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## Notions of a Learning Society and Learning Partnership Vehicles: the Island's Project, a Case Study

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**Notions of a Learning Society and Learning  
Partnership Vehicles:  
“The Island’s Project” – A Case Study**

**By**

**Fergus Murphy**

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
at the School of Art, Design and Printing  
Dublin Institute of Technology

Under the supervision of  
Dr. Siún Hanrahan and Dr. Jen Harvey

June 2010

## **Abstract**

This case study focuses on the Partnership Vehicle that was jointly developed by the School of Art, Design and Printing at the DIT, and the Sherkin Island Development Society in the period 1998 to 2004, in order to construct and deliver a pilot Fine Art programme on Sherkin Island in West Cork. The pilot programme was delivered on Sherkin from 2000 to 2003, and subsequently, based on the pilot, the School of Art, Design and Printing developed a prototype Fine Art degree aimed at isolated communities. This course is currently being delivered on Sherkin.

A third level-community partnership seems an ideal mechanism for furthering academic, local-community and indeed, society's educational aims and goals. However, in order to function at a meaningful level the partners need to display a high degree of flexibility and understanding of each other's needs (and limitations) in order to move toward their goals. In order to describe and understand this process and the journey undertaken by the partnership, I therefore elected to study it against a backdrop of learning society models, with a particular focus on notions of partnership between academic and local-communities, as a means of widening participation.

This process has enabled me to develop an understanding of the underlying motives of the partners in general, and key figures within the partnership in particular. As such, a key facet of this case study has been the opportunity to consider a partnership vehicle and ethos that developed between two communities prior to, and subsequently, in parallel with, higher echelon (e.g. institutional, governmental) strategies aimed at furthering certain lifelong learning and learning society agendas.

## Declaration Page

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Master of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any Institute.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute's guidelines for ethics in research.

The Institute has permission to keep, lend or copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Candidate

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My partner Bernadette Burns, and daughter Roísín.

The members of the “Island’s Project” partnership and the pilot participants.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The initial rationale for this research was to describe and consider an educational endeavour titled the “Islands Project”, a collaboration between the School of Art, Design and Printing at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), and the Sherkin Island Development Society (SIDS). At the heart of the “Island’s Project” was an objective of developing and delivering an accredited third level art course in situ on Sherkin Island, while simultaneously utilizing emerging technology to enable a distance education element.

The “Islands Project” that came into being was a Fine Art programme that had an initial intake of student-participants in autumn 2000, with another cohort the following year and which came to an end in the summer of 2003. The programme was accredited under the short course system available to the School of Art, Design and Printing at the DIT.

Student-participants on the pilot were drawn from South Western Islands such as Sherkin, Cape Clear, Heir and from the West Cork mainland and ranged in age from mid twenties to their early seventies, reflecting the “adult-learner’ bias at



whom the course was aimed. There were approximately twenty “student-participants” in two stages on the pilot course up to 2003.

Following the completion of the programme in 2003, the Island development society in association with the West Cork Arts Centre developed and enacted a professional development course for the “Islands Project” participants. Based on their experience of the pilot programme, the School of Art, Design and Printing (hereafter referred to as the School) has developed a prototype degree (BA in Visual Art) aimed at isolated communities.

## **1.2 The Research Project**

This research project was always going to focus on the “Islands Project” as a case study and much of my initial work was concerned with establishing a workable context within which to consider the project. There were certainly a number of contexts within which the “Islands Project” might have been viewed for the purpose of research. It might, for example, be viewed within the context of a third level outreach paradigm, or perhaps within the context of targeted educational funding for isolated communities. Alternatively, it might be viewed within the context of pedagogical strategies for a third level institute delivering a distance education course (as in the case of the original research title). However the hybrid nature of the “Islands Project”, neither classifiable as third level outreach, beyond a normative second-chance educational project, nor a distance or situated education project, pointed me in another direction. Increasingly the

most interesting characteristic of the “Islands Project” as I saw it, was the Partnership Vehicle developed by the partners to deliver the pilot programme.

This vehicle, as I will endeavour to show, was marked by an ability to navigate and pursue its aims in an arena of learning beyond limited educational boundaries and consequently my research has come to be a consideration of events relating to the “Islands Project” less in terms of an educational endeavour with educational outcomes and objectives, and more as a learning partnership. There have certainly been formal, accredited educational dividends, but also less formal, unaccredited (and perhaps beyond accreditation) learning outcomes for the various participants through their development of a partnership vehicle.

Of particular note has been the partnership’s formulation and operation not as a result of particular strategic decisions or policies, but rather at a lower structural level. To follow the military terminology, the partnership vehicle developed at a tactical level initially involving individuals on the ground networking on the basis of personal relationships, later taking shape at small unit level, i.e., at the level of school, community and student cohort. In short it came about, broadly speaking, in advance of Institute strategy and Government policy, at a grass-roots level.

### 1.3 The Literature Review

In the early stages of the literature review the focus naturally reflected the original research title<sup>1</sup>. These early brushes with all things pedagogical while alerting me that a purely educational viewpoint was too constricting for the case study in-hand, also led me to Edgar Faure's pivotal report for UNESCO in 1972, "Learning to be". This report fortuitously introduced me to notions of lifelong learning (crucially lifelong education in Faure's case), terms that have become something of an Irish policy catch all. Indeed, while contemporary national/ international educational (and indeed employment) policy hoists the banner of lifelong learning as the goal or solution to the imperative of "change", it seems less clear what problem in particular is being addressed. In other words, if Lifelong Learning is the solution, what exactly is the problem? As we shall see, it is perhaps more correct to consider Lifelong Learning/ Education in a strategic light, while any attempt to identify the source of these strategies must look elsewhere, towards notions of a "learning society".

In engaging with such notions one quickly discerns a shift in emphasis from education to learning, or as Edwards (1997) frames it, from *inputs* to *outputs*. This is something of a double-edged sword. While on the one hand it seems appropriate to consider the efficacy of education in a lifelong learning context, there is some suspicion that issues of government funding and provision for such an enterprise are perhaps being side-stepped with the responsibility for "learning"

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<sup>1</sup> Pedagogical strategies for distance education in practice-based disciplines.

being shifted predominantly onto the learner. That being said, broadening the debate beyond the traditional educational arena appears to offer an opportunity to widen the constituency of those who have an input in setting the agenda. As such, by acknowledging the place of learning in its various forms, throughout society, voices like Faure helped initiate a debate as to what sort of society is being strived for. In short, a broadening of the agenda from education to learning invites a more critical engagement with the curriculum of our society.

The arena of “a Learning Society” therefore presents an ideal context within which to consider the partnership vehicle developed on the “Islands Project”, as it allows the scope to be widened beyond a traditional educational viewpoint. In this respect, the work of Richard Edwards is crucial to this research. Edwards posits the concept of “change” as central to the contemporary experience and clearly emphasises its centrality to an understanding of notions of “a Learning Society”. The larger questions to be asked in relation to “change” (questions that frequently seem to pass unnoticed) have to do with issues of power and control. Who or what is empowered to decide and formulate change? Who or what is subject to that formulation? Or to put it in a simpler form, whose voice is being heard or valued, and whose voice is absent or perhaps less valued? This research aims to apply such questions to the partnership vehicle developed on the “Islands Project” in order to tease out the motives of the various participants in its construction and to describe that partnership in terms of Edwards’ notions of a Learning Society

## 1.4 The Case Study

Choosing the Partnership Vehicle as the case study phenomenon allows a consideration of learning society notions in three intersecting communities. As such this research centres on these communities coming to terms with the forces of change. Primarily it is the Island and School communities, as the principle partners, that are the focus of this study. However, a third entity, the DIT, although not a formal partner as such, also has a considerable bearing on the Partnership Vehicle.

Of necessity I shall therefore map out the partnership in its broadest form as a composite entity in various stages of development. Each stage of the partnership has its particular aims and objectives, as do the separate partners. These partners have exterior relationships to consider, with motives particular and peculiar to themselves as individuals and as members of groups. Through this process I shall aim to engage with terms such as **change, flexibility, lifelong learning, and partnership**; terms that have reached the level of common currency in the contemporary world, but which for that very reason require some attention in relation to their meaning.

Finally, having set out what this research aims to consider, it is incumbent upon me to set out what falls outside the boundaries of this research. In adopting a descriptive case methodology I am expressly not attempting a comparative

method, one that would compare this project with another/ other model(s). I will not attempt to show that it was a better or worse form of learning than that available on another School programme in Dublin, for example. Rather, in describing what has occurred in the “Island’s Project” Partnership, I aim to set out and map the particular learning/ partnership structure, a flexible construct which can be henceforth utilised in formulating other learning partnerships through explicitly acknowledging variable contexts.

## Chapter 2

### Re - formulation of the research title

#### 2.1 introduction

This research project has been something of a journey. The metaphor is rather hackneyed but useful just the same, as tackling the original research title involved me trying to get to the very heart of the endeavour developed for Sherkin in order to consider what questions needed to be raised. It was through that questioning process that I came to re-formulate the research title, a process, I believe, that requires some mapping here as it greatly assists in positioning the research.

#### 2.2 Rationale

The initial project title came through a successful research funding application submitted, in house, by the School of Art, Design and Printing at DIT. The School wished to extract some sort of pedagogical model from their experience on the “Islands Project” pilot, which at the time (October 2001) was just commencing its second stage, with the intake of a second cohort of “student-participants”. To this end the initial project title for the research proposed was:

**Pedagogical strategies for distance education in practice based disciplines.**

Upon my selection to research the project, I initially broke the title down into two broad sub-sections, namely: pedagogy and distance education (the “practice based” element being somewhat inter-twinned with the “distance education” element in the context of this research project) and commenced a broad literature trawl.

In engaging with notions of pedagogy, it quickly became evident that there was a considerable breadth of meaning within the discourse, the term pedagogy being open to a range of definitions and a myriad of understandings. Conventionally, the term is used in either a holistic sense, meaning teaching, or in a rather more technical sense, meaning the theory of teaching as employed by teachers. However, in the last decades there has been some attempt to distinguish teaching methods employed with adults (andragogy) from those employed with children (pedagogy).

An initial problem encountered in the face of such variance was the positioning of oneself in relation to the selection of the pedagogical definition. As such the dilemma is somewhat political in nature, a matter of where one wishes to sit in relation to education and/ or learning. In other words, does one align oneself with the “learner” or with the “learned” (teachers/ institution), or perhaps in an attempt to gain some sort of critical distance on both these parties, does one look beyond both these camps and focus on the “learning”. Another problem encountered in relation to pedagogical theory was historical in nature; that is, where to start? The



lineage of thought on learning seems endless. For example, the publishers Routledge have produced an overview of key thinkers in education in two volumes. These highlight the enormity of the subject, tracing a lineage from Confucious to Jesus to Nietzsche to Freire and beyond.

Fortunately, an answer to these inaugural difficulties was close at hand. While I was considering what might be broadly termed as theory, I was concurrently looking at policy in the form of Irish and EU educational documents. A phrase contained within the recently (at the time) published Irish White Paper on adult education, "Learning for life" (2000), caught my eye. It espoused "learning as **construction** rather than as **instruction**", which on further investigation alerted me to the work of Lev Vygotsky, and subsequently to Paulo Freire.

Vygotsky's thoughts on learning as a social construction and his formulation of a theory known as the "zone of proximal development" (Daniels 2001) have been, somewhat belatedly, receiving much consideration in the last few decades.

Vygotsky (1896-1934) was prominent in his field in the formative years of the USSR. A key element within his theories is a belief that learning is a social construct, Vygotsky laying emphasis on the idea that we construct learning in conjunction or partnership with others and that we explicitly do not learn in isolation.

Freire's overall premise seems to be rather more politically and practically embedded. His theory is a reflection of practical experience of teaching in extremely impoverished conditions, with a particularly Christian theme of death and resurrection. His stance is particularly dualistic in nature, you are either supporting the student or oppressing her/ him. He draws attention to this duality or polarity, however, in order that it may be resolved:

Education must begin with the solution of the teacher – student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.

(Freire 1996: 53)

In order to facilitate this reconciliation, Freire posits a new type of equation of "teacher-students with student-teachers" (Freire 1996: 61), which while validating difference at the same time emphasises their shared concern, i.e., studentship. This perhaps has particular relevance to the "Islands Project", where the students are referred to as "student-participants" rather than students.

In the event, my investigations into pedagogical discourses came to open up, rather than narrow down, the contextual possibilities for the research and identifying a likely context within which to place the research developed into a key consideration for me. Following my initial trawl it was evident that the "Islands project" could be viewed in many different contexts from various pedagogical points of view, from a social point of view or a cultural point of view, to name but a few.

It was through investigation of this topic that I came across what has proved to be a pivotal document, the “Faure Report”. Published by Unesco in 1972 this report appeared at a time of a crisis in education worldwide following the turmoil of the late sixties in western higher education and ongoing post-colonial re-assessment in other spheres. It was drafted in consultation with key voices of the era (such as Freire and Illich) and was something of a landmark in placing a notion of a learning society on the world stage. The Faure report became a stepping stone in my research between voices like Freire and contemporary notions of a learning society. This thread led in turn to the work of Roger Boshier in relation to the Faure document and its notion of the learning society, with Boshier in turn flagging the work of Edwards and his questioning of contemporary discourses of lifelong learning and the various notions of a learning society.

Concepts surrounding a learning society may seem rather abstract. However, linked with learning society notions are the phrases lifelong learning and (to a lesser extent) lifelong education, recurring motifs that are very much to the fore in Irish Government and EU policy documents of late. Indeed, such phrases seem to have particular potency as they appear able to easily cross the boundaries between education and industry. For example, a recent report on lifelong learning was produced and published not by the Department of Education but rather by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2002). While these phrases are used in a policy-type way, as an end in themselves, it is clear that within a discourse of a learning society they are in fact strategic in nature, a

vehicle or tool to implement a particular vision of society in the future. The important questions relate to what it is envisaged that society will look like, and whose vision is being pursued.

As I explored notions of a learning society, I came to realise that such notions provided an ideal contextual framework for the research project. My research into pedagogical theory had alerted me to a notion of education as imbued with issues of power and control (Bernstein) and to its possibility as something more radical (Freire). Vygotsky meanwhile pointed to the possibility of learning as a collaboration, while as I shifted focus from the realm of theory to that of policy, the “Faure report” signaled the prospect of a learning society, a society where learning pervades society.

Having established a new working context, the next element to be re-considered was the phenomenon to be investigated. As the emphasis shifted from a narrow focus on educational outcomes to a wider focus on learning (of which education is, of course, an especially valued part), it became evident to me that the “Island’s Project” course in itself was too narrow a focal point.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the phenomenon that was better suited for study was the Partnership Vehicle created by the partners in order to further their learning (and educational) goals.

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<sup>2</sup> I also came to realise that the term ‘distance education’ did not adequately describe the structure of the educational element of the “Islands Project”. The description distance education perhaps implies an open university type model, students at a distance interacting with an educational centre with limited or no interaction with other students. The situation on the ground in Sherkin very quickly manifested itself as a much more complicated reality. It took the form of a hybrid structure that was constructed around traditional face-to-face interaction as well as technically mediated interaction, a structure based on intensive blocks of student-tutor, student-student interaction. The educational centre oscillating between the locality and the city.

Taking the above into consideration therefore yielded a revised research title which reads as follows;

**Notions of a Learning Society and Learning Partnerships Vehicles**

**“The Islands Project” - A Case Study.**

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The partnership vehicle under consideration in this study came into being at a time when, I will endeavor to show, there was a strong sense among key figures on the “Islands Project” that an attempt to redress educational inequalities was both desirable, and more importantly, possible, at a time of flux in the realm of education both nationally and internationally. An indicator of this sense of flux in the educational system was the increasing prevalence of a term, lifelong learning, which apparently signaled a desire and willingness on the part of policymakers to cultivate a reform of the educational system as a whole by acknowledging that learning occurs in many settings and throughout the learner’s life. The roots of the partnership under consideration here, however, predate key Irish policy documents such as the White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000) which noted “ the adoption of lifelong learning as the governing principle of educational policy”, and strategic action plans such as those developed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2004; HEA, 2008). As such, this case study presents an opportunity to consider a partnership vehicle and ethos that developed between two communities prior to, and subsequently, in parallel with, higher echelon strategies aimed at furthering certain lifelong learning and learning society agendas.

Internationally it is also apparent that lifelong learning has, in the past two decades, come to occupy a prominent place in the policies of western governments (Field, 2000; Boshier, 1998; Edwards & Usher, 2001) and not solely as an educational concept. Rather it has become a fundamental plank in the policy of governance in general, touching on areas such as education, employment and social policy among others (European Commission, 2001).

As an apparent governing principle of our educational system the concept is due a good deal of consideration as the term in itself is rather vague and nebulous and so I have decided to look to its origins in order to ascertain what lies behind the slogan. In doing so I aim come to terms with what policymakers seldom articulate (at least clearly); what sort of society is envisaged as the goal of their policies?

To this end, this review looks at the “Learning to be” report, published by UNESCO in 1972 under the chairmanship of Edgar Faure. The “Faure report” is held to be a landmark document in that it placed a notion of a learning society on policy agendas on a global basis (Boshier, 1998) and crucially, in doing so, foregrounded the concept of active participation of the learner in his/ her learning.

This review of the literature is therefore divided into two sections, the first being concerned with developing an understanding of learning society notions, while

the second section deals with notions of partnership in the educational sector as a means of furthering active participation.

Having so considered what can be called the watershed of lifelong learning and learning society concepts, it is necessary to identify a more contemporaneous consideration with which to engage contemporary notions of a learning society. Richard Edwards provides one such engagement, setting out a framework that identifies three distinct agendas concerning Learning Society notions. These types are the Learning Society as an educated society, the Learning Society as a learning market and the Learning Society as a series of networks. As we shall see each of these models interprets participation in subtly differing ways, viewing the learner as either citizen, consumer or as something more generic. The development of an understanding of these notions will facilitate the construction of a framework, with which to characterise the units of analysis in subsequent chapters.

The second section moves from the theoretical to the practical in dealing with the area of partnerships in the educational realm. As Stuart notes, in an UK context, “effective partnerships emerge as the logical solution to countering educational inequalities” (Stuart 2003: 47), however, despite a widespread push towards partnership in education, definitions and models seem unclear (Stuart 2003: 44). From an Irish perspective, O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh (2004,2005) and Ó Fathaigh (2004) attempt to provide such a necessary understanding of “Partnership”, one



that acknowledges it as a concept that was developed to deliver social and economic dividends, “as a potential avenue out of the shocking levels of unemployment, emigration and general deprivation that Ireland found itself in” (Powell & Geoghegan 2004: 253).

### 3.2.1. “Learning to be.”

“Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow” was produced under the chairmanship of Edgar Faure and was published by UNESCO in 1972. The report is divided into four parts: a preamble plus three parts headed **Findings**, **Futures** and crucially **Towards a learning society**. Ideas concerning Lifelong education and learning were by no means new in 1972 when “Learning to be” was published. Field (2001: 5) traces such notions back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the Faure report itself notes;

The idea of lifelong education has gathered great strength over the past ten years, although it is an illusion to think it a discovery of our time. There is nothing new in the idea of the continuity of the educational process.

(Faure 1972: 142)

Rinne notes that prior to its publication, Paul Lengaard presented a report at a Unesco conference in 1970, entitled “An introduction to lifelong learning” and that in 1973 the OECD published a report on its educational strategy entitled “Recurrent education: a strategy for life long learning” (Rinne 2003: 2). What marks “Learning to be” as a benchmark is that it took lifelong education and the

learning society beyond the theoretical to the realm of policy, placing it firmly on the political agenda.

The “Faure report” fleshes out a global picture of education in which it notes certain types among nations. The report surmises that while all countries regard education as of the greatest importance (as he puts it, “a capital, universal subject”), some countries experience its provision as an exceptionally difficult problem. While the traditional form of education can be seen in certain scenarios to have stood the test of time well, the “Faure report” notes a contemporary “avalanche of criticisms and suggestions which often go as far as to question it in its entirety” (Faure et al., 1972:xix). Contextually the report was born out of an era of political/ educational unrest in the western world, a world in which Western governments seemed in the grip of colonial strife abroad and to be contending with civil unrest at home<sup>3</sup>. Previous norms at a cultural, political and educational level were coming under unprecedented scrutiny and pressure. Indeed the flash-points for many of the clashes between old and new seemed, in a pedagogically fitting manner, to be taking place at the educational coal-face of the school and the university. It seemed that the very presumption of the value of systemic learning and formal education was being brought into question by voices such as Illich (1971) and Freire (1972), a period of educational history which saw “the emergence of the Deschoolers” (Borg and Mayo 2002: 4).

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Hobsbawm recalls Paris in May 1968 as “ the epicentre of a bicontinental outburst of student rebellion, crossing political and ideological frontiers from Berkeley and Mexico City in the west to Warsaw, Prague and Belgrade in the east.”(Hobsbawm 2002; 246)

The report notes the difficulty of “developing countries “ who inherited/ imported/ adopted colonial/ foreign forms of education and have discovered these models to be either obsolete or irrelevant to their needs or problems (Ibid xix, xx). It does acknowledge that there are nations who are broadly content with the makeup of their educational systems and the report affirms their right to this view. However, the overall picture it paints is of educational systems in crisis, of little relevance or at least in difficulty. In short, the report is framed as a global response by a global organisation to a wave of change.

In addressing the relationship between education and democracy, the report casts democracy as also in the process of change. While it was perhaps necessary for the citizenry to delegate power to formal democratic structures at one stage, it is now necessary to assume a more direct participation in the structures of democracy. This is an intriguing proposition in terms of the further democratization of governance:

What is known as formal democracy – which it would be wrong to deride, for it marked great progress – has become obsolete. The delegation of authority for a fixed period had and still has the advantage of protecting the citizen from the arbitrary exercise of power and of providing him with the minimum of juridical guarantees. But it is not capable of providing him with an adequate share of the benefits of expansion or with the possibility of influencing his own fate in a world of flux and change; nor does it allow him to develop his own potential to best advantage.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> What is particularly intriguing about this statement is how well it reads if we substitute the word education for democracy. As we shall see later below, Bernstein’s definition of pedagogy achieves a blurring of the distinction between education and democracy, and indeed ties the operation of effective democracy to certain pedagogic rights.

