learning is good for any student. If the participants adopted such a proactive stance with regards to their work place learning then it would increase their chances to learn.

Stacey, Smith & Bartyt (2004) have pointed out that people in a workplace construct knowledge with their colleagues. It is therefore essential that apprentices see this possibility in the workplace and not just confined to an institute like a college. Participatory appropriation is the process whereby 'individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation' (Rogoff, 1995: 65). When apprentices are in college they expect to learn and through participatory practices they endeavour to learn. However, it would seem then that the participants in this research did not see the processes occurring in the workplace.

If the participants in this research fully expect to learn in college because it is a college than the converse may be true also. Specifically, the participants may not expect to learn in work. There needs to be engagement with the notion of the workplace as being a place to learn. Billett (2002: 3) contends that ultimately it is the individuals themselves who determine the invitational qualities of the workplace in terms of their opportunity to learn. This would seem to be the case in this

research. Such invitational qualities may be difficult given the power imbalance inherent in any apprenticeship.

Colm talked about the freedom in college to make mistakes. This could be absent from his own work place experiences and as such he sees it as being a particularly college based facet of his apprenticeship. Billet (2002) says that providing the opportunity to practice and avail of guidance is necessary for any work place practice. It can be seen that Colm highlights this aspect of college and associates this freedom with learning. Making such freedom accessible to apprentices in their workplace may contribute to their understanding that the workplace is a place of learning and it is not just restricted to college.

5.3 Complex relationship with employer

The relationship that apprentices in this research have with their employers is complex. For any apprentice the relationship with the employer is an integral part of the apprenticeship. It is important for the learning of the apprentice that there is a good working relationship with the employer. This research has seen contradictory responses where participants criticise employers on the one hand and then defend their employers. When Colm is asked whether his employer has assessed his workplace learning he seems defensive and eventually answers, begrudging 'not really, no'. Similarly there is evidence of both Stephen and Darren engaging in complex and sometimes contradictory relationships with their employers. Darren sees his employer as almost a fellow student as he remarks about his employers' learning experience while Darren was his apprentice. Stephen relationship is perhaps the most complex. He criticises his employer outright when he gets annoyed about not learning what he should be learning as an apprentice. He can see that his employer is falling short of his obligation to Stephen. Nevertheless he then defends his employer and in fact says he cannot complain. Such equivocation may be detrimental to the learning of the apprentice. It is vital that an apprentice can learn in an open environment in which views can be expressed and exchanged. Perhaps such findings are not surprising in light of international research which has shown that in traditional apprenticeships criticism and debate were discouraged between Master and apprentice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Engestrom, 1994).

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While the relationship the apprentices have with their employer has been demonstrated as being complex and contradictory it is nevertheless important that apprentices have lines of communication open to their employers. As Stacey, Smith & Barty (2004) point out 'the provision of dialogue within a community of learners has been seen as a significant factor, with knowledge construction being perceived as a dialectic process in which individuals test their constructed views on others and negotiate their ideas' (108). It is important that pathways still exist for the apprentices to engage in a dialectic process with their employers. For this to take place the apprentice should have a clear notion of the employer's responsibilities and obligations and not be afraid to expect that from their employer. It is also the case that the provision of dialogue within a community of learners should also be present with the work colleagues of the apprentices. When it comes to work place learning it is not only the employer that an apprentice will learn from. Work colleagues are also teachers and as such this are ideally placed for apprentices to 'test their constructed views' and 'negotiate ideas'.

Burke et al (2007 cited in Noe & McConnell Dachner, 2010) discuss the importance of interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue to enable learners' action focused reflection leading to skill and knowledge acquisition. Skill and knowledge acquisition is an integral part of the progression of an apprentice. If this does not happen then it is highly unlikely that an apprentice will develop. In order for this skill and knowledge acquisition to happen the apprentice must engage in a learning process. From an apprentices point of view it is vital that this can be carried out and as such the relationship with the employer is vital. The 'interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue' referred to by Burke et al (2007, cited in Noe & McConnell Dachner, 2010) involves a questioning of self and also a questioning of others. From this research it would seem that Darren is in a position to question others, in this case his employer due to the nature of his relationship with his employer. Such a relationship manifests in a camaraderie aspect where Darren identifies with his employer as Darren was his first apprentice and therefore his employer was going through a learning process also. Colm and Stephen do not seem to be in the same position as Darren in that they are in more contradictory positions. Both agree that the employer did not fulfil his obligations and yet they are reluctant to criticize.

