Communities of Practice and Communities in Practice: A Case Study of the Co-Creation of an Adult Education Family Support Network Programme

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Abstract

The Faculty of Lifelong Learning at the Institute of Technology Carlow co-created a Level 8 Certificate in Prevention, Partnership and Family Support with Tusla, the national Child and Family Agency. The part time programme was aimed at Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) members in Co. Carlow. The overall approach taken throughout this programme involved the use of specialist guest speakers and was purposively framed around the adult education principles of transformative learning and communities of practice, recognising the social and group cohesion that exists through shared endeavours and commitments of practitioners within CFSNs.

Keywords: Family Support, Prevention, Partnership, Social and Group Cohesion, Co-Creation in Higher Education, Community of Practice, Adult Education, Transformative Learning, Child and Family Agency.

Glossary of Terms

Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs):	Child and Family Support Networks help to support services engaged in family support through ensuring these services are easily accessible and integrated at the front line in their own communities. This is achieved through adopting a localised, area-based approach. CFSNs are also the unit building blocks of the National Service Delivery Framework (NSDF) and the frontline operational structure that ensures integrated service delivery.
Commissioning:	The aim of Commissioning Guidance is to ensure that the total resources available to children and families are applied to improving outcomes for children and families in the most efficient, effective, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way.
Communities of Practice (CoPs):	A community of practice is a group pf people who "share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly".
DCYA:	Formerly the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, now known as the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, their mission is to enhance the lives of children, young people, adults, families and communities, recognising diversity and promoting equality of opportunity.
Meitheal:	Meitheal is an old Irish term that describes how neighbours would come together to assist in the saving of crops or in other tasks. In a Meitheal, a lead practitioner will identify a child's and their family's needs and strengths and then bring together a 'team around the child'.
National Service Delivery Framework (NSDF):	Tusla is supporting the development and implementation of a single, transparent, consistent and accountable National Service Delivery Framework (NSDF), focused on improving outcomes for children. An important part of this NSDF is the area-based approach which is most clearly seen in how CFSNs are being developed and how the Meitheal National Practice Model is being implemented.
Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS):	This is a comprehensive suite of early intervention and preventative services being undertaken by Tusla and its partner agencies. The aim of the PPFS is to prevent risks to children and young people arising or escalating through early intervention and family support. The best way to improve outcomes for children is to intervene at an early stage to try to resolve problems and prevent harm. A way this can be done is by working with parents and communities to support children at the earliest possible stage.

Section One

1.1 Introduction

The Faculty of Lifelong Learning at the Institute of Technology Carlow co-created a Level 8 Certificate in Prevention, Partnership and Family Support with Tusla, the national Child and Family Agency. Funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs under the 'What Works Initiative', the part time programme was targeted at Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) members in Co. Carlow.

The module was developed to both strengthen and link academic theory and practice which supports the evidence base of prevention and early intervention service provision. A key component of the module was the collective gathering of CFSN members, with the objective of providing opportunities to create organic opportunities for members to get to know each other in an alternative context, removing barriers such as sector representation; funding or time restraints, and promote the development of professional relationships for future working partnerships.

On completion of the module, participants will have:

1. Developed their theoretical knowledge of the impact of early intervention and prevention for children and families - increasing their capacity to deliver quality, evidence-based practice.

2. Created new and enhanced existing working relationships with their partners in the community, developing a better understanding of services in their own area and an in-depth knowledge of the procedures involved in accessing and engaging in these services.

3. Reduced duplication of service delivery, improving efficiency of funding and staff resources, ensuring more children and families have quicker access to services, promoting the early intervention response.

4. Identified blocks to engagement in interagency work and strategies on how best to overcome these barriers.

This paper will provide a practice-based examination of this project in the form of a case study. The first section will examine the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS), an evidence-led approach to early intervention and

prevention work which has been implemented across Ireland by Tusla. It will critically examine the existing literature, tools and approaches relating to family support and early intervention to frame the context of the overall project and its significance to the CSFN members. The second section will engage in analysis of the practical aspects of the co-creation and facilitation of the Certificate in Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, highlighting the importance of enhancing the student learning experience through relevant industry collaboration whilst ensuring academic quality is maintained throughout module creation and delivery. Section Two will also appraise the quantitative and qualitative data which was captured before and after the programme to examine the learner voice and their experience of the project, specifically through the completion of an online survey reflecting pre-course knowledge and on completion of the module, an online survey gauging subsequent knowledge and allowing for feedback from participants. The third and final section of the paper will explore how the overall approach taken throughout this project was purposively framed around the adult education principles of transformative learning and Communities of Practice (CoP), recognising the social and group cohesion that exists through shared endeavours and commitments of practitioners within CSFNs by the strengthening of relationships and sense of solidarity amongst its members. Transformative Learning is primarily associated with adult education and refers to the perspective transformation that occurs through exposure to new concepts, and the succeeding engagement and discourse within the educational setting that results in original views or beliefs being challenged, transformed, and reformed. The use of CoP to comprehend the approach adopted by the CFSNs relates to the acceptance that learning is social and comes largely from our experience of participating in daily life. The principles of a CoP are identified within the existing CFSNs, acknowledging the theory behind the work already undertaken in communities by service providers.

