# Every Day is a School Day: Educators Experiences of Utilising an Integrative Framework within Social Care Education in Ireland

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## Abstract

Within an evolving regulatory context, this paper identifies some of the emergent challenges and opportunities for social care education in Ireland. Discussion focusses on the potential offered by the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' to address some of these contextual demands, and the pedagogy underpinning this approach is investigated. A number of educators' experiences of using this framework are provided, demonstrating how they innovatively integrated the framework with commonly used teaching and assessment strategies within social care education, such as mind-mapping, problem-based learning and the use of creative media. These experiences are offered to other educators who may wish to utilise authentic assessment and create space for integrated thinking within the classroom. Based on the learning collected from the above experiences, a number of key points were identified, including: (i) the role of community of practices in supporting innovation within the classroom; (ii) the value of an integrated pedagogical approach in developing core graduate attributes for social care; (iii) opportunities offered by authentic assessment to build, refine and integrate skills and knowledge, and (iv) the importance of 'self' in working reflexively within a dynamic and sometimes challenging environment. This paper contributes to the wider discussion on social care identity formation and explores the possibilities to reframe and reimagine social care education from a practice position.

**Keywords**: authentic assessment; education; educator experiences; social care

## Introduction

Social care education in Ireland is in a period of transition as programmes prepare for accreditation by CORU, the Health and Social Care Regulator, and educators review, revise and reshape their programmes to meet CORU requirements (Social Care Workers Registration Board, 2017a). These contextual changes have presented both challenges and opportunities for social care education, including ensuring that students meet the minimum

thresholds outlined by the Social Care Workers Registration Board (SCWRB) upon completion of their educational programme (SCWRB, 2017b), and producing critical, creative and reflexive practitioners in an evolving professional space.

Following on from the development of the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020), a conceptual teaching and assessment tool for social care education, this paper documents a novel approach to teaching that is underpinned by the framework, and offers innovative ideas that may address some of the challenges outlined above. This approach involved the collaborative efforts of seven social care educators through what Wenger (2010) described as an informal community of practice, which was borne from discussions about the regulatory process and the need for a profession-specific tool which could be integrated into their teaching practice and assessment methods. The educators shared their rationale for adopting the framework, the pedagogical approach used and reflections on the key learning from the process. Using these experiences, the paper outlines how the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020) can be used to scaffold students' learning, create opportunities for critical, creative, and practical thinking, and facilitate the integration of learning in preparation for relational based reflexive practice. The authors discuss how the tool was used to offer meaningful and authentic assessment (Swaffield, 2011) within practice teaching, with reference to the authentic assessment core dimensions, in particular realism, critical reflection and cognitive challenge (Gulikers *et al*., 2006; TU Dublin, n.d-a; Villaroel *et al*., 2020).  To conclude, the paper offers action points that may support educators to adopt a more integrated pedagogical approach within the social care classroom. The research was supported by funding as part of the IMPACT Project at TU Dublin (https://tudublinimpact.wordpress.com/).

**Social Care as an Evolving Profession**

The social care profession has existed for many decades in Ireland, situated originally within institutional and subsequently residential care settings (Lalor & Share, 2013). Over time significant social and political changes, both globally and nationally, have resulted in a wide diversification of the social care field. Examples of these changes include the shift to care being provided in the community, the increase in the aging population, the development of early intervention and family support, and a changing policy and legislative context (such as New Directions and the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity Act, 2015). These

developments have impacted on the role and reach of the social care profession, widening the parameters and scope of the profession. The privatisation of services and marketising of 'care' (Mulkeen, 2016) has shifted the focus from a vocational ideology, stemming from care provision by religious orders, to a new professional space (Lalor & Share, 2013). In keeping with the commissioning model of funding (Shaw & Canavan, 2017) resourcing is now accessed by evidencing and measuring outcomes, and this has become a core component of many practice models, for example the Welltree Model (Mulholland, 2020) and the Dementia Care Model (O' Shea, *et al*., 2019). These shifts have required social care professionals to evolve, to broaden their knowledge base and to seek new ways of working that reflect a dynamic field of practice, but are congruent with the spirit of social care work (Cruess & Cruess, 2009).