This reluctance could be a mirror of a power imbalance which could deter both participants from engaging in the kind of interpersonal dialogue that would facilitate their learning.

Learning that occurs within a workplace has been defined as situated learning (Billet, 1996). Hansman & Wilson (2002 cited in Yoong Ng & Cervero, 2005) refer to the power relations that that occur when situated learning occurs. This power relation is extremely important from an apprentice perspective. The power is held by the employer who is not neutral and who has an agenda in terms of company policy such as making profits. This may not aligned with the apprentice's outlook. Therefore imbalance of power between an apprentice and employer is potentially unfavourable for the apprentices learning. It has already been stated that traditionally apprentices were discouraged from questioning their teachers. O'Connor (2006) points out that some employers see apprentices as cheap labour. Further to this, Fenwick (2001: 5) points out that 'educators cannot ignore the economic pressures and sociological issues underpinning questions of learning and education in work.' Fenwick sees the workplace as a political place where there is a struggle for learning. Such issues add to the complexity of the relationship between an apprentice and an employer where the employer has many considerations to take account of other than the learning of the apprentice.

5.4 Transformative power of learning

Billet & Somerville (2004) refer to how an individual engages in workplace tasks is central to the learning that occurs and the level of engagement is partly shaped by an individual's identity. Having an occupational identity is very important to young people's sense of worth and carries status in the adult community (Unwin & Fuller, 2005). This research has shown how that identity transformed through the learning that the apprentices experienced. This transformation is a positive aspect to the participant's experience of learning and involved the apprentices seeing themselves as becoming something more than apprentices. Individual experiences in social practices such as workplaces can transformationally contribute to changes in their sense of self in terms of identity (Billet & Somerville, 2004). Identity appears to shift as biographical narratives regarding peoples' capabilities are rewritten and

extended (James, 2006). Billet & Somerville (2004) say that the formation of self is likely to be salient for the individuals learning and their engagement in transformatory events, such as remaking of work as it transforms across their working life. The self directs the intentionality behind this learning and yet the self is transformed by these events.

The participants seemed to be aware that they had changed throughout their apprenticeship. Fuller & Unwin's (2003) research which showed how an apprentice was working upon the assumption that he was the one learning even though there was evidence that he was also helping others to learn. Fuller & Unwin contend that the apprentice constructed his identity around the idea of being a novice despite the strong evidence contrary to this. This research has shown that the participants envisioned themselves as undergoing change through their learning. The transformative growth came about through exposure to different learning tasks. In Darren's case it was a job specific task requiring extra care and skill. Similarly Colm's transformation came about through a very new and technical skill requiring expert knowledge.

Ashforth (2001, cited in Isopahkala-Bouret, 2008) says that persons assume the exemplary characteristics of a certain socially defined role to which we perceive ourselves belonging. Apprentice painters and decorators would have no doubt as to their status regarding their roles. It is endemic to an apprenticeship that the learner is subordinate to the Master. As such it may be difficult for the apprentice to grow out of that role. However, Unwin & Fuller (2005) state that young people's vocational identity is not fixed and evolves during the course of their engagement with learning opportunities and barriers in the workplace. Similarly, Isopahkala-Bouret (2008) contends that work roles are not fixed but rather are negotiated within structural restrictions in different sociocultural contexts. From the testimonies of the participants it can be seen that there were instances when they grew outside of their apprenticeship role. Darren is probably the most emotive when he says he felt like he was 'more than a painter'. As well gaining new knowledge, skills and abilities, the outcomes of role learning are a clarification of what the new role is and eventually, transformation of professional identity (Ashforth, 2001, cited

in Isopahkala-Bouret, 2008). This research would indicate just such an outcome from the apprentices learning experiences.

The transformative power of the learning experience by the apprentices is similar to what Isopahkala-Bouret (2008) terms perspective transformation. Perspective transformation 'alters the way people understand themselves, their relationships with others and the world. It changes cognitive, emotional, and behavioural routines of perceiving and interpreting things. As a result, one is able to have new priorities and ways of thinking and doing' (ibid: 72).