(Ibid xxiv/ xxv)

Having pointed to difficulties in global education, “Learning to be” moves on to draw out the relationship between the economy, the modes of production and education. It highlights a fundamental change in the relationship between the economy and education that had become evident in certain instances. In the past if we were to consider the evolution of educational activity over time;

we soon see that progress in education accompanies economic progress and, consequently, evolution in production techniques, although it is not always easy to discern the respective causes among the complex, interacting elements.

(Ibid xxii)

Furthermore, the Faure report notes that as economic progress quickens so the educational system tends to ‘dispense’ larger amounts of knowledge to a growing student body, as required by an increasingly sophisticated process of production. Indeed this economic/ educational two-step accounts somewhat for the repetitive and conservative tendency of educational systems. However the report also acknowledges that in education there is also a function that stimulates and consolidates socio-political development.

“Learning to be” emphasises the link between the economic and educational worlds, a link I believe to be crucial to any understanding of a learning society discourse. In doing so it underlines the driving force of economics with regard to educational politics and foregrounds the tension/struggle between social and economic agendas within learning and training. Moreover, in so overtly linking

the realms of economics and education, it highlights the key role of motivation within modern educational policy.

The study of motivation is the key to every modern educational policy. This depends – either cumulatively or alternately – on the search for employment (at a level and with benefits corresponding to the level achieved in studies) and on the desire for learning, the *libido sciendi*. It is, however, striking to note that the first aspect (the search for employment) generally outweighs the second, which, besides, is often regarded as of negligible importance.

(Ibid xxviii)

As we shall see later this sort of tension goes to the heart of the learning society debate. It raises the question as to whose motivational needs are to be answered, those of society, those of the government, those of the economy or those of the individuals, or indeed all of the above.

The Faure report explicitly adopts a learners' viewpoint, to which society's various commercial and non-commercial structures must adapt. The first principle/recommendation put forward by the Faure report sets the agenda from the start. It reads as follows:

**Principle; “Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society.”**

Recommendation; “we propose lifelong education as the master concept for policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries.”

(Ibid 181)

It is upon this premise that the further 20 principles/ recommendations are built. The primary focus is on provision for the individual whose learning needs throughout his or her life are to be provided for. Provision is a key notion here. The ideal of a learning society, as per Faure et al., is implacably tied to the notion of provision, to the notion of lifelong education, which is to be the cornerstone of future policy.

Roger Boshier provides a useful overview of “Learning to be”, categorizing the twenty principles/recommendations into four broad categories. These are **Vertical integration, Horizontal integration, Democratization** and finally, as a result of successfully pursuing the previous three, the attainment of **the learning society**.

Boshier’s concepts of **Vertical integration** and **Horizontal integration** refer on a basic level to ideas of lifelong and lifewide education. Vertical integration refers to a system of education that is available to the citizen throughout his/her life, from the cradle to the grave. Regarding Horizontal integration, Boshier ascribes to the report a desire to foster education in a wide range of non-formal and formal settings. Such a concept proposes to acknowledge and value learning in all its settings, not just formal educational ones. Boshier compares it to the student, whether child or adult, being like a fish, swimming back and forth, securing education in a formal setting today and a non-formal one tomorrow” (Boshier 1998: 8). The “Faure report” is explicitly putting forward a notion of an integrated

educational system, one which is sufficiently flexible to offer the learner access to education at whatever age and to whatever level he/she requires and a system which values learning wherever it occurs;

The Architects of lifelong learning believed it is intolerable to have a situation where education secured in formal settings results in status and credentials, and that gained in non-formal, let alone informal settings, secures few credentials and no status....What counts is what is learnt, not where it was learnt.

(Boshier 1998: 10)

“Learning to be “ was not, however, calling for the abandonment of the traditional educational system. Rather what is envisaged is both a regeneration of formal education and a widening of the educational remit to all of society. As Boshier observes, the report was not about the dismantling of formal settings but rather a widening of the range of accessible educational settings to value education in all its settings: informal, non-formal and formal. As Boshier notes “ The intent of this tripartite distinction is to portray education as something that occurs throughout society” (ibid 11).

The intent of these concepts is to widen the responsibility for education society-wide, so that it is not just the responsibility of the traditional educational establishment. Indeed, Boshier suggests, it is less than desirable that educators hold such power, “ the worst thing that could happen to education is to have it fall into the hands of the educator” (ibid 11).

The third major concept of the “The Faure report “ as seen by Boshier is that of **democratization**. “Learning to be” is critical of the democratic credentials of educational structures and calls for their democratization. However, as the report is careful to point out, such a process will entail a basic restructuring of the system, “to extend widely the field of choice and enable people to follow lifelong education patterns.” The responsibility for such a shift is not just the duty of governments/ formal educationalists. The report extends the remit to employers (appendix 1, item 9), libraries, individuals themselves (appendix 1, item 14), and to workers and professionals (appendix 1, item 19).

Furthermore, simply widening access is not enough. As Boshier (ibid 11) notes, democratization means not only removing the barriers that block access to education but also ensuring that once learners gain entry to those systems, they become implicitly involved in the setting of their own educational agenda, thereby ensuring not only equal access but also equal opportunity. In other words it is foregrounding an ethos of participation.

What we see proposed above is a breaking down of the traditional boundaries of formal education. This involves a widening of roles that would see not just a reform of existing educational structures, but also a swelling of the definition of education to include all the other structures that the individual interacts with throughout her/his life. The vision is of a new sort of society – a learning society. Crucially, this is, on a basic level, a response to forces of change. The response



in the form of “the Faure report” is a call for the re-drawing of boundaries, a reforming of existing educational structures that in turn will lead to a re-modeling of society;

The very nature of the relationship between society and education is changing. A social configuration which accorded such a place to education and conferred such a status on it deserves a name of its own – the learning society. Its advent can only be conceived as a process of close interweaving between education and the social, political and economic fabric, which covers the family unit and civil life. It implies that every citizen should have the means of learning, training and cultivating himself freely available to him, under all circumstances, so that he will be in a fundamentally different position in relation to his own education. Responsibility will replace obligation.

(Faure et al., 163)

The breadth and scope of such an enterprise was not lost on the authors of the report. The report notes that education cannot but be a reflection of its own society. What it envisages is for education to attempt to reflect the society of the future (rather than the past or the status quo) and for society to become more educational in nature. “Learning to be” puts forward a notion of the learning society as an educated society. This is a society in which educational settings, whatever their formality, are valued and provided for the citizen through the whole of his/her life. The report envisages a society where the society-member is encouraged and supported on the journey of lifelong and lifewide education. The citizen, in turn, would reciprocate, as “responsibility will replace obligation” (Faure et al., 163).

Is this a utopian vision? Yes, to the extent that any undertaking which aims at changing the fundamental conditions of man’s fate necessarily contains a utopian element.....But it is not utopian when this prospect seems to conform not only to the present-day world’s fundamental needs

and major evolutionary direction, but also fits many phenomena emerging almost everywhere and in countries whose socio-economic structures and economic development levels are very different. Moreover, it is not so paradoxical as one might think to say there is no good strategy without a utopian forecast, in the sense that every far-reaching vision may be accused of utopianism. For if we wish to act resolutely and wisely, we must aim far.

(Ibid 163/164)

In pointing to the tension between education and the economy, between learning and training, the report sought to re-draw the parameters of education so that society itself would become defined in terms of an educational nature. That is, society would strive to explicitly adopt an educational character. At the same time education would expand its normative boundaries to facilitate the citizen learner in the pursuit of knowledge throughout his/her life and in the myriad of settings where learning takes place. Boshier uses the terms vertical and horizontal integration to describe this stretching of the boundaries.

The third strategy of the report as identified by Boshier is that of democratization. The “Faure report” emphasises the place of the citizen learner at the centre of the learning. As Boshier points out, the report seeks to involve the learner in his/her learning process to the full so that while education plays its part in democracy, education becomes democratic in nature. This is no small objective;

*It is an enormous task. Conceptually, it presupposes that we cease confusing, as people have more or less consciously done for a long while, equal access to education with equal opportunity, and broad access to education with democracy in education.*

(Boshier 1998: 79)

What is of particular interest to this research is the way the report reacts to the imperative to change. This early learning society agenda sets the task of change to be met by all strands of society that is the economic, social and educational spheres. The manner by which this is to be pursued is through three strands, Vertical and horizontal integration together with democratization. It is the latter that is of particular interest to this research, as within this core concept lies the idea of participation.

In conclusion the “Faure report” provides a useful historical starting point in gaining an understanding of what is meant by “the learning society”. With the report’s publication came the spelling out of a global agenda which envisaged a re-definition of education, of education’s role within society and, in the process, the re-imagining of society itself.

### **3.2.2. Contemporary notions of a learning society.**

The “Faure report” championed a notion of the learning society, one that envisaged a society that provided educational opportunities to its citizen across the plethora of possible learning settings, throughout the citizen’s life. Within such a notion all facets of society were to participate fully in learning and in so doing assume responsibility through participation. The embedded educational nature of society was coupled with a democratization of education. Society was imagined as becoming educational and education as becoming more democratic.

However, Rinne (2003) notes that in the late 1990s powerful supranational players issued policy/discussion documents which while heralding “lifelong learning” as the pre-eminent goal, seemed to be setting out a narrower concept than that envisaged by the “Faure report”. Lifelong learning as proposed by the O.E.C.D. in 1996 (“Lifelong learning for all”) and the European Commission in 1995 (“Teaching and learning – Toward the learning society”) concerned itself not so much with learning through education as with learning through training.

In these discussions the frame of reference has changed to become more and more economic. The discourse of the whole “learning economy” focuses on the themes such as employee skills and competence, a flexible work force, productivity and competitiveness. Life-long learning is also seen as an up-to-date answer to the problem of unemployment.

(Rinne 2003: 3)

For Boshier, this new policy of lifelong learning as posited by the EU and the O.E.C.D. is nothing short of hi-jacking. The “Faure report’s” advocacy of a learning society, achievable in part through a strategy of lifelong education has been supplanted by a theme of lifelong learning, a vision of society primarily in terms of the economy:

Everywhere Faure’s concepts and language have been stolen by advocates of a form of globalization which has everything to do with corporate élites and economies and, in stark contrast to what Faure was saying, appears untroubled by the erosion of civil society and democratic structures.

(Boshier 1998: 5)

That is not to say that social issues are absent from the “1990ers” (Rinne 2003) policies. However, as Rinne (ibid 3) notes it is more likely to be a Minister for Finance than a Minister for Education who is speaking about lifelong learning.<sup>5</sup>

There appears, therefore, to be a sharing of language but difference in meaning between the Learning Society as espoused by the “Faure report” and later notions. It is therefore necessary to consider the differing agendas that lie beneath the catch-phrases.

Boshier (1998) identifies Edwards as providing a useful map of learning society discourses. Edwards (1997) identifies three discourses that give different constructions of the learning society. These are:

- As an educated society
- As a learning market
- As a series of learning networks.<sup>6</sup>

#### **A learning society as an educated society.**

The learning society is an educated society, committed to active citizenship, liberal democracy and equal opportunities. This supports lifelong learning within the social policy frameworks of post – Second World War

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<sup>5</sup> In the Irish context it was the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, rather than the Department of Education, which published the “Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002).

<sup>6</sup> Rinne meanwhile refers to Green (2000) who likewise sets out a platform based on three models of lifelong learning. These are not dissimilar to Edward’s models although they are constructed in terms of “lifelong learning “ strategies as displayed by various European countries, rather than Edward’s learning society notions. The models are the state – led model of lifelong learning, the social partnership model and the market – led model.

social democracies. The aim is to provide learning opportunities to educate adults to meet the challenges of change and citizenship. Support for this conception was put forward largely by liberal educators in the metropolitan areas of the industrialised North in the 1960's and 1970's. This is part of a modernist discourse.

(Edwards 1997: 184)

Edwards sees early notions of a learning society as developing alongside those of recurrent education and lifelong learning. As we have seen above, a concept of lifelong education as policy coalesced in the form of UNESCO's "Learning to be" in 1972. Boshier notes that at roughly the same time, also in Paris, the OECD was working on policy that would take up the baton of recurrent education. Both types of policy, while differing in focus, concerned themselves within a focus on "input" that is, what inputs should national governments develop to provide educational opportunities for their citizens. Edwards perceives an agenda firmly focused on education, no mention of training at this stage. This notion of an educated society, Edwards notes, was foregrounded by the OECD (1973) and the European commission who point to its application in Sweden as a model of good practice. Edwards suggests however, that such a model emerged from a seemingly ongoing economic security. Therefore this notion of an educated society is underpinned by a presumed economic tranquillity, a presumption profoundly shaken by the economic fragility experienced in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, such a notion of an educated society has embedded within it a strong sense of the individual's presumed allegiance to the collective and in order to participate fully, it is the individual citizen's duty to participate in education.

Lifelong education becomes a form of socialisation into the norms and practices of the collectivity, part of the social order and ordering of the social, reflecting the advent of education in the ‘non-democratic domains of bureaucratic government and spiritual discipline’ (Hunter 1994; 176). An educated society is, therefore, both a condition for and an outcome of participation in liberal democratic social formations - a specific form of governmentality.

(Edwards 1997: 176/7)

Education in such a manifestation is presumed to be universally good, of benefit to all. Education is a generalisable and transferable commodity, something responsible citizens strive for as a necessary precursor to full participation in the collective. However, Edwards points out that while recurrent education supports learning and participation, just who the participants are and what forms of participation are envisaged are open to question or perhaps are questions seldom posed at all:

The emphasis is highly normative, apparently divorced from an analysis of power in the social formation and, with an emphasis on provision, very much situated within a view of the assumed inherent worth of liberal education.

(Ibid 177)

Indeed, Edward’s points to an apparent paradox, one that goes largely unexplained within such a discourse. That is, the lack of resultant political participation by citizens as a result of increased participation in education.

It is, however, possible to view an educated society discourse within a more progressive modernist reading. In such a reading lifelong education supports those on the margins in the decision making process by actively encouraging the disenfranchised to make their voices heard. It is a moot point, however, whether

such an articulation in reasoned debate results in any real shift in the balance of power;

The order is not imposed through education as a discipline, but invoked in the seduction of individuals to self-discipline as a condition for their collective well - being—a revival or continuation of liberal contractualism. For both, however, it is a liberal democratic order which governs the limits of a learning society, even when the latter is argued to be oppressive, ignoring the class, gender and 'race' inequalities embedded in its practice.

(Ibid 177)

Edwards perceives two “significant and inter-related challenges” to the above liberal democratic citizenship or perhaps conservative social order goal of an educated society. The first such challenge is moulded in terms of a learning market, the second in terms of learning networks.

### **A learning society as a Learning Market.**

Edwards notes that early notions of an educated society proved to be somewhat lacking in influence and in any event, a presumed bedrock of economic security revealed itself to be a rather shaky foundation. This led to the first challenge which proposes a society as a type of marketplace, where the needs of the economy are paramount, a design championed by employers organisations in a broad utilitarian thrust:

A learning society is a learning market, enabling institutions to provide services for individuals as a condition for supporting the competitiveness of the economy. This supports lifelong learning within the economic policy framework adopted by many governments since the middle of the 1970s. The aim is for the market in learning opportunities to be developed to meet the demands of individuals and employers for the updating of skills



and competences. Support for this conception has come from employers' bodies and modernising policy think – tanks in the industrialised North since the mid – 1970s in response to economic uncertainty. The usefulness or performativity of education become a guiding criterion.  
(Edwards 1997: 184)

The construction of a discourse of a learning society as a learning market has changed the substance of the notion and re-modeled it in three significant ways. Firstly, more attention is focused on utility in learning, utility being of paramount importance as a criterion within this discourse. This is discernible in Ireland in an emphasis on encouraging education in relation to technology in general and computer sciences in particular, the latter being highlighted as a central plank in the “Celtic tiger” model. Secondly, further emphasis is placed on the individual as the securer of his/her own learning throughout his/her life. Thirdly, the debate on learning is broadened to include not just educators and learners but other “stakeholders” within society/the market such as employers, policy-makers, trade unions, etc.<sup>7</sup> Broadly speaking then, the early discourse of a learning society as an educated society, which made little headway, is displaced by the more influential, indeed dominant notion of a learning market. Evident in this displacement is a shift in focus from collective responsibility in providing opportunities to members of society to a focus on the responsibility of the individual to seek out and consume learning opportunities in a learning market;

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<sup>7</sup> The adoption of marketplace phraseology into the educational and indeed the broad democratic realm is most interesting. Citizens (including students) have been re-branded as “customers” or perhaps “stakeholders”. What seems seldom considered is the suitability of such a metaphor for meaningful learning or effective democracy. A “Customer’s” role is to participate through consumption. As for a “shareholder”, while having voting rights, the efficacy is based solely on an economic criterion, that is, how many shares one holds.

This shift is one from the *polis*, in which members of a community decide their collective fate, to the market, in which individuals pursue self-interest as consumers. For some, this is liberating, as it 'frees' them from the 'deadening hand' of the collective and the bureaucratic management of the state-funded and state-administered institutions. However, this is largely at the expense of a conception of the collective, of society, as having the possibility for being a shared condition and one of mutual interests and responsibilities.

(Ibid 178/ 9)

Such a shift foregrounds an ethos of the market place, economic relevance and the individual as consumer. The nation state offers marketplace solutions to economic, social and cultural problems and attempts a re-drawing of boundaries accordingly, while retreating from the field. Within such a market-place context, institutions that previously paraded as learning providers must now dance to a different tune, re-branding themselves as businesses, making a pitch for students, who are re-constituted as customers.

Boshier notes a shift in the policy emphasis on the part of supra-national influential bodies like the OECD and the EU. Such institutions sidestep issues of provision and "input" in favour of an emphasis on product and "output". This is achieved by concentrating on the nebulous strategy of lifelong learning (learning throughout one's life being an intrinsic part of the human condition) to the detriment of provision issues, that is lifelong education. For Boshier and others, a learning market strategy is a sort of re-branding of re-current education concerns.

Lifelong learning has largely developed as a policy strategy to support the wider aim of economic competitiveness. It has emerged as a challenge to established providers of education and training and part of the challenge has been the very concept of lifelong learning itself, and the way it has

shifted the focus from institutional structures to people's participation and learning.

(Edwards et al.1998: 8)

Edwards however cautions against casting a learning market discourse in unambiguously negative terms, for to do so would be to ignore the inherent ambiguity of the contemporary experience. So while some would critique a learning market paradigm in terms of its emphasis on individualism to the cost of a community ethos, others would point to the freedom experienced by some in eschewing fossilised educational traditions. In any event, Edwards notes;

This simplistic rejection of the market signifies an inability to engage with the ambivalence of the contemporary period, a reflexive silence on the fact that it was primarily white, middle-class families who benefited from welfare state policies and the fact that it is under conditions of marketisation that there has been a massive expansion of the learning opportunities available to adults.

(Ibid 181)

### **A learning society as a series of learning networks.**

The second major challenge to notions of a learning society as an educated society has been broadly social and cultural and is that of a learning society as a series of learning networks. This challenge posits a view of society as a group of networks, a view that does not seek to exclude or deny the economic element, but rather to embrace both social and economic factors:

A learning society is one in which learners adopt a learning approach to life, drawing on a wide range of resources to enable them to support their lifestyle practices. This supports lifelong learning as a condition of individuals in the contemporary period in which policy needs to respond. This conception of a learning society formulates the latter as a series of overlapping learning networks or neo – tribes, for example, local, national, regional, global, and is implicit to much of the writing on postmodernity

with its emphasis on the contingent, the ephemeral and heterogeneity. The normative goals of a liberal democratic society – a learning market – are displaced by a conception of participation in learning as an activity in and through which individuals and groups pursue their heterogeneous goals.

(Edwards 1997: 184)

This discourse questions normative definitions of what exactly society is, such definitions having been intrinsically tied to the nation state, in itself a relatively new construction in the human experience. However, in a contemporary experience of ever-shifting boundaries;

The concept of learning networks is closely associated with the concept of civil society, and serves to highlight the social purpose of education. Furthermore it can be argued that the notion of learning networks problematises notions of society in that different forms of sociality and learning networks are developing. Rather than being members of a single society, we are part of a 'series of overlapping and inter – related local, regional, national, international, global societies'

(Edwards et al 1997: 29)

Edward's identifies a discourse that, while displacing the first two discourses, does not aim to replace them. Rather, what is being suggested is a series of networks that place education at the centre of social activity, focusing on both "inputs" and "outputs";

Learning networks are where learners adopt a learning approach to life, drawing on a wide range of resources to enable them to support themselves. This supports lifelong learning as a condition of individuals in the contemporary period to which policy needs to respond. Society is a series of overlapping networks e.g. local, national, regional, global. The normative goals of a liberal democratic society-an educated society – and an economically competitive society - are overlayed by a conception of participation in learning as an activity in and through which individuals and groups pursue their heterogeneous goals.

(Edwards et al 1997: 27)

In considering Edwards' models, Boshier frames both the educated society and the learning network society in terms of arenas, the former being an arena for citizenship and the latter as an arena for participation. A society of learning networks displaces notions of a market and an arena for citizenship by proposing education "as a central activity through which collectivities pursue a wide assortment of goals...Education pervades society and is no longer the monopoly of formal settings or educators" (Boshier 13).

At this stage it would be prudent to consider a central theme that runs through this review, that is, a notion of change. The "Faure report" is after all, on a basic level, a reply to the radical social change of the 1960s and "the perception that the traditional school system was no longer capable of responding to new social trends" (Schugurensky 2003: 2). Indeed the realm of learning, at its base, might be said to concern itself with change in the individual. Furthermore, allied to notions of change are notions of boundaries, as change inevitably brings boundary crossing and the possibility of a re-drawing of boundaries.