### *Moving Towards a New Regulatory Space*

Coupled with these wider contextual changes, CORU, the Health and Social Care Regulator, (established under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005) has brought the social care profession into a new regulatory space. While the overarching remit of CORU is to protect the public through regulating the health and social care professions, part of this remit involves the assessment and approval of education providers. Approved education providers - those who have successfully progressed through a comprehensive evaluative process with an independent panel - can offer graduates direct entry to the social care register post-qualification (SCWRB, 2017b). In preparation for this approval process, CORU have issued requirements which emphasise the value of practice learning through relational and interactive activities on placement, and situate educators with practice experience as core to the education team (SCWRB, 2017a). This offers new opportunities and possibilities to shape and reimagine social care from a practice position while integrating learning from the broader modules across the programme.

Curriculum design is commonly underpinned by desirable graduate attributes, for example critical thinking, problem solving, and communication, and the TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030 (TU Dublin, n.d) is committed to producing graduates that can demonstrate these key competencies. However, the publication of the *Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Workers* (SCWRB, 2017b) places an additional requirement on providers of social care education. The document outlines 80 competencies (under five domains) that graduates must attain on completion of their educational programme, and educators are tasked with ensuring

that students meet these threshold standards (SCWRB, 2017a). This changing regulatory context has created opportunities to re-evaluate teaching and assessment methods used, and to consider the role of authentic assessment in ensuring that graduates are 'industry ready'.

**Social Care Work: A Complex Endeavour within a Contested Space**

The lack of a clear identity in the contested space of health and social care has been a barrier to the development of the profession (Lancaster, 2012; Mc Hugh, 2020) and understanding context, role and goal within social care work can at times be difficult for students and workers to grasp. This is in part due to not having a well-defined space in relation to conjugate disciplines such as social work and psychology. Similarly, social care educators have endeavoured to communicate the nature of social care theory and application using tools from other professions, for example Collingwood's Three-Stage Theory Framework (Collingwood, 2005). Furthermore, social care practice is a complicated and nuanced environment and students need the ability to work in highly complex situations. This requires knowledge and understanding of individuals' multilevel ecosystems, drawn from psychological, sociological, legal and political theories, while practicing from a social model encompassing a human rights-based approach (McPherson, 2020). Given the complexities of individuals lives and experiences and the range of knowledge and skills required to support them effectively, practice teaching needs to support students to think in an integrated way (McCann, de Róiste & McHugh, 2009; McGarr & Fingleton, 2020).

*Rationale for an Integrative Framework for Social Care Education*

The recently developed 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020) shown in Figure 1 is a tool that facilitates educators to reframe the social care context, role, and goal. The framework places the service user and the practitioner at the centre, encircled by assessment, intervention and evaluation, considered to be the bedrock of social care work (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020). This work is situated within relationship-based practice (Brown, Winter & Carr, 2018; CORU, 2019; Ingram & Smith, 2018), offering opportunities for the co-production of services that are individualised and organic to meet the needs identified. The framework offers an ecological approach to practice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), by acknowledging the wider social and political contexts and the organisational culture where the work takes place. Finally, the five components which shape, inform and define social care work draw the framework together - these are theory, legislation, and

policy, safeguarding and risk, values and ethics and professional skills (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020).

Alongside the person in need of support, the practitioner is depicted at the centre of the framework, drawing attention to the role of the worker and the impact of 'self' on the shape and scope of the work. Therefore, the worker and the framework can be viewed as intertwined, as the worker becomes the vehicle through which professional skills and knowledge are funnelled and applied. The use of 'self' within the professional relationship is complex and there is no agreed definition regarding what the 'self' entails (Lyons, 2013; Trevithick, 2017). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the intricacies of 'self', here we are informed by Trevithick's (2017) discussion on the 'self'. In essence, how our experiences, thoughts, feelings and behaviours manifest in our everyday world; who we are and who we think that we are (acknowledging both core and adaptive features of 'self'). The application of knowledge is not a neutral activity; workers bring their experiences, values, perceptions, strengths and limitations to the work, reinforcing the importance of self-awareness, of knowing oneself and of practicing in a critical and reflexive way (Ferguson 2018; Fook, 2015). Positioning the worker (alongside the service user) at the centre of the framework enables the worker to reflect on why they act the way they act, and what impact this might have on the therapeutic alliance. Furthermore, it aims to deconstruct the worker as the 'expert' and reduce the dichotomy between the worker and the person in need of support.