Other findings from this research indicate that the participants viewed college as the place for learning. Nevertheless, at some level the participants could identify that they had indeed learned in the workplace. In fact Darren's powerful example of becoming a painter occurred on a job and Colm's happened directly as a result of specific workplace learning. So, despite the apprentices view that college is for learning it would seem that they learned elsewhere also. As Lave & Wenger (1991: 40) point out 'legitimate peripheral participation takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning, or whether there is any intentional instruction.' Also, different identities emerge through participation in different learning curricula (James, 2006). In addition to this Billet &n Somerville (2004) point out that in transformative learning workers draw on all forms of learning from formal and informal to theoretical and practical to enable such a transition that a transformation involves.

Lave & Wenger (1991) talk about systems within a social context. These systems, such as new activities, performing new tasks and functions and mastering new understandings, all occur within a broad system of relations in which they have meaning. These systems arise out of and are reproduced by social communities which relate to systems of relations among persons. Persons are defined by and in turn define these relations. When a person learns something the implication then is that the person becomes a different person with respect to the possibilities offered by these systems of relations. In effect the learning that occurs involves the construction of identities. Billet & Somerville (2004: 314) echo this when they say that learning is 'both shaped by, and in turn shapes, individual identities.' This type

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of process would appear to have happened in this research where the social community defines the apprentice as an apprentice. Through the relations with that community, in this case employers, teachers and work colleagues, learning has occurred. Through this learning the identity of the apprentices has changed and they have moved, however momentarily, beyond being an apprentice.

Cheng (2011) talks about the power of transformative learning as being a product of both the teacher and the student. From a student's standpoint the outcome of transformative learning were results such as skills developed for future profession, a higher level of achievement exhibited through increased confidence in themselves and in their knowledge. In contrast, Billett & Somerville (2004) say that identity transformations in the workplace are the products of individuals remaking or transforming practice. These transformations are not separate from, or conceivable without, individual's active involvement and engagement. In this research both Darren and Colm engaged in new practices which were beyond the normal routine work of their everyday landscape. Colm in particular highlights the new aspect of his learning when he talks about using a spray gun.

Both Colm and Darren highlighted particular moments in which the transformative power of learning was apparent. However, Billett & Somerville (2004) findings seem to disagree with this. Their research shows that identity transformations are not specific to particular learning moments such as significant events or particular learning incidents such as schools. They contend that such transformations are inherent in everyday conscious thought which is actively seeking to make sense of the encountered world. Stephen's experience would seem to conform to such contention as his transformation occurred over the period of his apprenticeship rather in a specific moment

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This research set out to ask the question *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?* This question was driven by my personal experience as an apprentice. I learned under the old time served apprenticeship which was fundamentally different to the newer standards based system which involves assessment throughout the spread of work based and college based modules. Teaching on the college based modules of the current standards based apprenticeship prompted my research question as it was driven by a need to investigate how the apprentices experienced their learning. I wanted to find out what is was like in the real world for an apprentice going through such a standards based system which involved assessment at every stage of the programme.

As this research was investigating the real life world experience of the participants it was phenomenological in nature. The data was collect using one on one semi structured interviews and was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. IPA was adopted because,

> It seeks to explore the links between what people say within interviews, and the way they think about their own experiences. It takes, as its starting point, a position in which the participant and not the researcher is expert. Its idiographic focus means that overall the participant, not the discourse or narrative, is the unit of analysis.
>
> (Dickson et al, 2007: 855).

By using this method of analysis it was intended to privilege the accounts of the participants and to unfold layers of meaning in terms of the experience of learning from the apprentices.

6.3 Conclusions

Despite being presented as separate themes I believe that the complex relationship with the employer experienced by the apprentices is a factor in the perception that college is for learning. Employers are in a unique position with apprentices. On the one hand they are like mentors to the apprentices but then the employer must run a business which is designed to make profits. Taking this into account there has to be a balance between learning and productivity. Furthermore, there is a responsibility on the employer to encourage the learning of the apprentice in order to prepare the apprentice for a possible life time career. It is significant that the participants in this research appeared reluctant to criticise their employer despite an obvious lack of work based assessment. However, through this complex relationship with their employer it is important that apprentices are able to expect the learning to which they are entitled on the SBA. Research suggests a 'vocational habitus' (Colley et al, 2003: 488) which proposes that learners aim for a certain combination of character traits demanded by the vocational culture into which they enter. It may be that the learners in this vocation are more inclined to a certain outlook regarding their employer and are reluctant to be too demanding despite the importance of their work place learning.