### **Change and Boundaries**

Concepts of change and boundaries also play an important role in Edwards' ideas concerning learning society notions as he highlights the centrality of change to the contemporary experience. Change, Edwards notes, and particularly its unpredictable nature, is often held to be a central facet of the

contemporary world, and “is also central to the growth in interest in lifelong learning and a learning society” (Edwards 1997: 22). In particular, he draws attention to an often narrowly economic and technological framework within which change is viewed. While shifts in the structure of the economy through globalisation are often scrutinised within this framework, he notes that the significance of environmental, socio-political change should not be understated.

While acknowledging the difficulty of gaining a critical distance on the process of change, due to its close proximity, Edwards nevertheless points to a number of types of change. Change in action, so to speak. These are cultural change, technological change, demographic change and the form of change that tends to be foregrounded, economic change.

Edwards notes the preeminence of the concept of flexibility within economic change and perceives two aspects to ideas of flexibility: flexibility within the discourse of competitiveness and within the discourse of insecurity. While the dominant discourse appears to be competitiveness, the relationship between the two is perhaps more intimate than it might seem. What is being suggested is that through highlighting a discourse of insecurity, the way is paved for offering up or discovering competitiveness as the solution to the problem, the way to be competitive being through flexibility (ibid 30/31). Indeed such a notion of change not only sets itself up as the preeminent global problem and solution couple but by its very nature it also “excludes the possibilities of alternative ways of

organising the global economy and the labour market. Also, it has constructed a view that makes the possibility of national governments intervening to regulate the market appear to be illegitimate” (Edwards 1997: 27).

Reflecting on such a discourse where attention is focused on ‘insecurity’ and the solution of ‘flexibility’ in order to attain ‘competitiveness’, while excluding alternative problems and solutions, perhaps one can sense a point Basil Bernstein makes about ‘horizontal solidarities’.

### **Bernstein’s discourse of Mythology.**

Before examining the above it is necessary to consider Bernstein’s definition of pedagogy. As I outlined in the introduction to this research, pedagogy itself is used in a wide variety of contexts. While ordinarily pedagogy is concerned with the principles and practice of teaching children, Bernstein sees it as a much broader enterprise which extends the boundaries of pedagogy well beyond its implied context of education;

Pedagogy is a sustained process whereby somebody(s) acquires new forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria, from somebody(s) or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator. Appropriate either from the point of view of the acquirer or by some other body(s) or both.

(Bernstein 1999:259)

Bernstein’s definition attempts to disentangle the relationship between the provider/ evaluator and the ‘somebody(s)’, who are the acquirer. The concept of the division of labour plays quite a prominent role within the pieces by Bernstein

considered later on, and it is evident here too. While he introduces the definition by highlighting the position of power occupied by the former, he lays open to question who has given the provider and evaluator this remit. Have they appointed themselves or has 'some other body(s) or both'. It is by no means certain that the acquirer has had a hand in the appointment. Viewed in the context of this chapter section, we can sense within this definition power in the form of the boundary between the acquirer and the provider/ evaluator.

Indeed, I would suggest that one could further distill a definition of pedagogy in this vein, with its providers, evaluators and acquirers, to an essence, **the control of change**, and as we shall see below, the centrality of change to the various discourses of a learning society is crucial.

Having established these rights and conditions, Bernstein narrows focus to consider how the school attempts to handle issues like social order, justice and conflict, within the school. In other words how does the school internally deal with supposedly external issues. He notes that Bourdieu, for example, proposes that the school accomplishes this by posing as a neutral entity, by pretending that the power structure within the school is created by a different criteria than those evident in the hierarchies outside the school. In doing so, the school, according to Bourdieu, is implicitly validating and legitimising the inequalities between social groups, what Bourdeau calls 'la violence symbolique' (Bernstein 1996: 9). While not discounting Bourdieus' thesis, Bernstein suspects that the 'trick' does not



work in only this way and that certain social groups are well aware that schooling is not neutral and indeed use this knowledge to improve their children's' pedagogic progress. Bernstein suggests that the 'trick' which disconnects the internal hierarchy of school from the external hierarchy of external society takes the form of a **mythological discourse**.

This mythological discourse contains some of society's arrangements and political beliefs, and performs a crucial function in reducing or diffusing tension between social groups. This is achieved within a discourse which emphasises "what all groups share, their community, their apparent interdependence" (ibid 9). This is what Bernstein labels as **horizontal solidarities**, whose purpose is to "contain and ameliorate vertical (hierarchical) cleavages between social groups" (ibid 9).

Within this paradigm of mythological discourse Bernstein identifies two pairs of elements which while performing different functions, combine to support each other. These pairs are the myths of national consciousness and integration, and the dual myths of hierarchy;

One pair celebrates and attempts to produce a united, integrated, apparently common national consciousness; the other pair work together to disconnect hierarchies within the school from a casual relation with social hierarchies outside the school.

(Ibid 9)

In relation to the former Bernstein notes the key role within modern societies that the school plays as a tool for "writing and re-writing national consciousness". A

national consciousness is molded out of “myths of origin, achievements and destiny”, and so in turn, the horizontal solidarity thus created, produces “fundamental and culturally specific identities”(ibid 10). Paired with this myth, and working towards an integrated national consciousness, is a myth of society as an organism within which groups relate to each other through interdependence of specialised functions. This myth of society as an organism serves to skim over the cleavages of differentials in power and potential within the structure of society, by thus highlighting a discourse of “equivalence through difference”. Such a myth plays its part in maintaining and justifying gender relations, the notion of complementary difference; “differences which allegedly have their basis in biology” (ibid 10).

The second pair of myths, which he groups under “myths of hierarchy”, strive to ‘disconnect’ the school’s strata from the stratification at work externally, in society in general. The school’s basic principle for the stratification of groups is age, an apparently “non-arbitrary” principle, in comparison with the arbitrary principles for stratification at work externally, like class, race, gender, religion, race etc. Therefore, students’ progression through the school is “legitimized by an apparent non-arbitrary principle”(ibid 10/11). Also, the school produces a hierarchy which deals with the success and failure of its students. However, this hierarchy potentially poses a threat to the horizontal solidarities, both inside and outside the school and so the school must disconnect its own hierarchy of success or failure from questions of the efficacy of the teaching;

How do schools individualize failure and so legitimize inequalities? The answer is clear: -failure is attributed to inborn facilities (cognitive, affective) or to the cultural deficits relayed by the family which come to have the force of inborn facilities.

(Ibid 10/11)

Bernstein emphatically places class at the centre of his consideration of democracy and education. He notes that class analysis seems to have faded from educational research in favour of other factors such as gender and race. However, he is adamant that any consideration of democracy, culture and education must “consider the constraints and grip of class-regulated realities”(ibid 11). Furthermore, he notes the underlying structure-wide pressures at work, which result from ongoing shifts within the division of labour. This feeds back into his initial definition of pedagogic rights;

Class cultures act to transform micro differences into macro inequalities and these inequalities raise crucial issues for the relation between democracy and education. It may be that the serious question becomes one of what shortfall, what limitation of pedagogic democratic right, for whom and where, is a given society prepared to tolerate and, at any one time, accept. Those subject to this shortfall, this limitation of pedagogic democratic rights, must be given good reason (and possibly other rights) if they are to have any confidence in the present and belief in the future.

(Ibid 11/12)

### **Power and Control**

Bernstein returns to boundaries more particularly in dealing with ‘Pedagogic Codes and their Modalities of practice’. Here he critiques theories of cultural reproduction in focusing solely on education as the carrier of society’s power

relations, while they pay less attention to pedagogy as a discourse in itself (ibid 18). Having focused on the media rather than the message, Bernstein concentrates on identifying and separating the strands of power and control in the pedagogic moment (remembering the breath of the moment which is as evident in government as it is in education).

Power as understood in Bernstein is to be sensed in the realm of classification. Power constructs and maintains boundaries between classifications, and so it exists in the space between classification, creating, legitimising, reproducing, maintaining and where necessary re-creating boundaries between categories (Bernstein 1996; 19). While power is located in the space between categories, control, on the other hand, is concerned with establishing legitimate and appropriate forms of behavior within such categories, "Control carries the boundary relations of power and socializes individuals into these relationships" (ibid 19). However, Bernstein notes, control is inscribed with both the ability to reproduce itself and with the potential for its own change.

Proceeding from his definition of the above relations, Bernstein highlights the crucial role of that space **between** categories that gives definition to those categories;

But I want to argue that the crucial space which creates the specialization of the category - in this case the discourse - is not internal to that discourse but is the space between that discourse and another. In other words, A can only be A if it can effectively insulate itself from B. In this sense there is no A if there is no relationship between A and something else ...it is the insulation

between the categories of discourse which maintains the principles of their social division of labour. (Bernstein 1996: 20)

Critically, according to Bernstein, if an insulation is broken, the category is in danger of losing its identity because the very essence of what it is, is defined in that space between it and another category. Also, a modulation in the insulation's strength will result in a change in the principles of the division of labour (ibid 21).

More crucially however;

Attempts to change degrees of insulation reveal the power relations on which classification is based and which it reproduces.

(Ibid 21)

Now this is most interesting in terms of our investigation of a learning society. As we have seen with Edwards, change is crucial to an understanding of learning society discourses and so when we add Bernstein's concept to the equation, notions of a learning society can provide us with an insight into the power relations at work. To this end Bernstein suggests some basic questions to be asked;

- which group is responsible for initiating the change? Is the change initiated by a dominant group or a dominated group?
- If values are weakening, what values remain strong?

(Ibid 30)

By posing these sort of questions one can perhaps uncover the hierarchical nature of inter-group relationships.

Bernstein's definition of pedagogy opens the realm of learning to questions of power and control, scrutinizing that which is broadly assumed to be positive, i.e., education. He proposes that within the character of education is a function that denies "vertical cleavages" (for example, class inequality) in favour of an emphasis on "horizontal solidarities" (for example, nationalism). The cleavage tends to be ignored while the solidarity is highlighted, an assumed general good. As Hart notes regarding the dominant economic agenda:

Currently predominating responses to changes in the global market system move mostly within a production-oriented paradigm of economic development, with an overwhelming emphasis on skills and techniques, preparing students for work in hierarchical organisations. Such a paradigm generates an interpretation of the current crisis which screens out the most important and most troubling aspects of the crisis: the increase in precarious, unstable work relations, the growing North/South division, the feminisation of poverty in conjunction with a new sexist division of labour, and the continued destruction of the environment.  
(Hart 1992:89)

Edwards asserts that the discourse of competitiveness has underwritten the thought and policy of many governments in the last two decades of the twentieth century and notes that "Restrains on the operation of the market have been removed in order for the 'spirit of enterprise' to be unleashed" (Ibid 31). Boshier (1998), Hart (1992) and Rinne (2003) likewise note the preeminence of an economic agenda, to the detriment of other spheres.

The other three types of change identified by Edwards, while less prominent than economic change, also appear problematic and may be agenda driven. With

regard to cultural change, Edwards points, for example, to the blurring of boundaries between what is held to be high and low culture, and between “education and entertainment, and education and leisure” (ibid 46). He notes the place of consumerism in an understanding of participation in lifelong learning, further noting that even though this may be unpalatable to some educationalists, it is imperative in any understanding of participation.

In dealing with technological change, Edwards cautions against any discourse which attempts to frame it as a ‘neutral’ or indeed ‘natural’ process. This sort of change is much more “complex and ambiguous” than is often portrayed, and discourses which highlight the need for adapting to technological imperatives in the name of competitiveness are open to challenge;

They can be challenged in relation to the necessity, direction and speed of such changes and the differential impact they have on adults and the differing possibilities of participating in shaping technological change. However, adaptation to technological change would appear to be the dominant experience for many adults rather than participating in and shaping the processes of change.

(Ibid 57)

Edwards also notes the contestable nature of such change which on the one hand can be seen as enhancing aspects of flexible, open and distance education while on the other may be viewed as increasing the learner’s sense of isolation and burden of responsibility (ibid 55).

A concern with demographic change, he notes, played a significant role in the 1980s UK and elsewhere. An anticipated drop in the numbers of young people travelling through the education system would have a knock on effect of a shortage of labour and drop in higher level numbers, while at the same an increased longevity would see an increase in the proportion living beyond 65. The former is the sort of concern often highlighted in contemporary Irish educational discourses, relating to third level participation particularly. Edwards notes, however, that while this sort of discourse in the UK did increase access, in fact “the demographic timebomb failed to materialise in the way that it had been expected”(Ibid 59). He identifies two possible explanations for this. Firstly (and this is most interesting when read in conjunction with Bernstein’s concept of an underlying class-regulated reality within democracy, education and culture) he points to research on the class composition of the particular group of young people entering initial education;

While the proportion of young people overall fell, there was a greater percentage of middle- and upper - class youngsters amongst that cohort.  
(Smithers and Robinson 1989) (Ibid 59)

In conjunction with the above he cites research that demonstrates the role class plays as a factor in whether people continue to participate in education and training, and notes “the fall in numbers applying for access to higher education did not occur as expected” (Ibid .59). Secondly, in this period there continued to be high levels of unemployment and so the demand for labour was low enough even for the reducing new entrants to the labour market.



Edwards observes that the “differentiation” and “de-differentiation” of demarcation lines around fields of policy, study, etc., is a particular aspect in a learning society paradigm. As we have seen he notices a particular imperative toward change and flexibility within a prevalent discourse of a learning society and further suggests that learning society discourses are crucially sites of contention. It is possible to discern in the most powerful voices a re-focusing “promoted by governments and policy-makers of the most developed countries” (Edwards 1997: 78), which sees the foregrounding of issues of output (learning, skills and the learner), at the expense of more traditional concerns with input (on adult education and provision). As he observes;

Lifelong learning, a way of dealing with uncertainty and change, is constructed within this discourse as an object of a particular sort, as a good thing in support of labour market policy, an adaptive process. The Issues of the direction and speed of change are displaced and left largely unquestioned. In other words, the particular context gives rise to a particular discourse of lifelong learning.

(Ibid 27)

In a similar vein Schugurensky notes a “neoliberal approach” to learning societies prevailing in the 1990s. An approach that “could not be isolated from a context of neoliberalism, post – fordism and economic globalisation”

(Schugurensky 2003: 3)

Whether a particular discourse is seen to be primarily concerned with economic needs or with social concerns or a mixture of both, a learning society paradigm which foregrounds a certain type of change can offer insight into the narrator’s

pedagogic and democratic vision. Sidestepping the nuances of the learning versus teaching tension for the moment, we can see that the crucial political aspects of any pedagogy (that is how the individual will change) are tied up with boundaries and issues of power, participation and non-participation. Therefore, from an educational point of view one must analyse and ascertain the basic assumptions and values within a pedagogical discourse such as, who are the teachers, who are the students, what will be taught, where and when will the teaching take place, etc., and perhaps more interestingly, the antithesis, that is, who are **not** to be considered teachers, who are **not** students, what will **not** be taught, where and when it **won't** be taught. In highlighting who/what is included and who/ what is excluded we are dealing with basic notions of democracy and participation, and in particular with issues of boundary.

### **3.3 Partnership**

Ideas concerning a learning society emanate from a range of sources, with an array of agendas being pursued. Notwithstanding the breadth of ideas at work, at a fundamental level these narratives might be described as pursuing a common purpose, one that aims at developing increased participation by individuals and groups within society, with learning at the core of that participation. While intentions and imperatives may differ according to the particular narrator, it is apparent that the larger notion is served by a subset of secondary phrases and concepts, such as 'lifelong learning' and 'lifelong education'. Similarly, the seemingly straightforward notion that is 'partnership' can be included in this

subset, sharing a surface simplicity that belies a more complex undercurrent. This is particularly evident in an Irish context, where a notion of partnership appears to pervade society and to be intrinsically linked to the very functioning of the state.

This section of the review aims to explore some of the ideas pertaining to the concept of 'partnership', particularly in an Irish context, thereafter focusing on a notion of 'learning partnership'.

### **3.3.1 Partnership and Participation**

As previously outlined in this review, the issue of 'learning' has come to be foregrounded by policymakers, nationally and internationally, as the preeminent characteristic of our society. While this discourse places emphasis on the individual learner and how he/she should further their skills/competencies and knowledge in a learning market, there appears to be less detail relating to or concern with funding the educational structures and mechanisms that are required to achieve these goals. As Edwards (1997) notes, the emphasis is placed on "outputs" (learning outcomes) at the expense of "inputs" (educational funding). In short, there is a suspicion that governments want their citizens to enhance their education and learning, in order to further economic goals, while the same governments appear rather coy about paying for broadening access to education. Nevertheless, while the dominant discourse of a learning society as a learning market foregrounds economic concerns like 'competitiveness', there is a

discernible 'social inclusion' theme intertwined with the economic one, albeit at an apparently subservient level. So, while it is open to some debate as to the motives for broadening participation and access (for the good of the economy or the good of society), the item is at least on the national agenda.

A 'partnership' process appears to be a straightforward, even commonsense way to progress such an agenda. In common with 'lifelong learning' and 'lifelong education' notions, it seems to be a wholly agreeable notion, one that appears to encapsulate a feeling of mutual ownership and purpose, an ideal vehicle to strengthen economic competitiveness and social inclusion. Indeed, within an Irish context, O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh point to the almost exclusively positive aura that encompasses the 'partnership concept', acknowledging that "to a large extent, this somewhat 'upbeat' image is merited" (O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007: 11), acknowledging that local partnership can enhance a more "integrated approach to policy-making". They caution, however, about the danger of "a blanket approval" for such a concept, pointing to, for example, early tensions between the state and voluntary sectors in the first national partnership process (ibid 12).

Indeed, it might be argued that a notion like 'partnership' derives much of its potency as a form of, what Bernstein terms, mythological discourse. That is, as a discourse that foregrounds "partnership" as a horizontal solidarity, while ignoring more problematic vertical cleavages, centered around power and control (Bernstein, 1996). As such, the simplicity and apparent utility of the notion is in

danger of wallpapering over a range of ideological and practical problems that are bound to surface when a partnership is formed - issues relating to power and control, boundaries, etc.. In fact, it is apparent that a certain amount of realism is required in acknowledging the practical limitations of a partnership approach<sup>8</sup> that, realistically, is not an end in itself but rather a means to an end.

### **3.3.2 Partnership in an Irish Context**

Notions of partnership have a special resonance in an Irish context, permeating a multitude of settings and functions throughout this society. While the phrase 'partnership' is used in an almost offhand way, underlining its apparently ubiquitous nature, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge its conceptual roots in order to acknowledge that it has been fostered with particular dividends in mind.

At an exceptionally bleak time in the Ireland of the 1980s, an ethos of social partnership was offered "as a potential avenue out of the shocking levels of unemployment, emigration and general deprivation that Ireland found itself in" (Powell & Geoghegan 2004: 253). Building on this early model that accommodated union/management/government negotiation, the idea has clearly taken root as, from 1987 to date, five national partnership arrangements have come about. Indeed these national partnership arrangements have drawn in an

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<sup>8</sup>The 'partnership' concept exhibits limited capacity in more general terms. As Crowley (1992, p.16) reminds, it is important to see the process as 'just another mechanism for relating [ to different parties], a mechanism that contains both pitfalls and potentials" (O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007: 13).

ever-widening body of constituents, becoming a much broader, society-wide platform that now also includes the farming and community-voluntary sectors (O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2004). At its root, however, the concept is intrinsically linked to one of 'competitiveness' ('Partnership 2000' 2000: 2), which is portrayed as the prime national goal, in order that economic and social aims may be underwritten. While O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh acknowledge contesting perspectives as to the driving force behind such national agreements within the state (whether the government acted on the social partners or vice versa), they nevertheless affirm that "it is clear that the 'partnership' concept has now become embedded in Irish forms of government" (O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007: 9). In addition, beyond the practice of 'partnership' at the level of Irish governance, they also point to the driving influence of the EU as a key factor, attesting that "the 'partnership' concept as understood and employed in national and local contexts cannot be separated from the prevailing influence of the EU" (ibid 10), and is consistent with a prevailing "European economic vision" (ibid 11).

### **3.3.3 Partnership and Education**

The country's rapid advance from the economic doldrums of the 1980's to the so-called 'Tiger economy' of the 1990's has helped to reinforce a sense of the country in a state of flux and 'change'. Beyond mere economic change, O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh highlight a number of social changes that have served to influence a reshaping of Irish educational policy in the recent past. These are economic growth, a changing work force, a shift from a largely monocultural

society to a multicultural one, demographic changes/focus on 'social inclusion' and the impact of EU membership (ibid 15/16).

In concrete terms the impetus toward the development of collaboration between educational providers and communities has been proposed in a number of reports and policy documents published in Ireland. As to the motivation for such collaborations in Ireland, O'Connor (2004) observes that there is a gathering impetus towards a re-defining of the role of the university, a belief that the university should be making a contribution to the life of the broader community. She notes that "these shifts of emphasis are linked to the focus on the concept of lifelong learning." (O'Connor 2004; 15). The "White Paper on Adult Education" for example, notes that "lifelong learning" is one of the central themes of the "Programme for Prosperity and Fairness 2000" (DES 2000: 62) and that the publication of the White Paper itself "marks the adoption of lifelong learning as the governing principle of educational policy" (DES 2000: 12).

The White paper, the first in the state to deal particularly with adult education, sets out some of the qualities which it notes as characteristic of the best type of Adult Education and which "all forms of formal education need to pay more overt attention to". One of the characteristics highlighted explicitly refers to a community dimension of provision that sees the coming together of the various

players, in the community.<sup>9</sup> Community education, as O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2004) point out, is a key element within the voluntary sector, one that is particularly concerned with a sense of collective action by "disenfranchised groups remonstrating against inequitable power relationships in society" (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2004: 5).