### *Underpinning Pedagogical Approach*
From a pedagogical perspective, the framework is underpinned by a constructivist pedagogy, whereby:

> the creation of classroom environments, activities and methods (that) are
> grounded in a constructivist theory of learning, with goals that focus on
> individual students developing deep understandings in the subject matter of
> interest and habits of mind that aid in future learning (Richardson, 2003, p.1627).

We do not wish to devalue other pedagogical approaches that inform learning within social care education, for example the contribution of cognitivism which recognises students as active learners within the educational space. However this conceptualisation of learning, in our opinion, most closely mirrors how social care students learn about themselves and others, as they synchronously interrogate knowledge, connect it to what they know about themselves,

**Figure 1: Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching**

and seek to make sense of it in relation to working with those accessing services. Therefore, the creation of student-centred learning spaces, opportunities for critical discussion and dialogue, and an emphasis on meta-cognition and self-awareness are all key facets of this pedagogical approach (Richardson, 2003) which we deem useful to supporting the integration of knowledge within the classroom.

Additionally, the framework aligns well with and is informed by Fink's (2003) 'Taxonomy of Significant Learning'. While some taxonomies are hierarchical in nature, where students meet the learning behaviours in an incremental fashion, the 'Taxonomy of Significant Learning' differs in that it is "relational" and "interactive" (Fink, 2003 p.32). Learning is understood to be synergistic in nature; learning in one domain can spark learning in another, therefore all domains are connected and interdependent (Fink, 2003). According to the 'Taxonomy of Significant Learning', there are six categories of learning, including, (i)

foundational knowledge (ii) application (iii) integration (iv) human dimensions (v) caring and (vi) learning to learn (Fink, 2003). While all domains within the 'Taxonomy of Significant Learning' align well with the competencies specified within the *Standards of Proficiency for Social Care* (SCWRB, 2017b) and the specific learning outcomes within social care education, the three domains of 'application', 'integration' and 'human dimensions' are of particular significance to this discussion. The 'application' domain refers to how foundational knowledge is utilised to engage in analytical, creative thinking, and problem solving. 'Integration' refers to how one connects various strands and makes links between discrete bodies of knowledge. Finally, 'human dimensions' is linked to meta-cognition, how one understands the 'self' and the other, and the individual journey of personal and professional growth (Fink, 2003). These domains are of notable relevance to social care education, as students try to understand how their knowledge base can be employed in practice, how different and often competing bodies of knowledge can inform decision-making (Milner *et al.*, 2015), and how their experiences, value bases and assumptive worlds can inform the shape and scope of their practice (Cook, 2020; Fook, 2015). Therefore, utilising the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' promotes 'application' and 'integration' and facilitates the exploration of 'human dimensions'; these themes will continue to be of relevance in the classroom experiences outlined below.

### *Challenges and Opportunities for Social Care Education*

As outlined above, the social care profession is in a period of flux (Byrne, 2016; McGarr & Fingleton, 2020; McHugh, 2020) offering a unique opportunity to re-examine what we teach and how we teach it. As outlined by the TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030 (TU Dublin, n.d-b), TU Dublin are committed to ensuring that students "develop the attributes and capabilities necessary for tomorrow's world, today". This raises the question around how to achieve this worthwhile and necessary endeavour. The practical and applied nature of social care education aligns well with the use of authentic assessment, to develop key skills and contribute to students becoming 'industry-ready'. While on practice placement students have the opportunity to experience the real-world context and to build experience within a social care setting. However, there are many other opportunities within the social care curriculum whereby authentic assessment can be utilised to create co-constructed, meaningful learning experiences that "inspire, support and develop the individual in reaching their full potential" (TU Dublin, n.d-a). Particularly, professional practice modules, applied modules or modules

where students are preparing for placement, the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' offers a scaffold upon which to hinge authentic assessment.

Integrating knowledge within practice teaching is not new to social care education (McCann, de Róiste & McHugh, 2009; McGarr & Fingleton, 2020), but as a bespoke tool, the framework offers an innovative solution to implementing a more integrated pedagogical approach within social care education. The framework supports students to more deeply consider the multi-faceted nature of the practice environment and to draw on the wealth of knowledge that they have already gleaned from across their educational programme. The positioning of 'assessment', 'intervention' and 'evaluation' at the very core of the model shifts the focus to the practice environment, and students are challenged to consider how a broad range of content across their academic programme informs their practice at a theoretical and practical level (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020). The creators consider the framework to be organic and evolving, in keeping with social care as a dynamic field of practice, and envisage that it will evolve further by incorporating feedback from students, educators and industry stakeholders.