In the course of this research it became obvious that the participants saw their college based modules as the place where they expected to learn. The assessments in the college based modules are extremely visible in that they are timetabled and form an integral part of the college based modules. The apprentices are notified and given notes and study time in order to prepare for these exams. It has been said that assessment drives learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007). If that is the case then it is somewhat understandable then that the apprentices see college as a place where learning happens as it is here where the most visible assessment occurs. The downside of this assumption is that learning does not occur in the workplace.

This research indicates the need to refocus an understanding of the workplace and see it in the same light as college. Aarkrog (2005) argues convincingly that learning in the work place must be supplemented with school based learning. He concedes the unique characteristics of both the work place and the school which combined

contribute to the effectiveness of such a programme where work place and school based learning are mixed. However, the school based learning should not supplant the work place learning.

An understanding that a workplace is a place of learning is required from learners engaging in workplace practices (Billett, 2002) and I would contend that there is an element of responsibility on the apprentices as well as the employers in this regard. This understanding is essential for apprenticeship to work effectively. This must be embedded within the mindset of apprentices to highlight the full potential of all the aspects of learning. In this manner the relationship the apprentice has with the employer is essential in highlighting this issue. As Billett (2002) points out, if learning is seen as something particular to educational institutes rather than as a product of social practices then this viewpoint may well inhibit understanding about learning and in particular learning through the work place.

It came across through this research that work place learning did not feature very strongly in the perceptions of the participants and they did not seem to realise this aspect of their apprenticeship. This needs to be addressed and made explicit to apprentices. Essentially, apprentices on the standards based apprenticeship programme are expected to learn at all stages of their programme. Further to this they have to be made aware that this learning is meant to be assessed. Aarkrog (2005) calls for a clear indication of which learning outcomes are expected from each particular place of learning. This would seem to absent from the experience of the participants of this study. The relationship between the employer and apprentice is a means of communicating this aspect of the programme.

In terms of the college based element Mullins (2005) sounds a warning note that Institutions involved in education that are rarely brought to account by external agencies can develop an imperialistic dynamic and thus engage in a transmission model type of education. Such a transmission model of education would be detrimental for the learner as it involves at its simplest level an information exchange between teacher and student. To date there is no such quality control on the SBA. O'Connor's (2005) research sought opinions form stakeholders such as employers, trainers, trade unions and apprentices on the success of the SBA as an

effective apprenticeship system. There are strengths to SBA such as setting a minimum competence and a good balance between on and off-the-job Phases. There are also drawbacks to SBA such as lack of assessment for the on-the-job Phases by many employers and a lack of monitoring of the on-the-job phases by FAS.

The transformative power of learning was highlighted through this research. It is perhaps significant that two of the participants were able to highlight specific leaning incidents in which this transformation occurred. As has been stated before the participants had a preconceived idea that college was for learning and therefore expected to learn. If they had an expectation that they would learn in the workplace they would then expand the possibility of the transformative power of their learning. It is vital that apprentices see their employers and indeed their colleagues as teachers. Fitzmaurice (2008: 347) says that the 'good teacher seeks to support students to develop to their full potential as human beings.' I would agree with this sentiment and would like to see attitude adopted by employers as they are also teachers.

Learning is obviously a powerful enabler. However, the learning potential of the apprentices did not seem extensive. Unwin & Fuller (2005) talk about restrictive and expansive learning environments. Expansive learning environments feature access to broad experience, knowledge based as well as competence based studies as well as access to career progression. Restrictive approaches provide limited opportunities for progression and development. Such an expansive learning environment would potentially contribute to much more transformational learning for the apprentice.

Yoong Ng & Cervero (2005) conclude that a triangular perspective should inform the design of learning in the workplace. This triumvirate would incorporate the 'three elements of power - organisational ownership, organisation structure and theories of adult education that are framed within the two former forces of power (ibid: 503). I would contend that there should be a voice for the learner in this model.

6.3 Recommendations

These recommendations are based upon this research and emerge from the analysis, presentation and discussion of the findings. The recommendations are as follows.

Recommendation 1:

The provision of an induction course whereby all aspects of the SBA programme will be explained. This induction should be provided to both potential employers as well as apprentices. Individual responsibility should be laid out clearly. For example, the responsibility of the employers regarding work place learning and assessment should be made clearer to all concerned.

Recommendation 2:

The production of book or pamphlet with the key points of the SBA outlined. This could be circulated to employers and apprentices as well as to colleagues of apprentices. This could also be made available to those thinking of taking up a trade. The provision of online details may not penetrate fully through to the apprenticeship cohort.