In terms of the local community, such a partnership process means engaging with a structure that the community may well view as privileged and "non-native" (Ó Fathaigh 2004: 43) and risking the loss of some identity in "getting into bed" with an altogether different sort of community. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that any understanding of what is meant by "community" in the context of partnership is by no means clear-cut. "Community" as Watson and Taylor (1998) note in relation to the UK, has tended to be centred around links to industry and the business world, with a more muted concern with access and adult education.

For the educational centre, it opens up to debate some very interesting issues regarding the ownership of knowledge, the value of formal education over less formal learning, and indeed, it raises questions as to the role of educational structures in re-enforcing society's inequalities. In short, such a structure asks of the educational centre "to what extent are providers willing to change to fit the individual?" (O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2005: 18) As O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh note,

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<sup>9</sup> The development of the Community dimension of provision with integrated linkages between the work of the education centre/school and those of youth, adult and community interest, and with other agencies in the Community, particularly in the employment, health and welfare and local development fields; (White Paper on Adult Education 2000:30/31)



“This self-conscious approach to change is exacerbated against a background of innate conservatism and consensualism in Irish education” (O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh, 2004b). As O’Connor (2004) observes, the “Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education” was particular in highlighting a general lack in flexibility in the models of provision.

### **3.3.4. Learning Partnerships**

As Stuart (2004) notes, effective partnership is the rational answer with which to attempt to solve educational inequalities, regardless of the underlying motives.<sup>10</sup> To date however, definitions and data with regard to partnership arrangements are rather thin on the ground. In the UK, for example, Stuart (Stuart 2003:44) points out that while there is a widespread desire to nurture such arrangements in policy documents and educational institution mission statements, “there are fewer accounts of how these partnerships work, or indeed, what exactly is meant by ‘partnership’.” Tett also notes (Tett 2003: 9), in relation to the UK, that partnership is such an imprecise notion that it is probably best viewed as a continuum, rather than a concrete idea. At the level of practice, Tett (2003) cites Marjorie Mayo who identifies three reasons for working in partnership, which in turn point to three different models. These models are; a budget enlargement model that comes about in order for the partners to gain access to additional

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<sup>10</sup>Whether the impetus for widening participation is economic strength, social cohesion or based on notions of social purpose, effective partnerships emerge as the logical solution to countering educational inequalities.  
(Stuart 2002: 47)

funds, a synergy model that aims at “combining knowledge, resources, approaches and operational cultures” as a means of achieving goals, and a transformational model that “assumes that by exposing the different partners to the assumptions and working methods of the other partners their usual ways of working will be transformed to the benefit of communities” (Tett 2003: 13).

In an Irish context, while a ‘partnership’ attitude is equally prevalent, the hard data has similarly been thin on the ground, the UK experience tending to set the benchmark. O’Connor, for example, points to some characteristics that indicate a desirable standard, by referring to REPLAN, a UK government initiative for innovative community education projects between 1984 and 1991, as a good model. Key characteristics (not dissimilar to the characteristics set out in the White Paper on Adult Education) include community-based provision, relevancy of curriculum and community consultation, partnership process, modularisation and credit systems as well as learning support, educational guidance and supportive tutors (O’Connor 2004: 18).

The recently published **Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion** (2007 O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007) however, fills a literature gap in an Irish context. O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh crucially opt to use the more generic ‘learning partnership’, rather than limiting themselves to ‘educational partnership’ per se. The intention here is not to minimise the educational character of such ‘partnerships’, but rather to acknowledge the breadth of educational goals that varies according to

“scope, range and sector”(O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007: 24). Furthermore, they suggest that a lack of a “single agreed meaning that captures the totality of the learning partnership phenomenon” (O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007: 24) should be viewed as a positive aspect, one that points to the diversity of approaches and underlines the “process-orientated” nature of learning partnerships. Indeed, they note that effective learning partnerships (LPs) must display a particularly self-reflective and self-critical nature, to the point of being aware when the existence of the partnership should cease:

Partnerships, by their nature, are organic – they grow over time out of existing structures and relations. They must be allowed (and be prepared) to evolve, replenish, diminish or disappear. Crucially, such decisions centre on a comprehensive (re)evaluation of internal, external and interdisciplinary alliances. Moreover, in-depth critical conception and debate is urgently required *vis-à-vis* LP arrangements.

(O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2007: 278/279)

Resulting from their trawl of the literature Ó Fathaigh and O’Brien point to a diverse range of ‘learning partnership’ experiences that vary according to the setting, goals and breath of educational goals. However, for the purposes of their analysis, they divide LPs into three approaches:

- Statutory.
- Voluntary.
- Blended.

A statutory approach is reflective of LPs driven by “the government, its agencies and/or statutory institutions”, for example, University projects for enlarging

participation in Higher Education (ibid 40). A “voluntary” approach to LPs meanwhile, is driven by certain Government Departments, state agencies, “voluntary network agencies” and/or community groups (ibid 44). Finally, the third approach is “characterised by a genuine attempt to synthesise the separate roles that statutory and voluntary groups exercise in the conception and development of LPs” (ibid 47).

The “blended” approach is particularly interesting due to the inherent difficulty of attempting to accommodate organisations/communities as different in structure and tradition as, for example, a University and a local community partnership. Such an approach serving to highlight “the significant challenge of merging both statutory and voluntary ‘life worlds’ (a phrase borrowed from Schutz)” (ibid 48).

Within an Irish context, Ó Fathaigh and O’Brien point to the Cork Northside Initiative as an example of a blended approach to a ‘learning partnership’, with “education conceptually and practically formulated on the basis of a negotiated agreement between statutory and voluntary elements of the partnership.

Specifically, the pedagogical focus is on:

- A commitment to transform existing practices in both sectors, with a view to facilitating those who have been totally excluded.
- Real cultural change, where statutory providers surrender the ‘expert’, ‘hierarchical’ image to facilitate a sense of educational empowerment at local level.

- The best conditions for learning to take place – this involves investigating the effective use of common resources, outreach work, induction, confidence-building techniques, appropriate teaching methods, negotiated curricula, etc.”

(Ibid 48)

In terms of efficacy, O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh suggest that a blended approach to LPs may in fact be the best suited of the three to further what they identify as key roles of a LP, “promote provider collaboration, articulate the voice of the learner, community and employer needs “ (ibid49). However, they are at pains to point out that ‘effective’ LPs do not come into being fully formed, but rather evolve based on a strong reflective nature that considers setbacks and adapts accordingly (ibid: 51/52). In short they adopt a learning attitude.

### **3.3.5. Conclusion**

It is clear that learning and education, in Ireland and elsewhere, have come to be positioned to the fore of policy that seeks to widen social and economic participation. While superficially it seems that both economic and social objectives are to be tackled, there is evidence to support the suspicion that economic concerns like ‘competitiveness’ hold pride of place at the table, to the detriment of social issues. In an Irish context, it is apparent that a ‘partnership’ process has been utilised to some effect in successive national agreements, as a vehicle of engagement between the government and the social partners. Extending a notion of partnership to the realm of learning in general, and education in particular, seems a logical extension of a successful formula.

However, any 'effective' and meaningful notion of 'partnership' cannot help but raise issues of power and control, and this is particularly true in a pedagogical (in the widest sense of the word) setting.

Within such a context, where apparently all learning is valued, it is necessary to look beyond the affectation of policy and strategy documents to more telling indicators, like funding and parity of esteem. For example, what sort of learning is strongly funded by government and what is not, which communities are sought out as partners by educators and similarly, what sort of partnership is on offer to the prospective partners. As O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh note, it would appear that the experience of partnerships in this country seems to mirror the experience in the U.K., where an economic agenda supercedes that of social inclusiveness. (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005: 4)

The germination of a partnership between an educational institution and a collective from society's disenfranchised borders, provides a fascinating arena within which contesting ideologies may come to a head. Within such an arena "change" comes to be foregrounded as being at the very heart of the educational enterprise, and as such it requires the development of an effective partnership vehicle that can facilitate all its constituents' differing agendas. However, the development of such a vehicle would involve a high degree of transformation, especially on the part of third level providers, a sector not particularly known for its maneuverability. In essence, a learning partnership process can open up the

realm of education to some severe scrutiny. Indeed, contrary to being “neutral”, educational providers need to acknowledge their role in sustaining a status quo that maintains inequality.

As O’Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2005) note, in side-stepping ideological issues Irish educationalists can be seen to be acting in an ideological manner, that is, re-enforcing the status quo.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this is the very nature of educational institutions, adept at facilitating change in the students, poor at coming to grips with change in the institution itself<sup>12</sup>. Thus one can view any attempt to bring two such different cultures as the university and the local community together as being fraught with challenges.

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<sup>12</sup> Education needs to be acknowledged as a field of social processes that produces loss of power, status and self-esteem. Hence, learning partnerships for social inclusion must be prepared to act *ideologically* in the interests of others characterised as ‘socially ( and culturally) distant’. Crucially, in avoiding ideology (and, specifically, a critique of the ideological construction of such terms as ‘disadvantage’ and ‘social exclusion’), Irish educational planners still appear to act ideologically i.e. in the interests of those who positively benefit from prevailing conditions. (O’Brien & Ó Fathaigh 2005: 18)

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Research Methodology**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the process of selecting, designing and formulating a methodological structure that would be most appropriate to the case in question. As such this chapter sets out to account for and make clear the protocol devised and deployed in order to buttress the validity of the research undertaken, by engaging with and considering a number of key considerations that are evident from research into best practice.

#### **4.2 Selecting an appropriate methodology**

A first step in selecting an appropriate methodology is to decide which of the two broad research traditions, that is quantitative or qualitative, one intends to follow. As my research came to focus on the phenomenon that was the Partnership Vehicle, it became clear that the unique character of the partnership required an approach that would make best use of the rich sources of qualitative data already to hand at the earliest stages of this research (with the strong probability of further ready access as the Partnership Vehicle developed), a method that would help to understand the phenomenon from the point of view of its creators, within their social/institutional contexts, in short, a qualitative approach. While in no way wishing to devalue a quantitative approach and the sort of data that such an



approach would generate, at the same time I would contend that qualitative methods likewise owe no apologies. Suffice to say that without redress to a well worn debate as to the pros and cons of both traditions, I would simply subscribe to Creswell's view that:

Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research.

(Creswell 2007:11)

It therefore remained to identify what sort of qualitative methodology might be best suited. Creswell (2007) identifies five major approaches to qualitative inquiry: Narrative Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography and Case Study Research, and proposes that in order to decide which method is to be employed it is helpful to consider the central purpose of each of these approaches:

The focus of a narrative is on the life of an individual, and the focus of a phenomenology is a concept or phenomenon and the "essence" of the lived experiences of persons about the phenomenon. In grounded theory, the aim is to develop a theory, whereas in ethnography, it is to describe a culture-sharing group. In a case study, a specific case is examined, often with the intent of examining an issue with the case illuminating the complexity of the issue.

(Creswell 2007: 93)

Based on these foci, the most appropriate method for this research project narrowed to either phenomenology or case study research. In the event I have selected the latter primarily due to the nature of the phenomenon under study (the Partnership Vehicle), a phenomenon that is not only experienced at the level of the individual, but also at a group level.

### **4.3 Positioning the researcher**

Before setting out the case study framework to be employed, it is necessary, I believe, to give some consideration to the topic of ‘objectiveness’ and to acknowledge the position that I, the researcher, occupy in relation to the case under study and the bearing that this has on this research project. To this end I propose to illuminate my position on two fronts. Firstly, I shall outline my relationship with the various parties/ communities under study and secondly, I shall describe what my critical standpoint or “worldview” is, in order that it is made clear what bearing this might have on the overall research. In short, I aim to describe my profile as a research tool.

#### **4.3.1 A research network**

In the first instance, prior to my official involvement in this research I was quite familiar with the “Islands Project” and the various partners and some, if not most of the key players. This familiarity hinges on the fact that my partner, Bernadette Burns, occupied a key role in the enterprise. It was through visiting Sherkin Island with Bernadette (prior to the “Islands Project”) that I came to know many of the Sherkin Islanders and through her work in the DIT that I had come to know many of the staff that would at a later stage become involved in the “Islands Project”. Indeed, since commencing this project I have become more explicitly involved in both the local community and the “Islands Project” itself, spending a

year on the Island in 2002-2003, and for a time being a member of the School “Islands Project” course committee. This familiarity with many of the participants has facilitated easy access to data that would, in different circumstances, have been difficult to gain entry to. These connections, together with my position as a funded researcher at the DIT, has, I believe, placed me with a foot in each camp and helped me to position myself in a more neutral and less partisan position.

This familiarity and closeness with individuals who played a key role in the “Islands Project” might, superficially, raise issues of concern regarding critical distance. However, I subscribe to a view that subjectivity tends to be an aspect of qualitative research that can be somewhat overplayed. As Baeur, Mruck and Roth (2002) note, social sciences usually attempt to add a heightened validity to research by emphasising the separation of the researcher from the research. On reflection, however, one must in all honesty acknowledge the implicit role that any researcher plays throughout a qualitative research project, and all the more so in a case study, when an intimate knowledge of and interaction with participants is, in fact, highly desirable. Furthermore, a boon to what Bauer et al., term “the fiction of objectivity” is the use of standardised methods for data collection, analysis, etc. Qualitative research however, is by its very nature, not suited to the use of standardized procedures but rather to an evolving and reflexive approach to procedures. Indeed pursuing a qualitative approach serves to highlight the impact that the researcher has in engaging with the phenomenon under study. As such, the hand of the researcher is to be sensed right from the

selection of the case, to the development of the questions and on to the analysis of the data collected. In short, the researcher must be alert to the part the personal plays in the collection and presentation of the study, and it would be dishonest to attempt to disguise or deny this relationship. Rather, it is incumbent on the researcher to be forthright in detailing his background, relationships and standpoint, in order to assume a reflexive attitude.

In adopting a reflexive approach it would also seem pertinent to offer a brief description of my own background. In terms of higher education, I come from a Fine Art background, having obtained my undergraduate degree in the DIT as a mature student in 1997. From 1998 to 2000 I held a position as a part-time lecturer on a number of Social Care courses at the DIT and have facilitated several projects/ workshops at various social care organisations. Since graduation I have also undertaken a number of art projects on the North Tipperary County Council "Artist in the Primary School" scheme and also facilitated an Arts Council community arts project on Sherkin Island in 2001, in conjunction with SIDS and the Island primary school. At the same time I have continued to develop my professional practice, participating in several group shows with a solo exhibition at the West Cork arts Centre in 2002. Currently, I work as an Art Tutor on a number of North Tipperary VEC community education and Return to Education courses. In summary, I have continued to engage my art practice while at the same time I have continued to develop a first hand

understanding of teaching practice through my lecturing and workshop experience.

### **4.3.2 A Worldview**

In the process of delivering this case study I have come to develop an understanding of the workings of society in general, and education in particular, that inevitably has had some bearing on my critical stance as a researcher and as such requires some clarification. The formation of my 'Worldview' (to use Creswell's term) has its roots in an initial literature trawl that focused on pedagogy in general and radical pedagogical theory in particular. Broadly speaking, an engagement with thinkers such as Bernstein, Vygotsky and Freire has alerted me to a palpable 'non-neutral' aspect of education that is somewhat at variance with a pervading notion that education is, de facto, a wholly positive and desirable enterprise. Instead I have come to an understanding of education as a process that is rather more complex, inscribed with a characteristic that both helps and hinders the citizen, challenging the status quo while at the same time maintaining, reproducing and replicating certain dominant hierarchies within society. As such it is plain to me that to view education as a neutral activity, an intrinsically positive endeavor, is to willingly ignore or skim over the cracks or vertical cleavages of society in general and institutional education in particular. Indeed, it is arguable that while educational structures are particularly adept at nurturing a certain type of change in individuals (whom it generally abstracts from their communities), the educational structures themselves appear to be rather

inflexible but rather assist in maintaining the status quo. In addition, and at a more practical level, the likes of Edwards and Boshier have raised my awareness of the role that national and international policy play in the pursuit of certain favoured agendas.

This notion of education as a contestable realm that reflects the cleavages of society at large also has quite a bearing on my theoretical stance as a researcher. I recognize that an understanding of education within social reality tends toward a critical stance rather than positivist or interpretive. As such I view myself as a critical researcher and so;

assume that social reality is historically constructed and that it is produced and reproduced by people. Although people can consciously act to change their social and economic circumstances, critical researchers recognize that their ability to do so is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination.

(Myers 1997: 241)

As such I freely admit that the realm of education is not simply an arena patrolled by interested groups. It must also be recognized that it is occupied by individuals and groups who may be subject to overt and covert constraints and in my research I have striven to be careful not to be overly judgmental or to ascribe hidden agendas to the appearance of obstacles.

#### **4.3.3 An ethical position.**

In the course of the study I have adopted a completely overt position whereby all parties were aware of my position as a researcher and my interest in the partnership as a phenomenon. This is not to say that that the key figures would

be au fait with notions of a learning society per se but I do not feel that this hindered the research in any way. By adopting the strategy of 'member checking', I have sought to bolster both the ethical standing and validity of the research by keeping the informants in the loop and seeking their feedback. In this regard I was not so much concerned with whether they agree with the findings or not (a possible weakening of the validity) but rather ensuring that they do not disagree with or disown the data collected.

Regarding the issue of confidentiality, it was not really feasible or indeed necessary to disguise the voices of the key figures in this research as they would be easily identifiable on any sort of close inspection, due to the small number of individuals involved.

#### **4.4 Case study research**

I have followed Yin's models of case study research and have broadly taken on his framework that emphasises four areas requiring attention in the design process, these are:

- Identifying the unit of analysis.
- Opting for a single case or multiple case study.
- How the case is to be selected.
- The data collection strategy to be employed.

Having narrowed the field in respect of the qualitative method to be utilised, I have looked to Yin to inform me further in terms of the type of case study to be employed. Yin asserts that a case study:

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

(Yin 1993: 13)

This definition indicates the pivotal role to be played by developing a theoretical proposition, such a proposition acting as a template to data analysis and collection and also aiding in focusing the study to a particular set of interests.

However, before dealing with this matter it is necessary to consider the purpose of the case study, as this will have a direct bearing on the design of the research project. Yin outlines three possible courses in this regard: exploratory, explanatory or descriptive applications. An exploratory study would primarily concern itself with identifying questions for further research, whether for some future case study or some other research mechanism. While such questions emerge as a result of this case study, they are not the primary purpose of it and so an exploratory application would not appear to be suitable.



Regarding an explanatory application, Yin describes it as concerned with cause and effect relationships. Such an application, for example, might be suitable for a case study which considered the effect of “out reach” programs on third level intake rates. While this research may touch on the role of notions of a learning society in policy and its effect on the ground, such an application would not facilitate this research, as this case study is concerned with identifying the constituent parts of the “Islands project” partnership at various stages.

Which brings us to the final category and the application I have adopted, that of a descriptive application. Such an application “presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (Yin1993: 5) and so is best suited to this case as in selecting a broad context of a learning society, the study strives to describe the myriad of micro-contexts and their discernible phenomena, in short, learning partnerships.

Adopting a descriptive case method raises an important issue that requires clarification concerning the research in general. It should be noted that it is not the purpose of this study to contrast models of educational delivery, to discern the merits of system x versus y. Rather, as a descriptive study, the task in hand is to map out the learning partnership in all its manifestations, within the context of a learning society, the broad phenomenon in such a context being learning in its various guises.

#### **4.4.1 Criticisms of case study research**

A possible criticism would be a concern over the transferability of what may be perceived as quite a narrow case study. How can a research project that is apparently concerned with a single phenomenon be transferable to other contexts? To answer this I would point firstly to the embedded nature of the case study. Within the overall single case I am in fact studying four embedded units (The Pre-Partnership stage and three Partnership stages: pre-programme, programme delivery and professional development stages), four readily distinguishable periods in the partnership, each markedly different.

Secondly, a questioning of the transferability of a single case study implies that other forms of research are implicitly more transferable. However, as Yin notes, regarding such an assumption;

The short answer is that case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a “sample”, and the investigator’s goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization).

(Yin 1994:10)

Another possible point concerns my familiarity with the players and the “Islands Project” itself, perhaps something of a double edged sword. On the one hand it provided me with both easy access to data in all its forms and with access to key personnel. On the other hand, it could be inferred that there is an issue to be addressed regarding critical distance. In answer to this I would point to the nature

of this research. In purposely selecting a descriptive methodology I have aimed to side step value judgements per se. The basis of this research is a descriptive process that explicitly aims at describing the phenomenon, not in addressing issues of value or worth. In doing so I have aimed at a more balanced view, without recourse to the well trodden path of polemics.

#### **4.5 The research design**

Returning to the study's design, I have constructed it on five pillars as follows;

- The study's questions
- Its propositions
- Its unit of analysis
- The logic linking the data to the propositions, and
- The criteria for interpreting the findings.

##### **4.5.1 The study's questions**

As previously mentioned I have come to view the partnership as a vehicle of change. As outlined in the literature review it is a notion of change that can be seen to be the common denominator between the realms of education, learning, partnership and a learning society. Framing it in this way leads to questions concerning construction and adaptation, direction and diversion. Questions such as where did the impetus for this phenomenon (the partnership) come from? What problem is being solved? Who is attempting to solve the problem and why?

These broad questions may be firmed up in more concrete terms as follows:

- Who instigated and developed the Partnership Vehicle on the “Islands Project”?
- Why was the Partnership Vehicle instigated and what influenced its creation and development?
- How did the Vehicle develop over the period of analysis?
- What were the Vehicle’s aims and objectives?
- What sort of strategies did the partners develop in order to achieve these aims and objectives?
- How successful was the Partnership Vehicle in achieving these aims and objectives?
- How does the idea of partnership evident on the “Islands Project” sit in terms of learning society notions?
- Is there a transferable model of partnership evident?