**An Innovative Solution for Integrating Knowledge?**

Following the initial publication of the framework in the *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies,* an informal community of practice was established consisting of educators from the TU Dublin Tallaght and City Campuses (n=7) who were interested in utilising the framework within the classroom to support their teaching practices. Through this collaboration, these educators demonstrated how the framework can be utilised in diverse ways to offer authentic assessment and as a vehicle to evidence the learning outcomes and proficiencies attached to each module. Carving out this space offered opportunities to tease out ideas with colleagues, to evaluate different approaches and to share challenges, insights, and suggestions. What follows is a sharing of experiences by this community of practice, how some integrated the framework with commonly used teaching strategies within social care education, and how it informed their use of authentic assessment (both formative and summative) within their modules. The modules involved were of an applied nature, geared towards preparing the students for professional social care work, developing their professional identity and "bridg(ing) the gap between classroom and the field" (Carelse & Dykes, 2013 p.166). We offer these experiences to other social care educators who may wish to utilise authentic

assessment, create space for integrated learning and provide students with opportunities to explore, interrogate and utilise knowledge as it applies to the practice context.

### The Integrative Framework as a mind mapping tool

*Noel Molloy teaches on the social care programme in TU Dublin Tallaght Campus. Noel is a member of the British Psychological Society and teaches psychology-based modules across several programmes. Noel has worked in both social care and social work and frequently draws on his practice experiences to support students to integrate their learning. Noel utilised the framework in his Counselling Skills module (n=80) as a revision exercise in advance of their final year summative assessment.*

Constructing knowledge through visual learning is not new in education and it is acknowledged that our brain learns in patterns (Hyerle, 1996). Williams & Newton (2009) have argued that visual information can at times be better mapped into the minds of students. Therefore, the visual nature and structure of the Integrative Framework can lend itself well to visual learning for the student. Balancing an understanding of theoretical and practical approaches when working within the relational space with a service user, while being governed by wider organisational and socio-political context, calls for a high level of awareness and integration of knowledge. The visual nature of the framework graphic can support and encourage this level of integration and reflection.

We as educators aim to facilitate the student's journey towards the integration of knowledge over the course of a three- or four-year programme. Moving from knowledge to analysis in this process does not come without challenges. In education, academic success and attendance do not necessarily equate to critical thought or thinking (Willingham, 2008). Incorporating a mind map approach to the integrative framework graphic is a means of conceptualising the nuance and complexity of social care education and practice in a visual format that can benefit student, worker and educator. The graphic refines all the aspects of social care pertinent to education and practice. Used as a visual aid or mind map, this can facilitate the educator and student alike on their journey of integrated teaching and learning. Attributed to British educational consultant Tony Buzan, mind maps are a method employing a graphic technique that can improve learning and enhance clearer thinking (Buzan & Buzan, 2006; Farrand *et al*., 2002). Potential exists to use the framework as a mind map for a class activity, formative assessment or preparation for a summative assessment component.

In social care, understanding the complexity of the self and the service user in context are fundamental to good practice (Brown, 2016; Howe, 2008; Lyons, 2013; Trevithick, 2017). Critically discussing this understanding was the task of the students' final summative assessment. A mind mapping session on the 'Relational' context of the framework was introduced in a revision tutorial. Students used this opportunity to unpick the relationship, leading to a discussion on 'Theory', specifically theoretical frameworks that help us understand relationships in the context of social care. As is generally the case, this was first used to formulate an understanding of relationships from the service user's perspective. The danger here is that, if this is where our understanding stops, patterns of behaviour that influence relationships can land squarely with the service user. At this juncture we looked to incorporate another aspect of the framework into our working mind map, one that might expand our understanding of the self in the process. Students choose 'Professional Skills' and the specific skill of reflection. Using this method allowed the students to explore on a deeper level the relationship between reflection and their own early experiences and attachment. The link was then drawn to the professional skill of self-care and 'Organisational structure and context' which can support this.