Recommendation 3:

Pro-active on the job monitoring by FAS needs to be implemented. If this happens then apprentices are more likely to be provided with a full range of work place learning. This recommendation also has the potential to widen the possibility of transformative learning experiences.

Recommendation 4:

There needs to be shift in the perception that only college is for learning. Workplace assessments should be timetabled to increase their visibility.

Recommendation 5:

The implementation of a learning log for apprentices. This would provide a means for the apprentices to become more aware of their own learning as it occurs. This would be particularly useful in the workplace in an effort to shift the focus of

attention on learning environments from the college based module to the work place modules.

Recommendation 6:

The appointment of an apprentice liaison officer should be put in place. Many third level colleges are appointing student retention officers in an effort to hold onto students and also student welfare officers. Something similar should be implemented within the SBA. Duties of the apprentice liaison would include the following:

(i)   The welfare of the apprentice being monitored. Such a liaison officer should take a holistic approach to the monitoring of the apprentice rather than just ensuring that assessments are undertaken. In this way the relationship between the employer and the apprentice can be mitigated by a third party. This could potentially avoid any conflict and contradiction in the relationship between the apprentice and the employer.

(ii)   Assistance provided to the employer in the case of any fears or anxieties regarding work place assessment.

6.4 Reflection

The main aim of this research was to explore the learning of apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship programme. Working from within the system as a teacher on the college based modules and also coming from a painting and decorating background meant that this topic was one that is very relevant to me professionally and personally. When looking at research questions it was my desire to give a voice to apprentices in these tumultuous times. I believe that I have done so and allowed their experiences to speak through this research.

I have enjoyed carrying out this research. Whilst writing this thesis I have come across very little work that addresses the real life experiences of apprentices in undergoing their apprenticeship programme through their own words. It is my hope that a thesis such as this can contribute to future understandings of what it is like from the apprentices point of view to undertake a programme such as the standards based apprenticeship. The research data that was collected was rich and meaningful and extremely extensive. It could only be explored minimally in this dissertation due to space constraints. I consider this to be my first step on a journey whereby I will continue to highlight the situation for vocational education and training from within through the voices of its main participants.

6.5 Concluding remarks

This research sought to investigate the learning experience of apprentices on the Irish standards based apprenticeship programme. While this research investigates only apprentice painters and decorators it is this researcher's belief that the findings may well apply to other apprenticeship areas. While looking into the experience of the learners in this research a significant point became clear. Whatever the quality of the learning opportunities that appear it is individuals themselves who decide to what extent they want to engage in those learning opportunities (Rainbird, Fuller & Munro, 2004). The learner must be motivated to learn and bring this motivation to the learning environment whether this is a work place or college. Beginning with such a motivation can only increase the potential for a positive learning experience regardless of the course of study undertaken. It has certainly been the case in my own personal experience to date.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Research Title:

How do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?

I am currently undertaking an MA in the Dublin Institute of Technology and as part of this research I am investigating the student learning experience. I am carrying this out in an effort to highlight the learning experience from the apprentice's perspective and in their own words.

I am inviting you to contribute to the research project and in order for you to decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and contact me if there is anything you would like clarified or if you would like more information.

The study will involve an interview being carried out in a location convenient for you. The interviews will take place in March 2011 and I expect the interview to take approximately 1.5 hours. The main aim of the research will be to capture the details of the learning experience of a group of apprentices.

It is completely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in the research. Should you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form that is attached for your information. If you do decide to take part but subsequently change your mind you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

If you experience any problems with the research, then please bring this to my attention immediately. If it is not appropriate to address your concerns to me, then you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Marian Fitzmaurice, whose contact details are available at the end of this document. All information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and all data will be anonymous so that individuals or the institution cannot be recognised in it.

The results of the research will be used to write my MA thesis, which will be submitted in June 2011. After the thesis is examined it will be stored in the Dublin Institute of Technology Library where it will be accessible to the public. In addition the data collected during the course of the project might be used for a journal article but you will not be identified in any report or publication.

Contact for further information
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Thank you for reading this and for taking the time to consider participating.

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Research Title: *how do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?*

Name of Researcher: Eric Bates

Please initial box

1.   I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3.   I understand that my responses will be anonymous before analysis. I give permission for the researcher and the Supervisor to have access to my anonymous responses.