#### **4.5.2 The propositions**

As the case study is descriptive in nature so it requires a descriptive theory, one that “covers the scope and depth of an object (case) being described” (Yin 22:1993). Yin also asserts that a theoretical proposition and rival proposition are crucial to the research design. However, as outlined in the literature review the very nature of learning society notions makes clear distinctions or boundaries difficult. This presents something of a difficulty for the case study. While it has been relatively clear-cut to develop a theory, it is has not been quite so apparent

how to develop a true rival theory, one which is mutually exclusive to the initial theory. This would appear to weaken the case study in Yin's terms. Having said that, as we have seen in the literature review. Edwards has formulated a scheme that allows some sort of distinction, all the while relying on categories that overlap rather than act as rival theories. Such a system as envisaged by Edwards facilitates a critical consideration of types without resorting to a polarisation that sets up an "either or " sort of confrontation. Certainly other voices (e.g., Boshier) can be heard in a more partisan vein, confronting the perceived economic bias of educational policy. I will attempt, however, to follow Edwards in travelling a more cautious path, one where a learning society as a series of overlapping networks can be pursued to the enhancement of, rather than to the detriment of, the more prevalent notions of a learning market. Bearing all of the above in mind, the descriptive theoretical proposition/ rival proposition as developed and informed by the literature review has therefore emerged as:

**This case study will show that the Partnership Vehicle in evidence on the "Island's Project", as a learning partnership, adopted an approach that strove toward a notion of a learning society as a series of overlapping networks. In doing so it superceded the notion of an educational partnership (a strategy that strives toward the notion of a learning society as a learning market or an educated society).**

### **4.5.3 The units of analysis**

The case study is a single case study in that it focuses solely on the partnership vehicle developed on the “Islands project”. However, it also involves embedded elements as there are a number of partnership stages of interest to this research.

The Partnership Vehicle as a whole can be seen to have developed from a number of distinct but overlapping relationships, these having developed over the chronological span of the partnership. Some of these relationships naturally came into being at a later stage, for example, the relationship between the students and the school-community only coming into effect at the recruitment stage of the first cadre of students. Other relationships have come into play from the start-up period and some of the relationships on a personal level well before that period. The mature manifestation of the learning partnership also presents other relationships that, while not directly pertinent to this study, can also be seen to at least inform the attitudes of these partners.

Initially the research was to focus on the period leading up to and including the delivery of the pilot course, as reflected in modules 1,2 and 3. In the event however, another period in the life of the partnership vehicle started to take shape in the form of a professional development course and was therefore included in the analysis.

Therefore, the units of analysis that I have focused on are broken down as follows, in four distinct modules, reflecting the chronological development of the partnership vehicle:

**Module 1: Pre-Partnership Vehicle** The initial discussions on the level of personal interaction.

**Module 2: The Partnership Vehicle (pilot programme development)** A focused drafting stage with individuals acting in a professional capacity.

**Module 3: The Partnership Vehicle (pilot programme delivery)** Course delivery of the pilot programme, with formal accreditation of the educational element.

**Module 4: The Partnership Vehicle (professional development programme)** Post-pilot delivery, non-accredited “Professional Development” programme.

Having identified the units of analysis, the broader research questions outlined in **4.4.1** are reflected in the more particular questions as appropriate to the individual modules as follows:

### **Module 1: Pre-Partnership Vehicle**

- Who were the key figures at this stage?
- What were these individuals' motives in seeking to develop the "Island's Project"?
- What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the partnership?
- What were the characteristics of this pre-partnership stage?

### **Module 2: The Partnership Vehicle (pilot programme development)**

- Who were the key partners and individuals at this stage?
- What were the aims and objectives of the Partnership Vehicle?
- At this stage what were the various roles under taken and why?
- What were the resource implications for each partner?
- What was the nature of the partnership in terms of formality at this stage of maturation?
- What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the Partnership Vehicle ?
- What were the characteristics of the Partnership Vehicle at this stage?

### **Module 3: The Partnership Vehicle (pilot programme delivery)**

- What led to the development of this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?
- Was there any overt change in the nature of the Partnership Vehicle at this stage?



- Why did this module come to an end?
- What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?
- What were the characteristics of the Partnership Vehicle at this stage?

#### **Module 4: The Partnership Vehicle (professional development course)**

- What led to the development of this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?
- Was there any change in the make up of the partnership Vehicle at this stage?
- Was there any re-defining of the original aims and objectives at this stage?
- What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?
- What were the characteristics of the Partnership Vehicle at this stage?

#### **4.5.4 The logic linking the data to the propositions**

Having developed the proposition, one can then engage in the business of collecting data from a variety of sources (including interviewing key individuals) in order to look for indicators as to what sort of society these individuals and groups had in mind when they set about developing the Partnership Vehicle. Since these players did not act in a complete vacuum, the role of the Institute, or perhaps key players' perception of that organization, also had some role in the development of the Vehicle.

#### **4.5.5 The criteria for interpreting the findings**

I have opted to utilise a form of pattern matching based on models developed from the literature review. This involves setting out what, in an idealized form, the agenda driving a partnership vehicle would be if it were derived from a notion of a learning society as a learning market, and what it would resemble if it were derived from a notion of a learning society as a series of networks. As I have shown in the literature review we can create idealised models or propositions from Edwards' learning society notions and these are set out in Figure 1.

However, it is important to reiterate that Edwards does not set up his models as polarities, models that are mutually exclusive. Rather he describes his schema in terms of a perceivable established notion (the educated society) and two contemporary possible challenging notions in the form of learning market and learning network. The use of these patterns are based on a strong initial suspicion that SIDS/ School partnership model is broadly inclusive, aiming to address a wide spectrum of goals across the range and as such heterogeneous in nature, superceding narrower learning market or educational models.

In any event, the logic employed has been to develop a description of the case, formulate a predictive pattern, collect the data and examine this data against the predictive pattern.

<b>Figure 1. Learning Society Models</b>				
	<b>Educated Model</b>	<b>Society Model</b>	<b>Learning Market Model</b>	<b>Learning network Model</b>
<b>When?</b>	One chance-specified		Throughout the working life of the Individual	Lifewide /lifelong
<b>Who? (1)</b>	Yearly cohort of Students		Individuals/ employees/ employers	Individuals and groups
<b>Who? (2)</b>	Government funded educational providers		Individuals/ employees / employers	All elements of society
<b>What?</b>	Traditional educational agenda		Skills /competencies	Education and learning
<b>Why?</b>	Satisfy national agenda		Respond to a market agenda	Heterogeneous goals
<b>Where?</b>	Formal educational settings		Formal and in-formal settings	Tri-formal settings

#### 4.6 The choice of tools for data collection

One of the most useful aspects of a case study methodology is its flexibility in facilitating a wide range of data collection methods. I have therefore utilised this facility across the spectrum of data points (with the exception of more quantitative tools, which are not suitable in this case). These data points are:

- Direct participant and non-participant observation
- Archival analysis
- Individual interviews
- Report analysis

#### **4.6.1 Direct participant and non-participant observation**

The case study was initiated in October 2002 and so the process of observation commenced in the third unit of analysis i.e., during the “course delivery” period. These initial observations enabled me to develop a fuller sense of the Partnership Vehicle, to establish the units of analysis and to positively identify the key figures/informants within these units.

In terms of the type of observation involved, all the figures involved were aware of my role as a researcher and so covert observation was not possible and in any event not relevant. It was therefore in a completely overt manner that I undertook my observations although there was some fluctuation between ‘Participant as observer’ and ‘Observer as participant’ roles, due to a fortuitous widening of access. My initial access hinged on my familiarity with most of the key partnership figures, enabling me to gain access to a wide range of meetings and workshops, both in terms of joint partnership meetings and working group meetings by the individual partners, and to carry out “observer as participant” observations. Over the course of the study there was a more direct-participant

role for the School programme committee meetings as I was co-opted onto the committee during the third and fourth module periods.

#### **4.6.2 Textual/archival analysis**

In discourse analysis terms, all data collected/available for analysis can be classed as text. For the purposes of this data point, however, it refers to;

- Written communications between the various partners
- Funding application documentation
- DIT and SIDS strategic plans
- DIT validation process documentation.

#### **4.6.3 The Interview process**

The selection of persons for in-depth interview came from a process of participant and non-participant observation in the earlier part of the study. From this process I identified a number of individuals as key figures who fulfilled a bridge-like role between different partners. While other individuals could be seen to have played a crucial role, they were excluded from specific interview as they had not been involved in all four units of analysis.

There was a possibility that one or all of these individuals could have left the partnership in the timeframe of this study. There was simply no method of guarding against this. Fortunately this did not occur and the targeted individuals remained closely connected to the “Islands Project”.

#### **4.6.4 Report Analysis**

Various reports on the “Islands Project” have come to be available for analysis in the course of this research. The lineage of these documents is primarily derived from the SIDS side of the partnership, emanating from SIDS for the benefit of the EEI or vice versa or in the case of the report produced by Clarity Research Development and Training Ltd., commissioned by SIDS.

#### **4.6.5 Validation**

In terms of the validity of the research, I note Yin (1995) who identifies four criteria for judging the quality of the research design, that is, construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. These criteria are tackled at various moments of the study through the employment of certain tactics such as peer/informant review, pattern matching, the development of a case study data base etc. Creswell (2007) on the other hand summarises eight procedures for qualitative researchers to consider and recommends that in order to strengthen validity the researcher should adopt at least two of these procedures. These procedures are:

- Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field
- Triangulation
- Peer review/debriefing
- Revision of working hypotheses (negative case analysis)
- Clarifying researcher bias

- Member checking
- Rich, thick description
- External audits

There is a high degree of accord between the two, although with Creswell there is perhaps a greater emphasis on the inevitable bias of the researcher. In the event I have taken on board both set of recommendations.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter set out the process of selecting and devising an appropriate methodology for data collection and data analysis. In so devising a research design I have opted to utilize Yin's design for a descriptive case study research, while at the same time acknowledging the inherently fluid nature of qualitative research and its emergent nature that requires a reflexive and flexible approach by the researcher. This has led to the construction of a single case study with embedded units of analysis, which is descriptive in nature.

The next chapter deals with using this framework to engage in a process of analysis of the textual material so collected.

# Chapter 5

## Data Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

The following four modules represent a snapshot of the Partnership Vehicle as it developed over a finite period. As that Partnership Vehicle revealed itself to be something of a continuum, it was incumbent on me to draw some sort of line in the sand, to select a cut off date by which time this research would finish. In the early stages of my project I presumed that the units of analysis would include a module dealing with the Partnership Vehicle in action delivering a degree course. In actuality the process of attaining that particular partnership goal seemed to stretch further and further into the future. I therefore opted to conclude the research in the period that followed the completion of the pilot project represented by module 4, when the “professional development” course was developed and delivered.

The four units of analysis under consideration are divided into the following modules:

Module 1 Pre-Partnership vehicle

Module 2 The Partnership Vehicle (Pilot programme development)

Module 3 The Partnership Vehicle (Pilot programme delivery)

Module 4 The Partnership Vehicle (Professional development course)



## **5.2 Module 1: Pre-Partnership Vehicle**

### **Description of the unit of analysis.**

This module relates to the period circa 1998 when initial discussions took place between individuals concerning the possibility of developing a programme that would address the particular needs of the local community/programme participants. It is the most fluid of the modules under consideration due to the informality of the discussions between those individuals, the data available being largely personal recollection by the key figures identified. However it is a particularly interesting period in that it affords the possibility of gaining insight into the motivation that those individuals had in moving forward to the next stage, motivational factors that will underpin the future development of the partnership vehicle.

The module is therefore concerned with the period when initial contact took place between key figures and it concludes with the formal meeting in Ballinadee in 1998, at which juncture the partnership vehicle can be seen to have come into being.

### **5.2.1 Who were the key figures at this stage?**

Data indicates that the initial impetus for the “Islands Project” emanated from a network of friends and acquaintances that either lived on, or had strong connections with, Sherkin Island. This initial impetus (circa 1998) appears to

have come from individuals talking about the possibility of a third level institute bringing an accredited art course to the Island rather than the normal situation whereby the Islanders would need to re-locate to a city in order to access such a course. From these early discussions **Bernadette Burns**, **Breda Collins** and **Majella O'Neill-Collins** (“Challenging Education” 2004; 11), felt encouraged to widen their group by speaking to the then newly appointed Island development officer, **Liam Chambers**, to see what he thought. His positive reaction subsequently led to Bernadette Burns agreeing to make further enquiries at her place of employment, DIT. As such she took on the role of a bridge-type figure by initiating contact informally between the Island community and the academic community. She approached **John O'Connor**, the Head of School (and also relatively new to his position), who was enthusiastic about the possibility of developing a new sort of educational enterprise. The key figures for this module had therefore initiated contact and began discussions as to a possible joint project.

### **5.2.2 What were these individuals motives in seeking to develop the “Island’s Project”?**

Having identified the individuals who were at the heart of the enterprise from the start, what can be said about these individual’s motivation? The data indicates two underlying and intersecting notions at large, the notion emanating from the community figures being somewhat broader than that of the individuals who worked in third level, that is, the educational professionals.

In the first instance there are the figures from the educational sector, Bernadette Burns and John O'Connor. Bernadette Burns' notion of change appears to be particular to a feeling for the need for educational opportunities or access, in this case for those denied the possibility of moving to the third level centre of the city. As such she seems to adhere to a notion of educational opportunity as a form of social cohesion. Considering herself as a member of both the "island community and the academic community" (B Burns 2005: 3) she displays a belief that an accredited course delivered on the Island could deliver social and educational dividends for the Island.

Bernadette Burns recalls that the Island community had a tradition of organising short courses for the inhabitants in the community hall and among the most popular of these taster courses were art classes run by Majella O'Neill-Collins. However while these courses were popular, there seemed to be an appetite for a course that would offer something more substantial by way of qualifications. Against this background discussions developed between herself, Majella O'Neill-Collins, Breda Collins and Liam Chambers concerning "the difficulty with taking education a step further and being able to offer accredited courses" (B Burns 2005: 2). Another concern at this initial stage was a wish to "give access" to those who did not want to move away from the Island to enroll on a full-time course in the city.

It is noteworthy that at this time she sensed a window of opportunity at the School of Art, Design and Printing due to the recent appointment of a new Head of School, John O'Connor (ibid4). Although she did not know him well at this stage, she felt that he was approachable, and so felt comfortable in contacting him on behalf of the community.

John O'Connor also seems to subscribe to a notion of change that places education at the centre of social fabric. He recalls that his interest in developing the "Islands Project" was sparked by his own encounters with isolated communities (such as those in Northern India) and with his experience of visiting the Blasket Islands, which had been evacuated in the 1950s. The latter he describes "as an economic, political, social and cultural failure on the part of the country" ("Rural issues in higher education" 2001: 185), albeit a failing by a relatively new national Government.

The lesson he ascribes to these personal experiences is the crucial place of educational opportunity for the survival of isolated communities, education sitting at the heart of the community;

These stories had convinced me that education is the key to survival. It is axiomatic in rural and island communities that once the primary school cannot be sustained the community is all but lost. If the youngest, brightest and most energetic members are plucked from the community its heart and soul begins to wither. Education results in empowerment.

(ibid 186/187)

O'Connor seems to subscribe to a notion of change which positions education in a pivotal role, with education being one possible counterbalance to worrying global trends;

The pattern seems to be universal: the draw of the urban city environment increases as global communication extends and social cohesion is eroded. One of the ways of counteracting this erosion is to provide education that is grounded in the needs of the community and that addresses, in a creative manner, the very fact of survival.

(J O'Connor 2005: 2/3)

This type of education therefore seeks to engage with the local community in developing an appropriate type of course. He envisages a sort of educational enterprise that aims not to simply transfer ready made models onto isolated communities, but rather that the educational centre should attempt a negotiation with the local community in order to develop mutually appropriate courses;

Our interest, as educators, is in developing a model linking isolated communities with third level educational institutions where a true sharing of knowledge can arise. In this way educational programmes that are truly useful to these communities may be devised, validated and delivered.

(Rural issues in Higher Education 2001:187)

This indicates a willingness to develop a two way system that would see the local community and its members learn from the academic community and its members, and vice versa. Such a system opens the possibility of an exchange of knowledge beyond the normative boundaries of education wherein the student is relocated away from his or her local community.

Bernadette Burns and John O'Connor as educationalists therefore appear to link social inclusion and vibrancy with educational opportunity and as such I would

suggest therefore that their notion of change is rooted in the tradition of a learning society as an educated society. It is also apparent however that they were prepared to move beyond the traditional paradigm whereby it is solely the student who experiences change through engaging with the academic community. The data indicates that they felt assured and confident enough of their position to open themselves, and their academic community, to a process of change. It is notable however, that there does seem to be a sense that economic and employment aspects are perhaps beyond their remit, their primary concern being developing a learning structure in the form of an accredited course.

The data collected in respect of the community figures indicates a broader set of concerns. Liam Chambers, the Island development officer, indicates a notion of change that appears reluctant to separate cultural/social, educational or economic threads. In interview he highlighted a strategic plan developed by SIDS in 1997 (L Chambers 2004: 6) that had as one of its key strategies the development of accredited further and higher education courses for the Island population. This strategy was to go hand in hand with other strands like developing social housing, improving the Island's technological profile etc. Following the drafting of the strategic plan a questionnaire was developed for the local community in order to ascertain what educational attainment the local community already had and what they sought in the way of accreditation and subject field for the future;

we saw it (the questionnaire) as a valuable tool in identifying what the gaps were in educational provision and lifelong learning. We also wanted to know what people's aspirations were. If we were going to try and locate a course, we needed to have some subject or theme that there was a popular demand for, as opposed to something esoteric.

(L Chambers 2004: 5)

As a result, the Island development society gained a clearer picture of the educational status quo on the Island, a picture which indicated a low level of educational qualification on the Island and pointed to a community that "wasn't ready for the 20<sup>th</sup> century let alone the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (ibid 5).

If the purpose of the strategic plan could be described as preparing the Island for the future, for change, what role would an Art course play in such a plan? How would he justify such a course in terms of utility? Chambers asserts that he "always felt that the arts could be an essential part of an economic sphere" (Ibid 8). He refers to his experience of the strategic plan for Skibbereen town where "there was quite a strong emphasis on the arts and education as one of the main functions of the town" (Ibid8).

Furthermore he contends that such a course should be viewed as part of a whole network of projects rather than in isolation;

everything was integrated as well. We'll say painting and art could be tourism related, it could be craft related, it could be tied in with - obviously based on the strengths that were there already - it could be a winter activity, you know, it was all encompassing really and by integrating it, networking with other things that were happening on the Island it strengthened it and made it more likely to succeed...

..and it was obviously high value and knowledge based, which was the direction we were trying to go.

(Ibid 10)

Chambers reiterates this point of strengthening the whole community by facilitating a network of projects. Rather than nurturing projects on a solely cultural, solely economic or social basis, he envisaged;

That it would be all embracing, it would be an integrated package I think really, that if you improve people's skills, they are in a better position to learn more, to improve their knowledge. And in that way they were improving, not just your own situation but their community as well.

(Ibid13)

Furthermore he notes that "an all embracing momentum for change"(ibid 13) was perhaps characteristic of the Celtic tiger era. On the Island there was a "new and higher expectation that things were going to improve and things could be made better" and that if things were improving in the cities, that "maybe we could get served a slice of the cake too" (ibid 14).

Breda Collins, a member of SIDS and the Island librarian at the time, was primarily aware of the Island as a community in a fragile position. She, like Liam Chambers, did not tend to distinguish between the economic, cultural or economic well being of the community. Rather than relying on the status quo as a template for the future, she was attuned to the need for the local community to control change on the Island rather than be a passive recipient.

In her role as librarian she had been instrumental in seeking and obtaining funding for the then state of the art ISDN line and computer software/hardware.



Majella O'Neill-Collins, not a SIDS committee member at the time of this module but closely connected to the Island, is a painter who had for some time facilitated children's and adult art classes at the Community Hall on the Island. Through these classes she was acutely aware of the appetite on the Island (and in the wider West Cork area) for some sort of accredited art course, that could be accessed in the community. Furthermore, as someone whose primary source of income was her painting, she was an example of the possibility of making a living in one's own community through their art , whether by sales or teaching.

When questioned as to why the community would press for an art course, rather than something more practical in a conventional sense, she notes:

There was a huge interest in the art classes, and lots of artists in the area. There was always artists coming through and travelling to the island. There was a crèche in the island and I had the children doing a lot of art. It was never an alien thing here."

(M O'Neill-Collins 2006:1)

In common with Liam Chamber's there seems to be an evident a belief in art practice as a viable and justifiable source of both creative and economic capital in the local community.

The Island community figures and the educational figures therefore appear to overlap somewhat in their vision of what their respective communities should be aspiring to, and as to how the respective communities should change. It is apparent that the educationalists were confident about the positive role third level education can play in sustaining a community, and equally assured of their role in

bringing educational opportunity to the local community. However, some of the more practical issues relating to education, and that the local community have experience of (like employment, critical population issues), are beyond the normal boundary of the educationalist's professional remit. This viewpoint is not surprising as it comes from a tradition in which the educational centre traditionally has been concerned only with the individual, not a community. Indeed, the student has traditionally moved to the academic community rather than vice versa.

Both Bernadette Burns and John O'Connor indicate that it was not their intention to simply impose a readymade third level course on the Island community but rather to negotiate a suitable, agreed programme platform. Indeed O'Connor notes that one of the key objectives is to open a two-way channel of learning between the school and the community, so that both may exchange knowledge. This would indicate a willingness of the part of the educators to engage in a process of change through their engagement with the local community.

The community figures also view accredited education as a priority but of necessity adopt a more holistic approach in seeing the availability of educational opportunity as one of a number of planks in the framework of a community's structure.