### *Providing Opportunities for Critical Reflection within the Classroom*

Ultimately, critical engagement organically developed from the relational context of the work into a deeper appreciation of both service users and workers patterns of behaviour, and how this can be supported within the wider organisation structure. Facilitating this understanding benefits students academically and also professionally within the therapeutic alliance. Drawing connections between profession skills, theory and the relationship while considering organisational structure and context was made more manageable with the visual breakdown of the Framework. This reframing with the visual conceptualisation opened the door to more focused acquisition of knowledge and critical engagement in the classroom. Therefore, the McGarr Fingleton Framework (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020) aided students to develop their critical thinking and explore the dynamic and shifting relationship between the service user and 'the self'.

### *Problem-based Learning and the Use of Clinical Vignette*

*Gillian Larkin and Marian Connell are lecturers on the Applied Social Care programme in TU Dublin Tallaght Campus. Gillian lectures across the programme in 'Professional*

*Practice, Management and Supervision in Social Care', 'Leadership and Organisational Change in Social Care' and 'Strategy and Governance in Social Care'. Prior to becoming a lecturer, she worked in family support and residential care settings for 15 years, and for the last 10 years has worked on a voluntary basis coaching and mentoring people experiencing difficulties with addiction and mental health. Marian lectures in 'Applied Social Care', 'Creative Group Work & Facilitation Skills' and 'Facilitating Arts in Social Care'. Marian has worked in Social Care and as a child art psychotherapist and draws on her extensive practice experience to help students integrate their learning. Both lecturers utilised the framework to support problem-based learning, using clinical vignettes. Marian piloted this on the 'Applied Social Care' year 1 module and Gillian applied the framework to 'Professional Practice' year 1 (n=60).*

According to Fitzsimons (2014, p.3) "*active learning strategies are considered the most effective for deep learning and are becoming the preferred choice to be used in teaching entrepreneurship*". Problem-based learning (PBL) is one such strategy, commonly used by social care educators through bespoke case studies and clinical vignettes. PBL is an inquiry process undertaken by students that seeks to resolve questions and uncertainties about complex life situations (Altshuler, & Bosch, 2003; Barell, 2007). Shier & Williams (2015) argue that the PBL approach assists social care students in linking theory and practice, challenges their biases and assumptive worlds, encourages links between college and social care practice placements, and promotes awareness of legislation, standards and social policies. Through working with 'real-life situations', Belt (2001) asserts a problem-based approach generates interest with students and maintains enthusiasm throughout the learning process. A particular strength of this approach is that it reinforces knowledge and understanding of subject material while allowing solutions to not be restricted to strictly 'correct' answers, thus not only improving understanding and application (Belt, 2001), but mirroring real life social care practice.

*Gillian's Experience*

The aim of the module, Professional Practice 1, is to prepare students for professional social care work though bridging the gap between the classroom and the social care environment. PBL (and indeed 'real-life' social care work) demands that students call on an integrated, multidisciplinary knowledge base (Wood, 1994). The 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' provided an excellent visual tool in which students could contextualise their

learning and understand that social care practice happens through the coming together of various knowledge and skills, rather than viewing it through the lens of one module or knowledge base. Having introduced the framework in class, it was then referred to throughout the module as students learnt and applied theory and skills to case studies aligned with the learning outcomes of the module and the student's stage of development as a social care year 1 student.

In assessing students' learning and development formatively, a practice scenario was constructed that explored issues being experienced by a service user in a family resource setting. In line with the PBL approach, the case study identified problems but was deliberately complex and vague to encourage students to inquire about it (Escartin *et al.*, 2015; Sheeba, 2019). Students were placed into groups of five, provided with the case study with clear directions of the task including the topic each group would examine - the areas of the Integrative Framework selected for the students to explore were theory, legislation and policy, safeguarding and risk, values and ethics and professional skills. Within the centre of the framework, the area of assessment of needs and intervention were also selected.  Students were provided with a time-frame for the activity and the use of a PowerPoint presentation was suggested to feed back their findings to the wider class group.

As articulated by Ersoy & Baser (2014), the students worked together in groups to solve the problems they identified in the case study by referring to the knowledge they already had and from researching relevant new information. At the end of the PBL process, students shared with the whole class their understanding of the situation, and identified relevant knowledge, theory, skills pertaining to their topic; by doing this, they were demonstrating the use of their own ideas and abilities in seeking to address the problems of the service user/situation and in the process, developing higher order thinking skills.