4.   I agree to take part in the above project.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

How do apprentice painters and decorators on the Irish standards based apprenticeship experience their learning?

General background.

1. Can you talk to me a little about your experience of learning in secondary school?

      Prompts –   How far did you progress in school?
                           Did you like secondary school?
                           Did you like particular subjects?

2. How did you become a tradesperson?

      Prompt –   Did you ever consider an alternative to an apprenticeship?
                           Did you ever consider an alternative career path?
                           Have you ever worked in some other area?

3A. Is there anything you like about being a tradesperson?

      Prompts –   How would you describe your work conditions?
                             Are you based in the one area/workshop?
                           Wages?

3B. Is there anything you dislike about being a tradesperson?

      Prompts –   What are your working hours?
                             Are they long?
                           Is the work hard?
                           What is your work commute like?

Work based learning.

4. Were you aware that WBL is assessed? Did your employer discuss this with you?

      Prompts –   how did this assessment make you feel?
                             Did you feel you were able to complete the assessment?
                           How did you feel doing the assessment?

5A. Can you talk to me about a positive work based learning experience?

      Prompt –   how did that experience affect you?
                           How did you feel during it?
                           Can you tell me what you were thinking?

5B. Can you talk to me about a negative work based learning experience?

      Prompt –   how did that experience affect you?
                      How did you feel during it?
                      Can you tell me what you were thinking?

College based learning.

6. Were you aware of that your college based learning was assessed?

7A. Can you talk to me about a positive college based learning experience?

      Prompt –   what kind of experience was it?
                      Was it a good experience or a bad   experience?
                      What was good about it?
                      What was bad about it?
                      How was it for you?
                      How did you feel during it?
                      Can you tell me what you were thinking?

7B. Can you talk to me about a negative college based learning experience?

      Prompt –   what kind of experience was it?
                      Was it a good experience or a bad   experience?
                      What was good about it? What was bad about it?
                      How was it for you?
                      How did you feel during it?
                      Can you tell me what you were thinking?

Appendix D: FAS Designated Apprenticeships

> **FÁS Jobs Ireland**
> **Apprenticeships**
>> **Apprenticeship Listings**
> ‣ The Craft of Agricultural Mechanics
> ‣ The Craft of Aircraft Mechanics
> ‣ The Craft of Brick/Stone Laying
> ‣ The Craft of Cabinet Making
> ‣ The Craft of Carpentry & Joinery
> ‣ The Craft of Construction Plant Fitting
> ‣ The Craft of Electrical
> ‣ The Craft of Electrical Instrumentation
> ‣ The Craft of Fitting
> ‣ The Craft of Floor and Wall Tiling
> ‣ The Craft of Heavy Vehicle Mechanics
> ‣ The Craft of Instrumentation
> ‣ The Craft of Metal Fabrication
> ‣ The Craft of Motor Mechanics
> ‣ The Craft of Painting and Decorating
> ‣ The Craft of Plastering
> ‣ The Craft of Plumbing
> ‣ The Craft of Print Media
> ‣ The Craft of Refrigeration and Air Conditioning
> ‣ The Craft of Sheet Metalworking
> ‣ The Craft of Toolmaking
> ‣ The Craft of Vehicle Body Repairs
> ‣ The Craft of Wood Machinery
> ‣ The Craft of Electronic Security Systems
> ‣ The Craft of Farriery
> ‣ The Craft of Industrial Insulation

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Apprenticeship Listings

FÁS Apprenticeship applies to the following crafts:

>> Agricultural Mechanics*
>> Aircraft Mechanics*
>> Brick and Stonelaying
>> Cabinetmaking
>> Carpentry & Joinery
>> Construction Plant Fitting*
>> Electrical*
>> Electrical Instrumentation*
>> Electronic Security Systems*
>> **Farriery**
>> Fitting*
>> Floor & Wall Tiling*
>> Heavy Vehicle Mechanics*
>> Industrial Insulation
>> Instrumentation*
>> Metal Fabrication
>> Motor Mechanics*
>> Painting & Decorating*
>> Plastering
>> Plumbing
>> Print Media*
>> Refrigeration & Air Conditioning*
>> Sheet Metalworking
>> Toolmaking
>> Vehicle Body Repairs*
>> Wood Machining

Source:
http://www.fas.ie/en/Training/Apprenticeships/Apprenticeship+Listings/default.htm