### **5.2.3 What attributes attracted the prospective partners to each other?**

It is apparent from the data that the initial impetus for the partnership comes from local community figures plus Bernadette Burns, who considered herself a member of both the academic and Island community. The key figures were not targeting a third level Institute based on proximity or academic reputation but rather adopting a strategy (implicitly rather than explicitly) of utilising existing links and networks. In this case Bernadette Burns acted as a “bridge” between the community and DIT. It was felt that this relationship between Bernadette Burns, the Island and DIT and subsequently John O’Connor was something “that we couldn’t have created I think.” (L Chambers 2004:10). Indeed in a geographical context there were more obvious third level candidates which would seem a more logical choice as third level partners for the Island community. However this would have meant developing relationships from scratch. In the event, Liam Chambers notes that he was amazed by the rapid development of the pilot from blueprint to actuality,

John responded through Ber I think and said he wanted to meet us. We were delighted, we thought we’d have a two or three year, at least, process to get any type of accredited training...in the early stages, but this speeded it up certainly, and effectively brought the institution to us, without having us to go and look for one, you know.

(L Chambers 2005:6)

He also points out that the presence of Bernadette Burns and John O'Connor in the initial group brought a level of professionalism and experience to the endeavour at an early stage which otherwise "we would have taken years longer to achieve without them, if ever" (ibid 11).

Bernadette Burns articulates a view that sees the possibilities for both the academic and local communities. From the Island's point of view she sees the partnership as a chance for it to work with a third level institution in the development and delivery of a locally centred course. From the point of view of the School, she notes that the local community offered the School a chance "to test and negotiate a new model offering education in a practice based discipline." (B Burns 6: 2005)

#### **5.2.4 What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the partnership?**

As outlined above Liam Chambers could refer to SIDS then strategic plan. This plan drawn up in 1997 points to the development of further and higher education links as one of its key strategies. He notes (2004:7) that the Island received funding for the development of the strategic plan and also funding for his position as a development officer together with other administration costs under the Community Development Programme. Otherwise he indicates that policy played no great part in the development of the partnership or the island project at this stage.

John O'Connor points out that the development of appropriate strategies within DIT were still at an embryonic stage at the time (J O'Connor 2005:5) and that this was not unusual as generally there seemed to be a lack of "planning prowess" within the Institutes of Technology/University sector. Data indicates that a strategic plan for the DIT was yet to be launched (2001) and as such for John O'Connor, as Head of School, there was an absence of any significant Institute/Faculty policy/strategy with which to guide the development of the Islands project. On the other hand, it has been noted that the absence of a firm strategy allowed certain flexibility in deciding that this could be a valuable project for the School.

### **5.2.5 What were the characteristics of this pre-partnership vehicle stage?**

- The impetus came from within a network of friends/acquaintances living on or connected with Sherkin Island.
- This group was made up largely of active members/employees of the local development society.
- Members of the local community initially approached the third level institute rather than vice versa.
- An initial idea found its way to an educational manager through an individual (Bernadette Burns), who formed a bridge between the academic and local community.
- That educational manager had a personal interest in the role of education in sustaining isolated communities. He was perceived by the "bridge person" as "approachable" and "not worn down by bureaucracy".
- At the time that manager had a certain degree of autonomy and discretion regarding budgets and staff allocation.

- From the point of view of the educational professionals this initial stage took place without a hard and fast Institute policy/strategy with regard to such issues as access and community links.
- From the point of view of the Island community individuals, they could look to an Island strategic plan. Otherwise they too were unaware of any directly supportive government policy/strategy.
- While the educational professionals naturally focused on education as the crux of any project/pilot, the “Islanders” viewed educational opportunity as one of a number of key strands inter-linking issues like housing, employment, sustainability.

### **5.2.6 Conclusions**

The data underlines this formative period as being marked by personal relationships between key figures involved in a professional and/or voluntary capacity in the local development society and individuals from tertiary education. Of key importance, as highlighted by Liam Chambers, are individuals who wear more than one hat, in that they act as bridging points between prospective partners.

It is particularly notable that the Partnership Vehicle came about as a consequence of the personal interest of the key figures identified, rather than as the result of a particular institutional strategy or Government policy. Having said that it should be acknowledged that the local community had recently developed a strategic plan with higher education as one of its goals. In this respect those individuals involved who were members of the local community were somewhat

better armed than those individuals who were members of the academic community.

As might be expected the educational professionals tended to see any prospective project in terms of educational values, with the possibility of redressing imbalances that occur in the educational status quo. The Island individuals, on the other hand, appear to have a more holistic view of the project, reflected in an understanding of an art course as a pragmatic field of study, which help the community and individual fulfill social, economic and educational goals.

### **5.3 Module 2 : The Partnership Vehicle (pilot course development)**

#### **Description of the unit of analysis.**

This module focuses on the period from the first formal meeting of the joint working group at “The Glebe House”, Ballinadee in 1998 up to the period before the launch of the “Islands Project” in 2000. It was at that meeting in Ballinadee that the partnership vehicle can be characterised as having been created, the component groups having decided to develop the concept of “the Islands Project” and having agreed a course of action.

#### **5.3.1 Who were the key partners and individuals at this stage?**

The partnership vehicle is initially made up of two organisations, SIDS representing the local community and the School of Art, Design and Printing at DIT. SIDS is a co-operative society, being registered as such since 1984, with a focus on promoting Sherkin as a place of residence. It works “closely with other Islands, the county council, the social housing association, and other organisations and groups in furthering its objectives.” (“Challenging Education” 2004:10). It was actively involved in securing a community development worker to represent those English-speaking islands in its area (ibid 10). SIDS, as a co-op, functions with a committee annually elected by the shareholders, those shareholders being members of the community subject to certain conditions.



The School of Art, Design and Printing has its origins in the first Technical Schools of Art and Science in Dublin at Kevin Street. The School comes under the control of the Faculty of Applied Arts, the Head of School reporting to the Director of Faculty, and so up the chain of command to the Directorate and the Institute President.

The key figures identified in module 1 remain as important actors within this unit of analysis. In addition, it was at this stage that Dr. Siún Hanrahan from the School emerged as a key player within the project. The evidence indicates that she came to play an important role in co-authoring research funding within the Faculty and advising SIDS on their successful EEI (Equality Education Initiative) funding application that allowed Stage 3 (the programme delivery) to take place. In contrast to other key figures there appears a more explicit and forthright questioning of educational norms and structures, and a questioning of the presumed benefits of the educational/knowledge rich centre reaching out to the perhaps presumed educational / knowledge poor periphery. In her paper “Digital Landscapes: A Paradigm of Engagement Rather than Control” (HAN Conference: October 2001) for example, she positions the “Islands Project” in the context of a new sort of learning paradigm where;

digital technology is enabling isolated communities to come together and *determine the grounds* of their relationship with third level institutions. The structures of any environment anticipate and shape the dynamics of those who work and participate in it. The contents of lessons may be forgotten but the structure of learning is not. Where education is essentially a monologue - a situation “in which one party names and directs the other, while the other listens deferentially” – it constructs authority as domination.

(S Hanrahan 2001:2)

This is a paradigm, she seems to propose, in which technology can play a role in a re-negotiating of the normative educational roles, extending the gambit beyond the educational realm, to the realm of learning. For if “isolated communities” are to truly “determine the grounds” on which they will engage with the educational institution, the boundaries are certainly breached beyond accredited, structured learning (that is education) to open up a landscape of possibilities.

In such a “Moorland” issues of authority and ownership may be thrown open for mutual re-definition, facilitated by the boundary re-drawing possibilities of that “digital landscape”. Very much like Edwards’ thesis of “differentiation” and “de-differentiation”, the crux of her notion of change seems to be the possibility of contesting normative roles and assumptions, this contestability arising when the architecture of authority, in the form of the educational institution, ventures to the periphery:

What was once ‘the centre’ is required to engage with an erstwhile ‘margin’ in an educational partnership in which authority is what emerges from their engagement rather than from either party.

(Ibid 2)

Edwards', as we have seen, places contestability at the heart of Learning Society matters, emphasising the importance of not simply being subject to change but being explicitly involved in the very framing of change. A willingness to engage in such a process of contestability seems to be evident here.

### **5.3.2 What were the aims and objectives of the Partnership Vehicle?**

Following the workshop at Ballinadee, it was agreed to initiate a working group made up of members of SIDS and the School, who would work together on developing a pilot programme. While these two groups acted in unison to form the "Islands Project" Partnership Vehicle, it is evident from the data that each of the sub-groups had their own aims and objectives, particular to the partner they represented.

The aims of the SIDS element of the partnership were envisaged as:

- To develop, with Dublin Institute of Technology, a prototype degree programme in Art and Culture for mature students. The programme to be delivered through intensive workshops and tutorials on Sherkin Island, using both live and electronic media to facilitate distance education from DIT
- To develop a methodology suitable for delivery by other third level institutions in conjunction with any remote community (positive outcomes would have significant implications for diversifying teaching methods within mainstream education)

- To provide economic opportunities for professionally qualified artists and a more socially attuned community, in the information society

(“Evaluation of the EEI: Third Level Community Projects” 2003: 2)

Not surprisingly these aims are a more concrete form of the ideas put forward by the key local community figures in the previous module. However, there are a number of interesting issues to be noted. Firstly, the community sees itself as implicitly involved in developing both the programme and its method of delivery. As a result of this it is explicitly registered that the local community has some claim to ownership of the resultant model. Also, the community reinforces a belief that art and artists have both an economic and social role to play in their community.

From the point of view of the School, a progress memo (John O’Connor 1999) highlights two aims for the project. The first aim foregrounds “developments in educational technology” as a possible means of devising access for isolated communities to third level institutions, to “match the academic knowledge base to that of individuals at a local level.” The second aim is envisaged as opening “ a two-way learning channel” between “the traditional learning centre” and “local culture”. This two-way system would allow the Island access to the educational center and the educational centre access to “the local culture and indigenous knowledge base”. As an example of the sort of learning dividends available, the

memo cites an Island community's understanding of "the need for flexibility and adaptability on a fundamental basis: this ability is essential for survival in the frequently adverse conditions they face." The School is therefore attempting to lower the normative barriers to allow the island community share in the creation and ownership of any course that the Partnership Vehicle develops, and at the same time, specifically broaden the Schools ability to become flexible and adaptive.

### **5.3.3 At this stage what were the various roles under taken and why?**

Documentation referring to the initial stage 1 period lays emphasis on the fact that "both sides agreed that it would be inappropriate for a third level institution to simply parachute in a ready – made course. Rather it was agreed to forge a new and innovative type of course that would address the needs and concerns of this particular group of students" (Art and Culture Programme, Sherkin Island – An overview 2003:1).

Data indicates that the negotiation of roles did not present any major problems for the partners. What is indicated was a negotiation process that did include some crossing of traditional boundaries, the SIDS element of the partnership having some input into areas that would normally be the sole preserve of the academic institution, areas such as programme time-tabling, structure and curriculum. While there was some consultation with SIDS regarding the syllabus, for example, as to the breath of the disciplines that would be appropriate for the

prospective students (S Hanrahan 2005: 3), the partners expressed themselves content to let inherent expertise decide responsibility. Therefore the content of modules fell to the School members, whereas the SIDS members advised as to the probable requirements of the future students (L Chambers 2004: 27) with regard to time-tabling:

We weren't quite sure of the exact structure we would end up with but we obviously felt that we knew what the community wanted, we felt there was a market for accredited courses in art in particular, and I think we knew that the syllabus, the content would not be our forte.

(L Chambers 2004: 11)

Regarding funding for the "Islands Project", it was at this stage that SIDS applied for, and was subsequently granted, funding from the Department of Education and Science. This funding came via the Departments "Education Equality Initiative" and was to fund a three year pilot.

This funding application was made in SIDS name only, with Siún Hanrahan providing assistance in drafting the application. Data indicates that the rationale for SIDS alone applying was to keep the budget tight, in order to make the application as attractive as possible to adjudicators. On the other hand it was felt that John O'Connor as Head of School had enough "flexibility" with the School budget and staff time-tabling to cover costs and resource issues on his side (L Chambers 2004:14). It later transpired that this "flexibility" on John O'Connor's part was fleeting, a window which rapidly closed as procedures and budgetary discretion at School level hardened (John O'Connor 2005: 1)

In any case from my own observational notes from partnership meetings there was also a perception among the partners that the overall DIT structure was not flexible enough to allow outside funds obtained to be routed to the project and any such funds would simply vanish into the larger Institute budget.

#### **5.3.4 What were the resource implications for each partner?**

This stage is somewhat more concrete in form compared to the earlier fluidity of Stage 1, a stage that might be described as an “imagining” period; that is, a period when a group of individuals initiated the process of the project through imagining possible futures and directions. Stage 2 sees these possibilities being fashioned into more concrete aims and objectives through a process of negotiation between the twin groups within the partnership.

It is interesting to note that there was an explicit decision on the part of the partners to press ahead with a pilot programme. The partners seemed to feel that they had the necessary means to develop and deliver a pilot programme themselves, with a strategy of seeking outside funding for further development at a later stage rather than at seed level. Bernadette Burns notes that, “At the time everyone involved agreed that it was important to get something up and running as soon as possible, and then later seek accreditation and funding.” (B Burns 2005: 6) John O’Connor observes that the advantage of adopting a such an approach is that something can be built and developed at a time when “interest is live” among those who see the potential. (J O’Connor 2004: 4)

The resource implications brought on by Stage 2 are twofold. The School is able to fund its element (basically a time-tabling issue with some travel expenditure) within its own budget and to avail of pedagogical expertise from the newly formed Learning and Teaching centre at DIT. Likewise the SIDS costs are largely a matter of working hours, which the community is able to absorb through existing funding for the Island Development Officer and his assistant. Voluntary members of the working group supply their time free of charge, while those employed on both sides give extra time without charge.

### **5.3.5 What was the nature of the partnership in terms of formality at this stage of maturation?**

On the general issue of the formality of there appears to have been two distinct notions in evidence in the data collected. On the one hand, John O' Connor, while emphasising the partnership ethos inherent in the project, is quite clear that, of necessity, it was an informal partnership;

The partnership model agreed was an informal one in that a Head of School does not have the authority to sign an agreement or commit the Institute. My powers are limited to allocating staff and limited funds from a budget.

(J O'Connor 2005:7)

From the SIDS point of view there was at this stage a sort of written partnership undertaking document put forward (see appendix). However it is clear from the data collected that John O'Connor as Head of School would not have been authorised to sign such an undertaking. In the event it appears that SIDS did not



press the matter. When I questioned Liam Chambers about the formality of the partnership he spoke of the understanding between the partners as being beyond notions of formality and better defined in terms of overriding trust (L Chambers 2004:2). He did concede however that some sort of written agreement might well be required if the partnership undertook the delivery of a degree programme, as a pre-requisite perhaps to draw down mainstream funding from the Department of Education for example (Ibid 25).

### **5.3.6 What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the partnership?**

From the standpoint of the School, the data collected shows that Institute strategy at this stage of the Partnership Vehicle remained rather vague and broadly speaking there appears to be no clear strategic support to which the School partnership team could look. There is mention of an understanding that the project would be supported by EU and national policy (S Hanrahan 2005:4) but practical funding supports for the School in this regard seem absent.

Liam Chambers confirms that they had no knowledge of similar partnership projects and indeed that prior to the EEI application there did not appear to be any funding possibilities (L Chambers 2004:14). The possibility of funding from the Department of Education under the Education Equality Initiative appears toward the end of this stage. The application for these funds (co-authored by

SIDS personnel and Siún Hanrahan) is framed very much in terms of social inclusiveness and equity:

As best I can recall...the application highlighted issues of social inclusivity –by being based on partnership with a local community it aimed to achieve a number of things. Firstly, that people for whom it would not be possible to up-sticks and move to a city, it would be possible to engage in third level education in a practice-based discipline. Secondly, that accessing third level education need not deprive an isolated community of some of its more dynamic members. Thirdly, that individuals need not be wrenched from their knowledge base in order to participate in and contribute to third level education.

(S Hanrahan 2005:5)

### **5.3.7 What were the characteristics of the partnership at this stage?**

The characteristics displayed are as follows;

- Individuals coalesce into two working groups, one from SIDS and one from the School, both composed at their core of those key individuals identified from stage 1. Other staff and community members joined these respective groups but the key personnel as previously outlined remained to the fore, with an additional key figure, Siún Hanrahan, identified.
- The School and the Island communities lay emphasis on the joint ownership of the course that they aim to develop. The Island envisage an accredited course which will fulfill the local communities particular needs across social, economic and educational strata. The School hope to help develop a course that utilises new learning technologies and at the same time open a two-way learning channel with the Island community, particularly identifying flexibility and adaptability as desirable concepts to learn from the Island community.
- Formal funding applications are processed by the two groups within the Partnership. The School looks to in-house funding through Institute and faculty research type platforms, “access” type funding not being perceived as available. SIDS seek external funding through a Department of Education equality initiative. It is evident that both groups seek funding on an individual rather than joint basis, it being perceived that this is the best way to proceed.

- A noticeable niche position within the partnership develops at this stage. It is another “bridge” individual, in this case Siún Hanrahan, who has a role in both groups formulating, advising and drafting funding applications.
- SIDS/School groups begin a series of meetings aimed at negotiating a suitable course structure. SIDS speaking on behalf of future student-participants outline their criteria in respect of time-tabling, the School setting out a criteria in respect of curriculum, teaching resources, etc.
- There is evident an explicit decision to start a pilot programme as soon as practical. This is facilitated in the School under the short course model that would furnish students with accreditation under the European Credit Transfers System (ECTS). This is seen as allowing the partners the experience of jointly delivering an accredited course, while testing the feasibility on a number of fronts of developing a diploma/degree course.
- It is evident that while both communities view the enterprise as being a partnership, with a partnership ethos at its core, the School is clear that it is not in a position to commit to any formal partnership agreements on behalf of the DIT. There is an understanding on the part of the School figures that only the President of the Institute is capable of giving such an undertaking and when the term partnership is used, the School makes a point of highlighting its informal nature and that it is of necessity a relationship between the School and the Island community, not the Island and DIT.

### **5.3.8 Conclusions.**

This module relates to the actualisation of an “Island’s Project” Partnership Vehicle. Although informal (in that no contractual agreement is in force) in nature, the partnership establishes respective working groups, which collaborate at the level of a joint committee. From the start the partnership announces its intention to develop and deliver the pilot on a joint basis, both communities seeking to optimise and value the other’s expertise and knowledge.

The partnership rapidly develops a pilot programme and decides to set a pilot in motion as soon as possible, while at the same time setting about the task of sourcing suitable funding. It is envisaged that the School will be in a position to fund its involvement in the project through the Head of School's discretion concerning resources together with small scale funding opportunities within the Institute. The Island community meanwhile succeeds in drawing down funding from the EEI. It is noteworthy that as such the two partners seek funding on an individual rather than joint basis.

## **5.4 Module 3: The Partnership Vehicle (Pilot programme delivery)**

### **Description of the unit of analysis.**

This unit of analysis deals with the period covering the intake of the first group of student-participants in 2000, until the last formal School assessment in 2003.

This period saw the first cohort of student-participants complete three stages with of the pilot course, with a second cohort completing two stages. The first cohort at its formation consisted of 11 participants, while the second cohort consisted of 14 individuals (“Clarity Report” 2004: 28). These individuals were drawn primarily from the local Islands and the West Cork area.

### **5.4.1 What led to the development of this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?**

At the end of the previous stage there was an evident decision to start a pilot programme with the resources available there and then. The School facilitated this within its own structures, the Head of School having a fair degree of latitude with regard to the time-tabling of teaching hours and other school resources. The local community commenced the process of seeking external funding aided by a member of the school working group. Data indicates that the availability of full

time staff in the form of the development officer, and his part-time assistant, were crucial factors at this stage.

This strategy of getting something going as soon as possible merits some consideration as it would appear to go against the norm that would see bodies applying for funding prior to undertaking a pilot. As to the logic of such a strategy John O'Connor noted:

The benefit of developing a project from available resources is that it can be done when the interest is live. Those who can clearly see the potential and trust their instincts can build immediately without having to convince others to fund and/or support a new initiative.

(John O'Connor 2005: 4)

Bernadette Burns concurs that there was a feeling among the partners to get "something up and running as soon as possible, and then later seek accreditation and funding" and that "the project on many levels was more successful than we had hoped." (B Burns 2005: 6) However, as she notes, "the down side is that getting accreditation for a BA programme that is being delivered in such a different way has been much more time consuming than any of us had imagined." (Ibid 6)

#### **5.4.2 Was there any overt change in the nature of the Partnership Vehicle at this stage?**

This stage is the longest of the units of analysis, occupying a period of some three years. Despite this long period the key figures as identified in modules 1 and 2 remain to the fore. An exception occurs in the case of Breda Collins who

left her position as assistant to the Island development officer during this stage to take up a position on the mainland. Her departure from Sherkin overlapped somewhat with the arrival of Josephine Smyth on the SIDS staff, Josephine taking up Breda's previous role as assistant to the development officer. Other than this the key figures remained in place at this stage. Indeed Josephine Smyth pointed to this continuity of personnel as one of the particular strengths of the partnership (J Smyth 2004: 15). It should be noted that the DIT working group had at this stage expanded to include lecturers to deliver the various modules of the course. While this brought new inputs to the course structure and modes of delivery, it had little bearing on the thrust and makeup of the partnership vehicle itself.

What can be seen to have had a bearing on that vehicle was the induction of the first cohort of students into the equation. Data indicates that among the founding partners there was a sense that the ethos of partnership, which pervaded the relationship between the local and academic communities, should extend, as far as possible, to their relationship with the students themselves. Evidence indicates that the partners attempted to engender this ethos on a number of fronts. For example, it was decided by the team partners to refer to the students as "participants" (or "student-participants), aiming to give a sense of ownership to the student-body, and "to reflect the emphasis on partnership, rather than the traditional 'student-teacher' relationship" (Clarity Report 2004:12).