*Marian's Experience*
The objective of this module, Applied Social Care 2, is to empower students to gain an insight and understanding of social care work in Ireland today, drawing on theoretical frameworks, the historical context, regulation, the ethical considerations in social care work and the legislation underpinning work with service users across the life span.  In exploring an overview of the care system in Ireland and teaching students about Proficiency D1.9 (SCWRB, 2017b), the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' (McGarr & Fingleton,

2020) was utilised. My colleague (Gillian) at the onset of semester 2 had introduced the framework to this cohort of students and had referred to it throughout her module, therefore students already had experience of using it.  A combination of narrated PowerPoints and in-class PowerPoint presentation were given to the students on the previous weeks providing an overview of Residential Care, Foster Care and After Services in Ireland. Legislation underpinning these key areas were discussed, as was the role of HIQA.

Students were divided into groups of six and assigned to breakout rooms, provided a case study looking at three different subjects, foster care, residential care and after care and were given very clear questions to address. Case studies were purposefully designed in an elusive manner to encourage students to adapt an enquiring mind drawing on the lecturer's practice experience of working in these areas. Slides were provided to the students in their breakout rooms giving them clear directions and to ensure that they had easy access to the case study that they were studying. Students were required to appoint a scribe and a rapporteur to record and feed back to the larger group on how they would support the service user drawing on theory, legislation, and policy. Students were at the centre of their own learning and were facilitated to make theoretical links to practice and work co-operatively and collaboratively (Stoltzfus & Libarkin, 2016). When the students returned to the classroom, questions were posed by the lecturer to the groups to encourage class discussion and to enhance students' problem-solving and critical thinking (McGinty & Boland, 2016).

The 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020) was an invaluable tool to enrich this process, to go to a deeper critical level, and to enhance summative and formative learning. The students began to explore the assessment process, offer an intervention, identify risk, link policy and legislation. Relevant theoretical frameworks were discussed, and an awareness of intergenerational trauma and the impact of the loss of parents due to their children's care experiences were also explored. Students drew on socio-political contexts such as intergenerational poverty and minority and marginalised populations. Professional skills like active listening, being empathetic, the importance of being patient and understanding and advocating for the service user were also investigated. Values and ethics were explored in a concrete way and students showed a great awareness of being non-judgemental and sensitive to the needs of parents who have lost their parental rights.

*Utilising Realism to Promote Student Engagement*

Chi & Wylie (2014) cite the importance of incorporating opportunities to decipher problems and have debates with peers for greater cognitive stimulation. In these examples, students appeared motivated, took a problem-solving approach and did a critical analysis of the case studies presented. Therefore, the use of the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020), combined with case studies, was advantageous in aiding students to develop their critical thinking, link theory to practice and creatively engage with each other as active participants in their learning. A key learning opportunity for students is to understand how the knowledge and skills they have identified fits together in a coherent way for the benefit of the service user. However, this approach demands a level of skill from the educator as their role shifts from presenter of information to facilitator of a problem-solving process (Allen *et al*., 2011). As each group shared their information on their topic of the Integrative Framework, their learning was guided by asking questions that probed the relevance and accuracy of their material, the depth of analysis of the issues presented, and highlighted new or neglected issues for consideration. Therefore, some scaffolding of the students' learning occurred as they pieced together, like a jigsaw, how all the different pieces of information provided a more comprehensive view of the service user and the supports required.

### Creative Use of Media

*Dr Ailish Jameson and Anne Marie Shier (Fulbright Scholar) are lecturers and tutors in the School of Law, Languages and Social Science in TU Dublin City Campus. They co-teach the 'Principles of Professional Practice' module for first year social care students (n = 30), which gives students an understanding of the principles, historical and legal frameworks governing professional social care and initiates the development of a professional identity, recognising the needs of the social care practitioner in this complex area (Technological University (TU) Dublin, 2020). They focused on the creative use of media as a teaching tool using the Framework to support their approach.*

Educators commonly utilise film, images or case studies to stimulate debate and discussion. In this example, the film 'The Florida Project' was selected as a medium for the application of the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching. The use of film in education for social care and social work has many benefits, including the development of critical analysis and practice-based skills and the opportunity to explore real-world scenarios (Fox, 2017; Shier &

Williams, 2015). This film centres around a child 'Moonee' and her mother 'Halley' and the challenges faced due to poverty (Tallerico, 2017). In particular, it highlights significant shortcomings with respect to the provision of support, guidance and child protection for Moonee.

The 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching was applied to this film using a workshop style class as well as forming the basis for an exam question, thus providing both formative and summative opportunities to integrate the framework. In preparation for the workshop, students had to complete several tasks. They watched the film 'The Florida Project', a webinar on the Framework (Mc Garr & Fingleton, 2020), and read the accompanying article by McGarr & Fingleton (2020). The focus of the workshop was on how the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' could be applied to the needs of the characters Moonee and her mother Halley, specifically focusing on assessment of needs and the design of interventions to meet these needs. In the workshop, a presentation was delivered to explain the framework and present the case study. A worksheet was provided for the student social care workers who worked in teams of five.

Firstly, students were asked to brainstorm their ideas under the five elements of the framework: Theory, Legislation & Policy, Safeguarding & Risk, Values & Ethics and Professional Skills (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020). Students identified key legislation and theories taught in the classroom and linked them to the case of Moonee and Halley. For example, they highlighted The Child Care Act (1991) and Children First Act (2015) under policy and legislation. Under 'theory' students highlighted 'Attachment theory' by Bowlby (1988) and Salter-Ainsworth *et al.* (2015), and linked this theory with Moonee and her style of attachment with her mother. Following this initial brainstorm sessions, students were then assigned specific policies, legislation and theories to work on with the instructions in the worksheet. Students were requested to be specific with respect to each of the five elements. Many of the teams identified the importance of adopting a strengths-based perspective with regard to the issues presented in the movie. They highlighted how confidentiality and working with this family to promote and meet the needs of the child as being paramount. This linked in with the module learning outcome which addresses the role of advocacy in promoting the needs and interests of service users and explain the influence of system-level change to improve outcomes, access to care, and delivery of services, particularly for marginalised groups. In addition, it emphasised under Domain 5.15 of CORU proficiency the

need to be able to identify the different types of child abuse, their role in reporting concerns, and how to deal with disclosures of child abuse (SCWRB, 2017b).

*Peer Learning Opportunities and Cognitive Challenge*

The 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' was very effective in terms of teaching complex material on the needs of children, child protection, and wider societal issues such as poverty and homelessness. Students found the five elements very useful in facilitating them to compile ideas and identify multiple elements applicable to this movie. With respect to the exam question, students skilfully applied the framework to conduct an assessment for Moonee and her mother Halley and designed creative and innovative interventions, drawing on the five elements of the framework. This workshop and exam question addressed many of the learning outcomes and CORU proficiencies applicable to this module. For example, under professional skills used in this case, students were meeting learning outcome 2 and CORU proficiencies 1.1, 1.21 and 5.15 which focus on the nature of social care work, the role of a professional social care worker and the safe and effective practice within ethical, legal and practice boundaries of the profession and with respect to personal growth and development (SCWRB, 2017b; TU Dublin, 2020).

**Where to from here?**

The above reflections indicate some interesting uses of the framework within the classroom; however, the authors acknowledge that there a number of limitations to this paper. This collaborative effort is but part of a wider research study, whereby the authors piloted the framework with both students and educators to further inform the development of the model. While the results of this pilot will be presented in a later article, this paper represents a sharing of experiences and ideas by educators as they sought to integrate the framework into their teaching and assessment practices. Acknowledging the above limitations, the key learning identified by the community members can be summarised in the following action points which could be useful in creating innovative opportunities for learning within social care education:

- *Create a formal community of practice to support innovation within the classroom and offer a space to share learning.*

    In an evolving social care context, time for creativity, innovation and shared learning cannot be underestimated. Yet teaching in higher education can be an autonomous and sometimes isolating endeavour, particularly for educators transitioning from a

practice background (Gourlay, 2011). Space to reflect, share experiences and ideas with colleagues can be useful (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and can provide valuable networking opportunities to keep abreast of changes within a rapidly evolving field of practice. As the new Technological University continues to evolve, we see huge value in this kind of cross-campus collaboration, an endeavour that requires support at School level. As lecturer familiarity with the framework is key, having access to other educators can support the use of this within the classroom (through brainstorming, connecting ideas etc.), which will provide for a more rewarding experience for both educator and student. Furthermore, the community of practice could be broadened to include experienced placement supervisors who are currently working in the field, further building links with stakeholders in line with the 'Partnership' pillar of the TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030 (TU Dublin, n.d-b). This expansion would enable an exploration of how the framework could enable the practice education team to evidence proficiencies attained on placement, therefore improving the integration of practice learning across the programme.