In the previous module the SIDS figures speak of taking decisions in the project development stage on behalf of future students, based on what the SIDS figures imagine will be those students' needs and interests. In this module, the pilot is running and those same SIDS figures signal their intent, as much as possible, to involve the participants in their own learning process. Similarly, the School figures that drafted the pilot course curriculum are keen to seize the opportunity afforded by a new sort of programme, to try and extend the normal parameters and involve the participants as much as possible. The "BA in Visual Art" course document notes of the pilot programme:

From the start of the programme the participants were wholly implicated in their own and in their peers learning processes. Strategies such as learning portfolios, peer learning, critical discussion, etc., were utilised to enable the participants to develop creatively within a group and individual dynamic.

("BA in Visual Art" 2004: 9-10)

Data collected shows that the SIDS and School partners continue to make reference to their collaboration as a partnership. However from my observation it is in the latter parts of this stage that there is a much clearer emphasis from the School team that the partnership is between the School and the local community, rather than the Institute and the community.

#### **5.4.3. What were the resource implications for the partners?**

SIDS started to receive funding from the EEI in January 2001. Since they knew at the start of the pilot in October 2000 that this was on the way they were able to make ad hoc arrangements to cover expenses in the interim. The funding that



they received was to cover a three year period, however, they “managed to budget cleverly and stretched our three years funding to cover four years” (J Smyth 2004: 20)

The School continued to be able to fund its costs largely through the discretion of

John O’Connor:

It was decided that the parts of the pilot programme that the School were responsible for be funded through the School Budget. We were also awarded some monies through seed funding and through research projects.

(B Burns 2005: 9)

These costs primarily related to teaching/ contact hours, technical back up (especially in respect of eLectures), some art materials and travel expenses.

As the “Islands Project” was a pilot programme the Student-Participants were not levied with registration or tuition fees but this also meant that they were not entitled to “full-time” students cards. From the EEI via SIDS there were some monies available for child-care expenses, overnight accommodation on the Island and some travel expenses for the participants when they attended lectures in Dublin (once a year). The Island Development Officer (L Chambers 18: 2004) also had some success in encouraging a flexible attitude from the Department of Social Welfare as to the continued payment of benefits to the participants while they attended the pilot.

#### **5.4.5 What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?**

In terms of policy it is evident that the partnership members perceived that there was a supportive climate educationally, at national and EU levels, which would look favorably on the “Island’s Project”. Team members make reference to EU and Irish policy papers as part justification of the course. However, although documents like the White paper on adult education and the Bologna accord seem to buttress the project theoretically, there seems to be little by way of direct funding that the partners can access (with the exception of the EEI monies accessed in the previous module).

This module of analysis is marked in terms of strategy by the publication by the DIT of “The Vision for Development 2001-2015” (DIT 2001), in which the Institute sets out perceived challenges and goals<sup>13</sup>. The data collected indicates that in practical terms it fails to register on the Partnership Vehicle radar. This is not in itself surprising as the strategic plan is little more than a proposal or blueprint, with the hard detail to be worked out in future years by various committees and working groups. However, it is a useful document for this research as its analysis provides some insight as to the Institute hierarchy’s general demeanor in terms of learning society notions.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A more focused strategic plan was produced in 2006 (Dublin Institute of Technology: Strategic Development Plan 2006-2009), produced primarily, it would appear, as a response to a HEA funding competition. It utilizes the seven themes set out in the earlier plan, and interestingly, while setting out a range of projects undertaken by the Institute in collaboration with communities over the years, it fails to mention the “Island’s Project”.

In the foreword to the plan the Institute President sets out the rationale for the development and delivery of the strategy. He highlights a worldwide context of “change”, setting out a schema that highlights “demographic, technological, social, economic, environmental and cultural” (DIT 4: 2001) factors driving that change, echoing what we have seen in Edwards’ comment in the literature review. Furthermore the future is painted as a time of “uncertainty”, with four key players highlighted as driving the need to change, these key players or perhaps stakeholders being the Government, Society, the “student – clientele” and industry.

It is envisaged that these stakeholders have differing agendas and needs. The Government will be “seeking cost efficiency, responsiveness to national goals and accountability in return for state funding” (DIT 4: 2001). Society will demand “higher education play a more effective part in addressing inequalities affecting disadvantaged groups” (DIT 4:2001). Students will expect “new learning delivery systems”, while Industry will be “seeking the most efficient and effective delivery of programmes and new programme content responsive to its needs.” Coupled with these new demands is an expectation that there will be increasing competition in the higher education sector for an ever diminishing pot of potential students (“student – clientele”), and increasing competition for state and non-state funding.

In order to satisfy these demands the strategic plan sets out seven themes that the Institute will need to embrace:

- Multi-level, Learner-Centred Environment
- Strong Postgraduate and Research Arms
- Closely Allied with and Responsive to Industry
- Reputation for Excellence
- Flexible Leading-Edge Electronic Capabilities
- Supportive and Caring Ethos
- Entrepreneurial Institution

The plan flags the end of the certainty and primacy of government funding, appearing somewhat resigned to a future of uncertainty. Its response to this uncertainty is to explicitly focus on developing stronger ties with the economic realm, adopting some of that sphere's terminology ("student-clientele") and emphasising that the Institute must become an "Entrepreneurial Institute".

From this study's point of interest (community partnership as a means of addressing educational inequality) there appears to be little on offer. The plan seems to set the bar at getting "disadvantaged groups" to come to the educational centre, rather than the Institute going out to them. Indeed the strategic plan is quite geographically explicit as to the Institute's zone of influence, specifically aiming to "contribute to the intellectual and cultural development of the city, with particular reference to Dublin's inner-city" (DIT 19: 2001).

A possible means of extending the Institute's geographical zone of influence is pointed to in theme 5, "Flexible Leading-Edge Electronic Capabilities". In this

instance it is envisaged that technological advancement can be utilised as a means of developing “a range of outreach centres collaboratively with industry/development boards/agencies.” As such it is apparent that the sort of outreach imagined is more concerned with the business community than with local communities per se. This is understandable given the tradition of the DIT and its close links with the construction, marketing, hotel industries, etc. However, the underlying thrust of the seven themes does tend to reinforce the point raised in the literature review as to the ambiguity of the term “community”.

Based on the models set out in the literature review it certainly seems that in response to a perceived climate of change, the Institute was leaning toward a vision of a learning society as a learning market.

While the Institute strategic plan is of little relevance in real terms to the Partnership vehicle, toward the later stage of this module the issue of “Partnership” itself and the model on offer at an Institute level comes to the fore. Although not directly an issue of policy or strategy, the Institute’s notion of partnership is an explicit indication of what formal partnerships the Institute has an interest in developing.

As we have seen the partnership vehicle developed on the “Island’s Project” has been a partnership between the School and the Community, with the partners subscribing to an ethos of shared ownership and responsibility. However, during this module as the School began a lengthy validation process for the “BA in

Visual Art”, certain contractual difficulties became evident. In jointly delivering the pilot programme, an informal understanding between the School and the Community has been sufficient for the Partners. However, if a degree programme is to be jointly delivered (and this is one of the aims of the Partnership vehicle), Institute procedures require a formal partnership agreement between the community and the Institute itself.

“Partnership with external organisations” (DIT; 2000), produced by the Academic Council at the DIT, sets out the procedures and criteria for the Institute to enter into a partnership with another organisation. The document specifically does not relate to a number of activities including “short courses” and “courses in outreach centres”.<sup>15</sup> Therefore the “Islands Project” in the period of analysis as a short course would not fall into the criteria for these procedures. However, once the SIDS/School partnership attempts to deliver a degree type course it would appear that the matter becomes less straight-forward. If the course is to be delivered entirely by DIT staff, as a sort of outreach programme, the procedures seem to remain outside of the “partnership” procedures. If, however, the envisaged course is partly delivered by community personnel, the partnership procedure comes into play.

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<sup>14</sup>The Institute does operate a community links programme under the auspices of Dr. Tommy Cooke. However, the courses on offer are not of degree standard and the partnerships between the community links unit and the community do not involve written partnership agreements.

The procedure document sets out a two-fold process involving partnership and accreditation. The document defines partnership as follows:

A Partnership will involve a contractual relationship with an appropriate external institution or organisation for the purposes of collaboration on programmes of study.

(DIT 4: 2000)

However, in order for a “contractual relationship” to occur, a prospective partner organisation must of itself undergo a validation process to be recognized by the Institute as being “appropriate” and “accredited”;

A partner organisation is one accredited by DIT in which a programme or range of programmes is validated and/or franchised by DIT. Such an organisation may be a private company, a non-profit organisation or a public corporation, a professional institution or another educational institution, in Ireland or abroad.

(DIT 4: 2000)

These procedures and definitions evidently have their roots in the franchising out of DIT accredited courses to be delivered by other organisations, for example, third level institutions in Asia. As such it would seem evident that the partnership mechanism available at Institute level is limited in its capacity and not particularly suited for the purpose of developing partnerships with local communities. It is evidently a construction for engaging with other members of the academic community or perhaps the business community. In the event it would appear that the only formal model of partnership that is available would actually mitigate against the Islands Project Partnership Vehicle, as it would mean engaging in another, lengthy, validation process.

#### 5.4.6 What were the characteristics of the partnership at this stage?

The characteristics displayed are as follows;

- The initial one year pilot programme is completed. The perceived success leads to an extension of 2 further years of the pilot and the intake of another cohort of student-participants. The student-participants are awarded European Credit Transfers under the short course system in DIT. The pilots come to an end in 2003, the initial group of student-participants having completed 3 stages (3 years) and the second group having completed 2 stages (years).
- The two partner working groups continue to meet regularly to discuss progress and possibilities regarding the short course and the proposed degree course. What is particularly evident is the existence of certain boundaries (whether self-imposed or not) in relationships with bodies outside of the partnership but which have a large input into the ongoing programme and any future degree programme. The SIDS grouping deal almost exclusively with the major financial supporters of the project, the EEI. The school grouping dealing exclusively with the Institute and the validation process.
- The Partnership's loose association with the West Cork Arts Centre develops into something more concrete. The student-participants avail of workshops at the centre outside of course hours to facilitate their creative development. Some of the students gain part-time employment on the centre's outreach programmes.
- The cohort of students are explicitly invited to take a more than usual role in the construction of their learning. They are ascribed the title of student-participants.
- One of the attributes of the School group which was instrumental in the Partnership's formation, flexibility regarding the allocation of school resources, comes to be severely restricted during this period of analysis. There is a noticeable shift over the summer period of 2002 when the Head of School experiences a dramatic reduction in available resources. From a position of comparative wealth regarding the allocation of teaching hours and budget, the environment changes very rapidly. Lecturing hours are dramatically reduced at the School (75% of part-time teaching hours axed-see draft letter 30.9.2002)), thereby placing extreme pressure on the mainstream School programme, let alone pilot programmes.



- It is evident at the end of this period of analysis that there is a perception that the flexibility that allowed the school to initially develop the partnership has ceased to exist.
- The partnership did not succeed in developing further lines of funding at this stage. The EEI point to mainstream funding as the best option if the degree programme receives validation.
- School team members within the Partnership draw up a prototype course document for a degree in Fine Art based on its experience of the “Islands Project”.
- The school continues to look for in-house research funding, the lecturer and management hours being made possible through the Head of School’s discretion over the school budget.
- The key figures remain largely unchanged although at this stage Breda Collins bows out. Prior to Breda’s departure Josephine Smyth joins the SIDS working group. The continuity of personnel is seen as one of the major contributing factors in the strength of the partnership

#### **5.4.7. Conclusion.**

This module has two distinct themes in terms of the “Partnership Vehicle”. The first theme sees a vehicle engaged in the process of developing and delivering a pilot project, while the second theme relates to the validation of the prototype degree.

The initial project is held to be successful and is extended to a three year term, with a second cohort of student-participants coming on board. It is expected at the time that the validation of a prototype degree based on the experience of the pilot will come on stream during the lifetime of the pilot programme. However this turns out not to be the case, for two apparent reasons. Firstly, the pilot

programme is curtailed at the end of the third year of its delivery on the instructions of the Faculty, citing wide-ranging budgetary cutbacks and calling a halt to any pilot programmes being delivered by the School. In any event the pilot funding secured by the local community is coming to an end. Secondly, the validation process for the new degree turns out to be an exceedingly lengthy, indeed torturous operation. It is this painstakingly slow validation process that increasingly becomes the other dominant theme of this module.

This initial vehicle has a certain degree of obsolescence built into it as its success in developing and delivering a successful pilot programme leads to the development of a BA programme. While the local community representatives were content to work on the basis of an informal partnership the Island Development Officer seemed aware that a move to mainstreaming (as the holy grail of the process) would require a more formal agreement between the local and academic communities.

The model of partnership employed by the School for the pilot was of necessity an informal one as it was not within the remit of the School to enter into formal partnership agreements. This allowed the School to adopt an attitude of close collaboration with the local community and indeed the “student-participants”, relaxing certain normative educational boundaries in an attempt to tailor a course that met the needs of the community. However, moving from the delivery of a pilot, short-course programme to a BA programme required the partnership

vehicle to bring the Institute on board as a partner. To achieve this, it became evident, the local community of itself would need to be validated to become “accredited” by the Institute. The Institute mechanisms for such a partnership were somewhat limited, taking the form of a franchise model which is based on an external organisation wholly or partly delivering the course of study and requires a validation by the Institute of any prospective partner body.

Such a process is perhaps not unreasonable in franchise situations but begs the question of the Institute’s attitude to communities other than those of an academic or business nature. What appears to be on offer to the local community are two polar opposites. On the one hand, any pedagogical involvement by the community seems to require that the community endure an accreditation process in order to be validated. On the other hand, an “outreach” programme, run by the Institute on a less formal basis, by-passes the need for validation, since by Institute definition, no partnership exists.

## **5.5 Module 4: The Partnership Vehicle (Professional Development programme)**

### **Description of the unit of analysis**

This unit of analysis deals with the period from autumn 2003 to the summer 2004. In this stage we shall see evidence of a certain refocusing of the Partnership. The termination of stage 3 had been somewhat forced upon the Partnership by external events; that is, as a consequence nationwide educational cutbacks and the resulting rapid curtailment at the School of pilot programmes.

As a result of these events a course was drawn up for the pilot programme participants by SIDS, in collaboration with members of the School, and in partnership with the West Cork Arts Centre. The programme was based around a series of workshops, with the School providing technical and pedagogical expertise. Although some of the workshops were facilitated by School staff, the School itself was not directly involved in devising the programme or its delivery and the resulting programme did not carry any formal accreditation from DIT. It was envisaged however, that the course work produced by the Participants could be utilised at a later stage to strengthen the individual's case for direct transfer onto the new degree programme.

This unit of analysis then, focuses on a period of re-adjustment for the Partnership, in which a further learning structure (“the Professional Development Course”) is developed and delivered, while on a parallel track the School continues in the process of seeking validation for the prototype degree. In this module the West Cork Arts Centre becomes a direct partner to SIDS, while the School is less directly involved, although the School has some flexibility regarding staff members giving expert advice.

#### **5.5.1 What led to the development of this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?**

This stage emanated from events largely external to the Partnership itself, events that brought about the termination of Stage 3. Following pay budget cutbacks in 2002 the School “suffered a 75% reduction in our budget allocation for part time teaching”. (JO’C draft letter 30.09.2002), this having the effect of placing extra pressure on the allocation of full time teaching hours. In a worsening climate of budgetary restraints John O’Connor as Head of School received instructions that the school were “not to run any more pilot programmes until the BA course was validated” (B Burns 2005: 16).

From the SIDS point of view the three year funding from the EEI was about to come to the end of its term. Moreover the partnership had not identified further funding options for the “Islands Project”. Indeed there seemed to be an expectation on the part of SIDS team members that the validation of the BA

would open up the funding opportunities through pushing into the arena of mainstreaming.

Against such a backdrop and faced with the very real possibility of the suspension of the pilot course the data collected indicates a pronounced reluctance on the part of the partners to allow proceedings to come to such an abrupt halt. Bernadette Burns notes that:

The participants of the programme, and the SIDS working group were reluctant to let the programme wind down, when it was running so successfully. SIDS formed a partnership with WCAC to run a series of weekend workshops from October to May on Sherkin. John O'Connor gave me permission to work with them in an advisory capacity for this period of time. Other members of teaching staff in the school offered their services voluntarily, and we went down and worked with the participants.

(B Burns 2005:16)

In view of this, there seemed to be a strong intent on behalf of the various interested parties to keep the momentum rolling. To consider the resources to hand, to "go back to the drawing board" (L Chambers 2004: 23) and to develop an interim series of workshops, in the expectation of a successful validation process for the BA in the near future.

In July 2003 the SIDS/School teams met with the Student-Participants on Sherkin to advise them of the situation. John O'Connor highlighted an "economic shift" as the root cause (F.M. 21.7.05). It was put to the Participants that while there could be no formal DIT accredited course of any type in September of that year, the partnership were optimistic that the degree validation process would

gain momentum in the coming months and so the partnership would like to put in place some sort of structure to keep the group together. With the Participants' agreement the Partnership working group would, over the coming weeks, structure a programme that would:

- Take place over the academic period 2003/2004.
- "May" fulfill an APEL role to ease transfer onto the degree course if it comes about.
- However any such programme would not be accredited/ assessed by the School of Art.

Furthermore the WCAC would be approached to see if it could take place mainly at the Arts Centre (the Island community hall had recently been extensively damaged by fire).

My notes indicate that the meeting had a positive atmosphere and that the Participants' attitude seemed to be encapsulated by one person who spoke of her relief that there would be a framework in place for next year. It was therefore agreed that the SIDS/DIT team would work on a programme and get back to the participants.

What emerged from this process was the "Professional Development" programme, a programme delivered by the WCAC and SIDS in partnership, with technical/ teaching assistance from individuals at the School of Art, Design and Printing.

### **5.5.2 Was there any change to the make up of the Partnership Vehicle at this stage?**

As indicated above the School was precluded by Institute procedures from formalising its partnership with SIDS, and to a certain extent with the student-participants. Even though the Schools' relationship had been informal (or as described by Liam Chambers, "beyond formality"), the previous stage saw the School being required by the Faculty not to engage in further pilot programmes due to budgetary cutbacks. At the initial stages of the partnership (modules 1 and 2) John O'Connor, as Head of School, characterised the school as having "sufficient independence to develop the project without 'permission' because of the lack of procedure" (John O'Connor 2005: 5). By the time of this fourth module the situation had changed, particularly his discretion over staff and budget, so much so that he expressed a doubt as to whether such a pilot would be possible in the context of 2005 (John O'Connor 2005: 14).

Therefore at this stage the School was precluded from facilitating any further pilot programme. However, in order to maintain some sort of continuity in the, hoped, short period between the end of the pilot and the start of the prototype BA, the possibility was discussed for some sort of interim programme. Such a



programme would be delivered through a partnership between SIDS and the WCAC and would be made available to the student-participants:

SIDS formed a partnership with WCAC to run a series of weekend workshops from October to May. John O'Connor gave me permission to work with them in an advisory capacity for this period of time. Other members of teaching staff in the School offered their services voluntarily, and we went down and worked with the participants. I worked with Ann Davoran to devise and run a series of workshops in Professional Practice, which would help participants prepare for the continuation of their lives as practicing artists should the BA course not get validated.

(B Burns 2005: 16)

So while the School was not explicitly involved in the delivery of this “Professional Development” programme, some of its staff members were involved in an advisory manner while others acted as visiting lecturers for some of the modules delivered. At the same time, the school was pressing forward, seeking validation of the BA in Visual Art.

Therefore this stage is of particular note in that as the School was required to draw back somewhat (but not altogether), the West Cork Arts Centre increased its role in partnership with SIDS, central to this increased role is the director of the centre, Ann Davoran. Ann Davoran’s relationship with Sherkin existed on both personal and work levels. Ann had close ties to the Island in that she had been a regular visitor as a college friend of Majella O’Neill-Collins. As Josephine Smyth notes:

she (Ann) was very aware of what was happening on Sherkin, so again another fortuitous development in that she moved down and married an Islander and took over management of the Arts Centre .....

(J Smyth 2004: 23)

The WCAC's link to the partnership was further strengthened by the fact that Bernadette Burns and Majella O'Neill-Collins were Board members of the Arts Centre, Majella holding the Chair. Furthermore one of the course participants, Sheelagh Broderick, was also at the time a WCAC board member.

A particularly interesting aspect of the relationship between SIDS and the WCAC was the drafting and co-signing of a partnership agreement, something absent from the partnership between SIDS and the School of Art. Ann Davoran points to the fact that the centre has used similar agreements with other bodies and that she feels:

The process of developing an agreement brought clarity and understanding to our own and each others roles and responsibilities and expectations.

(Ann Davoran 2005: 2)

### **5.5.3 Was there any re-defining of the original aims and objectives at this stage?**

This stage may be seen as a response by the partnership to unforeseen circumstances. Also, as John O'Connor notes he had presumed that the discretionary powers he held as Head of School would remain in force perpetually, therefore the sudden reigning back on his discretionary powers to allocate teaching hours and resources came to be something of a shock to the partnership. Data indicates that due to its nature as a pilot, it was not envisaged

that the "Islands Project" could or should continue indefinitely. However, there is evident an expectation, on the part of the SIDS element at least, that the question of accreditation for the prototype degree would have been answered at a much earlier time in the process.

#### **5.5.4 What were the resource implications for each partner?**

While the partnership has not succeeded in identifying further funding, the SIDS team could at least rely on the EEI funding to see them to the end of the calendar year (rather than the academic year) thereby funding their element of this stage to December 2003. Thereafter, however, they came to rely on a series of ad-hoc funding arrangements, including a sum of approximately 10,000 Euro donated by the Student-participants following an art auction. This is not to say that there were not concerns as to the longevity of the partnership at this stage. For example data indicates that the SIDS team were seriously concerned in the summer of 2003 about the ability of the School to maintain a commitment to the Partnership, "in the context of the national cutbacks and particularly cutbacks within DIT itself." (L Chambers 2004: 23). However following a partnership meeting in June of that year, fears as to the willingness and ability of the School to maintain commitment to the process in the face of certain obstacles, were sufficiently allayed. The partnership decided to keep the impetus going by focusing on the utilisation of local networks and subsequently a series of workshops were developed by SIDS and the WCAC.