- *An integrated pedagogical approach can support the development of core graduate attributes.*

    Debate abounds on how best to produce graduates who are critical, analytical, and practical thinkers (Fink, 2003; Chi & Wylie, 2014; Fitzsimons, 2014). Shifting focus from curriculum-driven teaching methods towards a collaborative, critical and active learning space can support creative, adaptable, and flexible thinking (Fink, 2003); key graduate attributes as per the TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030 (TU Dublin, n.d-b) and fundamental skills for working dynamically within a social care context are important. An integrated pedagogical approach can support these competencies (Boix Mansilla, 2008; Fink, 2003; Youatt & Wilcox, 2008), as students consider the knowledge and skills they have accrued and how they fit together in a coherent way for the benefit of the service user. Creating space within the classroom for this creativity to flourish is a worthwhile pursuit and the methodologies identified above illustrate the opportunities provided for higher order thinking skills to develop. Furthermore, the collaborative learning environment facilitates teaching the "how" of social care work. By the "how", we do not mean the teaching of discreet elements (such as theories, practice approaches and so forth), but how these are combined in a way that is congruent with the spirit of social care work and aligned to the context, role and goal of the social

care worker. This shifts the focus from knowledge acquisition towards a more critical engagement with the content, in line with the Taxonomy of Significant Learning outlined by Fink (2003).

- *Authentic assessments offer valuable learning opportunities for students to build and refine practice skills and can be incorporated across the programme.*

  Within an applied programme such as social care, students cover a broad range of content which informs their practice at both a practical and theoretical level. Employing authentic assessment methods offers opportunities to explore how this content is of relevance to the practice environment and how it can be utilised in the everyday practice of the social care worker. Linking in with the discussion above, authentic assessment can support the development of key professional competencies, which contribute towards students becoming industry-ready (Murphy & Whelan, 2016; SCWRB, 2017b), a key commitment under the TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030 (TU Dublin, n.d-b). The TU Dublin Authentic Assessment Framework outlines four dimensions involved in designing authentic assessments: realism, meta-cognition, cognitive challenge, and feedback processes (TU Dublin, n.d-a). Within this framework, authenticity within assessment is understood to be on a continuum, rather than applying all four dimensions in a rigid way. This framework offers a guide to what authentic assessment might 'look like' and may be of use to educators seeking to transition from a traditional to more authentic style of assessment within their classroom.

- *Understanding the 'self' is fundamental to working reflexively in a dynamic environment.*

  Within social care education and practice, reflecting on the 'self' is crucial (Lyons, 2013; Trevithick, 2017; Ward, 2008) and the reflexive practitioner is one that is aware of how experiences, biases and assumptive worlds shape their engagement with the work and can adapt their practice accordingly. Arguably, this is a journey rather than a destination and true understanding of 'self' is challenging to attain, for students and experienced practitioners alike (Ferguson, 2018). Unsurprisingly, students easily connect with clinical vignettes and third-party scenarios, and engage in the dissection of these wholeheartedly. To turn such scrutiny on oneself is a different experience and one that must be managed carefully within the classroom and while on placement. Therefore, while the framework encourages students to reflect on how "the self" interacts with each component of the framework, educators must plan mindfully for

such discussion and dialogue, taking into consideration student needs, stage of development, and the need for safe sharing spaces.

## Conclusion

Social care as a profession is undergoing significant change which, from an educational perspective, has implications for what we teach and how we teach it. This paper outlined the current context of social care as an evolving profession and offered a rationale for the development of the 'Integrative Framework for Practice Teaching' (McGarr & Fingleton, 2020) as an innovative teaching tool and a scaffold on which to hinge authentic assessment. Aligning the framework with the core principles of Fink's (2003) Taxonomy of Significant Learning, the paper demonstrated how utilising the framework within teaching and assessment can facilitate the development of higher order thinking skills and support educators in adopting a more integrated and constructivist pedagogical approach. Members of a community of practice shared their experiences of using the framework in innovative ways within the classroom and key learning points were shared, including supporting student's ongoing relationship with the 'self', and opportunities to examine, interrogate and apply underpinning knowledge to the practice environment. Reflections on the learning were discussed, and possible actions and further applications were identified. Sharing, developing and learning new and innovative ways of educating social care students offers endless possibilities to respond to the challenge of keeping education contemporary, relevant and impactful, thus meeting the commitments outlined within the TU Strategic Intent 2030 (TU Dublin, n.d-b).

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