From the point of view of the school working group, Siun Hanrahan notes that;

Involvement at an informal level was the School's only way of demonstrating our good faith. In the face of internal obstacles, by participating in and supporting the development of this stage, the School has invested in maintaining the partnership.

(S Hanrahan 2005: 18)

### **5.5.5 What was the role (if any) of policy or strategy at this stage of the Partnership Vehicle?**

The DIT strategic plan is still going through its development process at this stage of the partnership. Regarding the WCAC, Ann Davoran notes that the centre's attitude regarding partnership was not so much informed by government or Arts Council policy than by "examples and experience from the general area".

Furthermore the WCAC strategic plan places learning/educational partnership at the core of the Centre's work (A Davoran 2005: 2).

### **5.5.6 What were the characteristics of the partnership at this stage?**

- The school is required to take a reduced role in the partnership at this stage as it receives instructions from Faculty that there was to be no new enrollment on pilot programmes.
- The partners decide to try to keep the ball rolling based on an expectation/hope that the BA in Visual Art will be validated.

- As a result a series of workshops is developed in partnership with the WCAC. The School's role is of a technical/pedagogical supportive nature as the workshops do not form part of any accredited course.
- These workshops are constructed and delivered by SIDS and the WCAC, with assistance from the School of Art and its staff. The workshops fulfill a number of roles, for example providing the possibility of making up an ECT shortfall in the pilot course in the event of the transfer of student-participants to a new prototype degree (the possibility being that some sort of APEL structure could be utilised), keeping the student group working together in the expectation of the degree programme being accredited, providing a useful series of workshops to prepare the student group for engaging in professional practice in the event of further programme coming on line.
- The partnership as a whole showed itself to be vulnerable to outside influences which could have a rapid effect on it with very little warning.
- The Student-Participants staged and promoted an auction of their work with the specific aim of generating funds for the "Professional Development" course of workshops.
- The local Arts centre was a willing partner in developing and delivering the said series of workshops.
- SIDS and the WCAC constructed and agreed a specific partnership agreement to cover this period of engagement. The School of Art, Design and Printing was specifically not a party to this agreement.
- At the end of this stage the Faculty of Applied Arts had not as yet processed the proposed BA in Visual Art forward to begin the validation process proper.

### **5.5.7. Conclusions.**

This last module of data analysis sees the partnership vehicle adapting to certain unforeseen circumstances. In light of a certain stepping back by the School, the WCAC plays a more central role, co-developing and co-delivering a one year "Professional Development" course in collaboration with SIDS. Key figures from

the School continue to play a significant part in the partnership, contributing to the delivery of this one year programme. At the same time the School continues to press ahead with seeking validation for the BA programme.

The partnership displayed the ability to react to events that were beyond its boundaries. In this regard it displayed an inherent flexibility in reacting to unforeseen circumstances. This is particularly true of the SIDS element who quickly drew in another partner in the WCAC. It is less true of the School whose maneuverability proved to be less nimble in a context of constricting Institute procedures

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

By placing the “Island’s Project” Partnership Vehicle within the context of learning society notions, this research has focused on describing the vehicle developed by a group of individuals and communities attempting to effect, and come to terms with, “change”. In so describing the vehicle and the journey it undertook, this study is tasked with establishing the motivation and goals of those individuals and partners, and subsequently considering these aspects against the backdrop of learning society notions.

As outlined in the literature review, it is the nature of these notions (and subordinate ideas like lifelong learning, participation, etc.) to be rather nebulous and vague. Indeed, at the level of strategy and policy, these notions tend to be utilised in a rather off-hand way, apparently reinforcing a broad, neutral and commonsense approach to “change”, while in point of fact there is inevitably a foregrounding of a rather more narrow, focused and utilitarian approach. Against such an ambiguous backdrop, the practical experience of the “Island’s Project” partners in developing their Partnership Vehicle offered a concrete phenomenon by which to consider what is understood, by different communities, by partnership as a means of engaging with “change”. I have endeavored to show

the authorship, make-up and direction of that vehicle (and its prolonged journey) served to illuminate (and indeed challenge) certain “Vertical Cleavages” that lie at the heart of education, cleavages that underline the “non-neutral” nature of education, and which bring to the fore issues of power and control, and ultimately, authority.

In practical terms, a number of structures and groups were the focus of this research. On a simple level, the Partnership Vehicle was a unit formed by two communities, the Island and the School, and these entities have been to the fore in this study. This understanding of the vehicle is complicated, however, by the fact that the School is not a stand-alone entity in itself but rather a unit within the DIT. As such, the DIT, while not one of the partners (perhaps surprisingly so), has also had a considerable bearing on the Partnership Vehicle, and so also warranted some attention. Lastly, but crucially, due attention was required concerning the role of key individuals as it was apparent from the earliest phase of this study that a considerable amount of the drive behind the Partnership Vehicle emanated from individuals rather than organisations per se.

## **6.2 Roots and Direction**

As seen in module one, the roots of the Partnership Vehicle are to be traced to the group of individuals from the Island community who seemed adept at developing and widening their network. Consequently the initial impetus came from the local community figures in the first place, with that network expanding to



include educational professionals, and thereafter the wider Island and School communities. It is this grassroots aspect of the Vehicle that is particularly notable, as it appears to have ensured the longevity of the Vehicle despite various obstacles and setbacks, while at the same time, I would contend, it was this very aspect that served to highlight why such a Vehicle, so constituted, runs contrary to the norms of the educational establishment and threatens to subvert and contest some rather basic assumptions concerning education and its provision.

The data points to a defining moment in the earliest stage of analysis as the proposed partnership vehicle comes to be framed, as being of particular note. The expressed intent of the School members (and particularly the Head of School) at that time was to engage with the local community in a meaningful way, rather than “parachute in” a ready-made course, and in doing so attempt to engage with the learner, and his/her community, in his/her locale. This indicates that while traditional values permeated these School members’ concepts of higher education, there is an uneasiness concerning educational norms that may in fact play a part in undermining the viability of isolated communities, by drawing individuals away from their communities. In order to counter this aspect, the Partners asserted that, from the earliest stages, they opted to develop and deliver a course underwritten by both communities and to this end it was decided that the adoption of a “meaningful” partnership ethos between the School and the Community was the optimum tool with which to pursue these goals. Subsequently the Vehicle that is developed explicitly aims to extend its notion of

partnership and participation throughout all facets of the project, from the pedagogical attitude adopted in relation to the “student-participants” (utilising learner-centered strategies, peer-learning, etc.) to the sharing of expertise in developing the programme structure and the use of resources.

Having selected “Partnership” as the ethos to drive the Vehicle, there is no evidence to suggest a particular partnership model being employed. Indeed, the evidence is that the players had no prior experience of being in a “partnership” situation. Rather it seems that the Partnership Vehicle to be developed is informed by two, apparently contradictory factors: that it must be informal and yet genuine. These factors allow the Partners to adopt a learning attitude (rather than a purely educational one), engendering a willingness for both communities to become involved in areas normally beyond their remit. Some of the issues tackled were: Island Community involvement in design and development of the pilot programme; new pedagogical strategies to address the teacher/ learner problem (a learner-centered program); the program is designed to be delivered in the local community (in situ and remotely); the use of strategies to foster student co-operation in a learning environment; the Island Community takes responsibility for areas like technological facilities, liaison with other bodies such as the library service, social welfare. An informal model of Partnership therefore allowed an easing of boundaries, allowing other minor partners to join, move in and out of the limelight and at a later stage being flexible enough to absorb a stepping back by the School Partner. It is this sense of flexible partnership (what

Liam Chambers describes “as beyond formality”) that permeates the Partnership Vehicle. It bypasses the need among the Partners for a formal, written agreement and allows the Partnership Vehicle to continue in the face of certain setbacks. However, the informal nature of the Vehicle is a double-edged sword as it offers little in the form of protection from outside circumstances. In the event, the latitude experienced by the School, through its Head, in respect of budget, time-tabling and the development of short courses at the early stages of the Partnership Vehicle come to an end. In the light of serious cutbacks, the trickle down effect is soon felt at the pilot programme level, and the School is instructed to suspend pilot programmes forthwith at the end of the third stage of analysis.

In terms of direction, the validation process for the prototype BA in VA proved to be particularly slow, taking 5 years before a validation panel was convened. This slow process placed a considerable stress on the partnership. The Vehicle’s progress is marked by a fundamental difficulty in terms of the validation of the prototype degree, one of the main partnership objectives. While it is evident that the School partners thought that the validation process could be achieved in a relatively short time, this was not to be the case. In contrast to a rapid and straightforward progression of the pilot programme as a short course facilitated within School structures, it was at Faculty level that an acute bottleneck was encountered in the ongoing process of developing the BA programme.

In short, the laborious progression from a pilot to a degree programme can be seen as having exposed some unforeseen boundaries and tensions between pilot and degree programmes, between Institute echelons, between informal and formal partnerships, between Institute strategy and the Partnership Vehicle, and between policy and practice.

### **6.3 The role of Policy and Strategy**

This second stage of the Partnership vehicle coincided with the publication of “Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education” (July 2000). This was the first Irish White Paper on Adult Education, and identified inclusiveness and lifelong learning as key notions not just in an educational context, but society wide. What is of particular note is that the Partnership Vehicle, by its very make-up and objectives, was already attempting to engage with many of the issues set out by the White Paper. Issues such as learning in the learner’s community, community involvement, student-centered learning, improved access for mature students, etc., were at the core of the Partnership Vehicle. The White Paper is unfortunately less forthcoming in presenting new and substantial funding opportunities to further this agenda. What it does do is point to funding opportunities elsewhere, such as the “Third-Level Access Measure” under the NDP (2000-2006). However an inherent problem with this type of measure is that it is aimed at Institute and/or sector wide “change”, and as such offers little for initiatives like the Partnership vehicle.

Both the White Paper and the EEI report serve to highlight the difficult position of an entity like the Partnership Vehicle, operating as it does in the no-man's land between policy and educational practice. For while it is apparent that the Vehicle displayed desirable characteristics from the point of view of the White Paper, and in securing EEI funding satisfied their criteria for pilot funding, in the longer term both looked to strategic change from the educational centre in order to progress the community education agenda. Realistically, however, the incentive to adopt such an agenda is undermined by the figures, with the entire budget for community education in 2003 standing at €18m or 1.5% of total Government spending on education.<sup>16</sup>

The School members seemed less well armed in respect of the support of their wider academic community, the Institute. The Institute's strategic plan was embryonic in form at the earliest stages of this research and indeed seems to have developed little by the end of stage four. While the broad brush-strokes of the initial Institute plan indicated some interest in developing closer contacts with local communities, it seems clear that, in tangible terms, these sort of contacts are limited in scope. The School's involvement with the Island community could therefore be classified as something of a "tactical" enterprise, one that developed with tacit backing from Faculty but without the firm strategic support from an as yet fluid Institute strategic plan.

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<sup>16</sup> Clarity Report 2004: 12.

While on the one hand the Partnership Vehicle's flexible nature allowed it to progress rapidly to achieve many of its goals, the School element encountered a much slower than anticipated process for the prototype degree, which remained incomplete at the end of the fourth analysis stage of this case study. Arguably, any new project requires a certain amount of momentum in order to continue and it is clear that the "Island's Project" came perilously close to stalling due to factors outside the control of the School (i.e. budget cutbacks, a slow validation process, the curtailment of the Head of Schools' discretionary powers). Having said that, the Vehicle Partners did ultimately succeed in gaining validation and sourcing funding for the BA in Visual Art, which is currently being delivered to its third cohort of students. Evidently this could not have happened without Institute support.

On balance, it would appear that the experience of the "Island's Project" Partnership Vehicle highlights and confirms the slow-moving nature of large third level institutions, organizations not noted for their ability to engage with rapid change. It could be argued that such a characteristic is understandable and perhaps desirable, to a certain extent, in any organization. However, this caution should be balanced with an ability to recognize and nurture innovation, whether it emanates from the top or lower echelons of the institution.

In terms of the Island partners, it is evident is that the Development Society, as the authors of their own strategy and tactics, were eminently better able to

weather the sea-changes experienced during the period of this study. The School, on the other hand, while having some latitude and leverage in the allocation of funds and resources which allowed it to fund elements of the pilot and partnership, and supported by the newly created Learning and Teaching Centre in matters pedagogical, were ultimately only a unit within a larger less flexible structure, the Institute.

#### **6.4 Partnership and notions of a learning society**

With partnership as a practical solution to the issue of participation, the type of partnership model utilised serves to give a very strong indication as to the respective communities' vision and understanding of a learning society. In this respect the sort of partnership envisaged by the School/ Island Partners is clearly a very different animal to that envisaged by the DIT at large, the former reflecting an ability to engage with a wide range of partners, while the latter seems substantially narrower in focus.

In respect of the Institute strategic plan, one reading of it is that it reflects the DIT coming to terms with a new sort of learning society agenda. The traditional agenda of an educated society, with its established student base and assured government funding is clearly flagged as rapidly becoming redundant. In response to this agenda of "change", the Institute seems to be aiming to fulfill the needs of society, valuing and developing links with external communities. A closer reading however, reveals a strategy that seems to be more specific in

catering for the needs of the business community, while less specific in terms of the needs of local communities. The Institute's leaning toward a learning society as a learning market sits in contrast to the route taken by the School. In the absence of a clear strategy at the time, the School, in the form of its Head and staff, has purposefully relaxed educational barriers in order to develop a two-way learning route through the initiation of the "Island's Project" Partnership Vehicle. Strategy at Institute level, albeit in a formative state, does not therefore indicate that there is a particular interest in the sort of Partnership developed between the School and the Island Community.

It should, however, be borne in mind that a third level Institute is rather hierarchical in structure. This is in contrast to the local development society that is rather more democratic with committees and committee officers elected by the local community. In this context the Partnership Vehicle throws into sharp relief the issue of the democratic credentials of the educational system generally, and third level education particularly. Indeed the Partnership Vehicle illustrates three communities with differing levels of democratic values. On the one hand we have SIDS, representing an isolated but holistic community. Its aims and objectives are those of the community, pursued by an elected committee, supported (at the time) by a team of employees. The School, through its Head, wished to emulate a more democratic ethos and engage in an informal partnership with SIDS in order to develop and deliver a more participatory form of learning. However, the School was caught between its democratic/pedagogical aspirations and the



reality that it is a subservient part of a hierarchical structure. In practical terms it throws into relief the breadth of what the Faure report is proposing regarding democratization. It would appear that the DIT was not ready at the time to consider any sort of partnership beyond a formal franchise model, if a degree programme was at stake (interestingly, in 2009, a draft “agreement” has developed by the two communities in order to cement their relationship and responsibilities during the delivery of the BA in Visual Art. This document appears to circumvent the need for a partnership validation process by simply not referring to the relationship as a partnership). In any event, the options on offer at the time of the period of analysis (effectively a model and a non-model) appeared to limit the Institute’s options as to the courtship of prospective partners. Of course, if it is the case that policy from above is in reality only concerned with pushing a learning market agenda, aimed at only developing partnership with Industry and Business, then the model on offer at the time was quite sufficient.

That the notion of partnership should be so problematic to an educational Institute is, on reflection, not so surprising. After all, while an agenda of change permeates learning society notions, change also lies at the very heart of education itself. As Bernstein’s definition of pedagogy underlines, there are basic issues of identity and authority in accepting that an entity, other than the educational centre itself, is “an appropriate provider and evaluator.” If such a boundary is breached, the centre as a traditional overseer of “change” is liable to have to endure change itself.

### **6.5 Is there a transferable model of partnership evident?**

The partnership developed on the “Islands Project” offered the constituents a vehicle that was evidentially successful in challenging a number of normative educational boundaries and seemed flexible enough to allow transferability to some extent. It proved to be highly adaptive as witnessed by the ability to develop new and further partnership relationships in Stage four, while maintaining contact and input, albeit in a much reduced role, with the School and its staff.

However, the possibility of repeating the partnership is questionable due to a number of variables that are evident in the period of analysis. Firstly, the Island partner was fortunate to have been able to access funding from the EEI, the first round of such funding. For a comparable partnership a similar coincidence of funding is by no means assured. Furthermore, the Head of School has expressed doubts that the financial and time-tabling latitude that enabled him to commit in the early stages would come about again. Also, the goodwill and commitment required of the key School staff may or may not be forthcoming for similar projects. One key figure has emphasised that had they realised the course of events that lay ahead, especially with regard to the lengthy parallel degree validation process, they would not have been willing to commit so wholeheartedly to the whole process.

Having said all that, it is clear that the Partnership Vehicle developed succeeded in engaging with many of the issues raised by the White Paper in relation to community education and bears a striking similarity to the model of good practice as set in the UK (REPLAN). It could be argued that the Vehicle was somewhat ahead of its time in an Irish context, and might yet serve as a useful experience if the community education agenda gains momentum.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Evidently while the Partnership Vehicle matured based on personal trust and understanding, this sort of informal agreement did not afford much protection from events and forces outside of the Partnership itself. In the event, the Partnership Vehicle was perhaps overly reliant on the discretion of the Head of School to allocate resources. When these discretionary powers proved themselves to be fleeting in the face of cutbacks, the Partnership Vehicle was required to alter its direction radically. The pilot programme developed by the Partnership, while seemingly consistent with government policy and good practice, was by definition beyond the boundaries of the mainstream system and so was not afforded the protection of that system in the face of budgetary cutbacks.

While on the one hand the Partnership Vehicle's flexible nature allowed it to progress rapidly to achieve many of its goals, this was in stark contrast to the rigid nature of the School's relationship with Faculty and with the Institute. This

apparently inflexible, hierarchical relationship is evident in a validation process for the prototype degree that was still incomplete at the end of the fourth analysis stage. In stark terms it would appear that the Partnership Vehicle did not match the only model of partnership as envisaged by DIT, a franchise model, and so the Institute did not seem interested in entering into partnership with the Island Community. In short the path of the Partnership Vehicle appears to have been influenced more by budgetary cutbacks, the slow pace of validation at Faculty and Institute level, and bureaucracy than by higher echelon strategy or policy.

It is, I believe, clear from the data that any attempt at describing the Partnership Vehicle will inevitably highlight one prime characteristic. While in essence the Vehicle represented the coming together of the School and Island communities, it derived its energy and direction from its architects, a network of focused individuals. This network had, at its root, a conception of a society that places learning as the cornerstone of community building, in order to achieve social, political and economic objectives. In short, the sort of characteristics that the Partnership Vehicle displayed (as an engine of change), resonate from the ideals of key individuals and denotes a conception of society as a series of inter-linking, learning networks.

Furthermore, the concept of a learning society displayed by those individuals and evident in the orientation of the Partnership Vehicle, is in contrast to that exhibited by DIT strategy and government policy. The Partnership Vehicle

displayed an inclusive ethos, aiming to further the broadest learning society agenda, while in parallel DIT strategy and national policy hardened into a narrower, instrumentalist, learning market agenda.

This research came to center on three communities coming to terms with the forces of change. Primarily it is the Island and School communities, as the principle partners, that are the focus of this study. However, a third entity, the DIT, also has a considerable bearing on the Partnership Vehicle, even though, by its own definition, it was not a partner in the Vehicle. Evidently, the flexibility and adaptability displayed by the Partnership Vehicle derives from something akin to a learning network notion, a conception of partnership in its widest sense and one that highlights the constraints which bound the School. However, what these key figures perceived as logical and desirable in terms of a partnership ethos, that is a two-way, “meaningful” interaction between two communities, transpired over the course of the period of analysis to be at odds with the prevailing understanding of partnership within the larger Institute, a narrow, ‘franchise’ model. In short, the “Island Project” partners exhibited a notion of partnership that reflects an understanding of a learning society as a series of learning networks, whereas the model of partnership on offer at the Institute is more in keeping with a notion of society as a learning market.

What is of particular interest is that the partnership process (between the School and Island communities) and the marked lack of it (between the Partnership

Vehicle and the Institute) illustrates in a practical way quite basic differences in the understanding of what a partnership might be. As such the peeling away of the layers of vague theoretical notions serves to illustrate what lies at the centre and to glimpse, albeit in one higher level institution, what in practice is on offer in terms of a partnership and participation. Indeed the flexible, mutually validating nature of the “Islands Project” Partnership Vehicle sat in stark contrast to the narrow model of partnership underwritten at Institute level, a model which while perfectly adequate for the purpose of contractually cementing a franchise-type partnership seems somewhat limited in scope. This contrast of approach encourages a suspicion that the Institute, at the time, was more interested in courting and wedding certain types of partners, while other (less appealing) prospective partners do not warrant a serious, committed proposal, or indeed, might be presumed to pose a threat to the Institute’s sense of identity and well being.

At the same time the Institute is naturally responsive to the Government policy of the day and ten years on from the creation of the Partnership Vehicle those policies continue to undergo a process of formulation and re-formulation. The HEA, for example, is expected to produce “The National Strategy for Higher Education” (the so-called “Hunt Report”), which may offer concrete inducements for all third level institutions to increase their number of non-traditional students (something lacking in previous policy papers such as the “White Paper on Adult Education (2000). Ongoing DIT strategy also reflects this changing policy

landscape, and for example, the Institutes' submission to the "Hunt committee" lays particular emphasis on the Institutes' Community Links programme, pointing to the Institutes long record of community engagement. Furthermore, in its own submission to the "Hunt committee", the DIT Community Links programme explicitly calls for a widening of the traditional third level remit beyond teaching/learning and research to include a third pillar, that of community engagement.

In conclusion, a third level-community partnership seems the optimum mechanism for furthering academic, local-community and society's educational aims and goals. However, implicit to any such engagement is the realization that the partners need to display a high degree of flexibility and understanding of each others needs and limitations, forging a partnership that becomes an arena of contestability, in the most positive sense of the word, between differing notions of what sort of society is being imagined and strived for.

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