1.2 Overview of PPFS

Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) was developed by Tusla with a vision to transform services for children, young people and families, who request support from Tusla and its community partners, but do not require or meet the threshold for child protection intervention. PPFS creates pathways to support and engagement for children, young people, and their families, embedded in an ethos of early intervention, prevention, partnership and collaborative working which delivers on the Principles of Family Support, identified by Pinkerton et al. (2004). These are:

1. Working in partnership with children, families, professionals and communities;

2. Family Support interventions are needs led and strive for minimum intervention required;

3. Requires a clear focus on wishes, feelings, safety and well-being of children;

4. Family Support reflects a strengths-based perspective which is mindful of resilience as a characteristic of many children and families' lives;

5. Effective interventions are those which strengthens informal support networks;

6. Family Support is accessible and flexible in respect of timing, setting, and changing needs, and can incorporate both child protection and out of home care;

7. Facilitates self-referral and multi-access referral paths;

8. Involves service users and front-line providers in planning, delivery and evaluation on an ongoing basis;

9. Promotes social inclusion, addressing issues of ethnicity, disability and rural/ urban communities;

10. Measures of success are routinely included to facilitate evaluation based on attention to outcomes for service users, and thereby facilitate quality services based on best practice (Pinkerton, 2004, cited in Tusla, 2013, p.12).

Early intervention and prevention practices which engage children, young people and their families, across all levels of need, improve systems which link families to the right services, with better co-ordination and information sharing, strengthening partnerships working across sectors and develops opportunity for workforce and cultural change (CES, 2013). Implementation of early intervention and prevention work practices has yielded positive outcomes by reducing the need for services later in life for individuals. Coupled with better outcomes for individuals, early intervention and prevention has also achieved societal and economic benefits for communities and wider society in general, reporting improved lifelong outcomes and enhanced economic benefits in areas

such as early childhood care and education; educational attainment; parenting; and child behaviour (Rochford et al., 2014).

Learning and professional development achieved through engagement on this programme enhances working knowledge and bolsters the opportunity for implementation of early intervention and prevention practices across the working community of child, youth and family support service providers and practitioners in Carlow.

1.3 Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs)

PPFS act as a conduit to deliver services which support children, families, and young people, ensuring a timely and appropriate response to need. CFSNs work through interagency collaboration to activate the delivery of services. Interagency collaboration presents benefits and challenges for the practitioners and agencies tasked with implementing services. CFSN members are at the coal face of delivery of services, they are opening the door to the children, families and young people requesting support, making it vital that they are adequately supported and resourced in their service provision.

Tusla's PPFS services are delivered within a framework co-ordinating and facilitating multi-agency and multi-disciplinary engagement (Tusla, 2017), via three main work streams: participation; parenting; and Meitheal and the area-based approach. Captured in the area-based approach are the CFSNs, formed in each of the Tusla Integrated Service Areas (ISAs). The multi-agency networks are open to membership from organisations providing services on behalf of children, young people, and families, within the community and voluntary and statutory sectors, with the core principles of providing timely services and interventions locally for children, young people, and families and that there is no 'wrong door' for families seeking support. These Networks operate an intra-network referral process to support families accessing the most appropriate service for their need (Cassidy et al., 2018). Engagement in the Network supports practitioners in their role of protection and support to children, young people and families, to strategically target and respond to extrinsic factors which impact on children's wellbeing and safety (McGregor and Devaney, 2020). Local areas benefit from the work of the CFSNs, as needs and gaps in services are identified and addressed collaboratively through the perspectives of the interdisciplinary membership.

Participation on the PPFS module at IT Carlow supports the organic development of professional relationships through formal facilitated sessions

and informal networking opportunities arising over the course of the module. Sharing learning and experience to inform the delivery of practice among CFSNs outside of the college environment helps to transform theory into practice.

1.4 Communities in Practice

CFSN members contribute to the Tusla Meitheal process for individual children and young people within the community. The Meitheal group consists of the child or young person; their parent or guardian and all other relevant stakeholders who provide supports to the child and their family work together to identify needs and an action plan to achieve outcomes which improve the situation for the child or young person and their family (Tusla, 2017). CFSNs facilitate collaboration between practitioners and families through Meitheal and individual family support interventions, which actively engages children and their family throughout their process, implementing participation strategies for children, young people and their parents, to ensure that a child-centred, rights-based approach is delivered so that all children and young people are safe, supported and are achieving to their full potential (Tusla, 2017).

This collaboration between families and practitioners is necessary to deliver a response to need and creates opportunities to grow and strengthen capacity within communities (Boydell, 2015). The co-created PPFS module addressed core theoretical understandings and explored evidence based practice associated with the interagency delivery of Meitheal, relating directly to learning outcome three, whereby on completion of the module, participants will have created new and enhanced existing working relationships with their partners in the community, developing a better understanding of services in their own area and an in depth knowledge of the procedures involved in accessing and engaging in these services.

1.5 Social and Group Cohesion

Statham (2011) acknowledges the value of interagency and collaborative working for service users, by improving access routes to services and creating a speedier response to need; for agencies by improving engagement with service users; less duplication; improving efficiencies; and finally, for practitioners in enhancing knowledge and skills; improving job satisfaction and opportunities for career development (Statham, 2011). In the 2018 review of the implementation of CFSNs, Cassidy, et al. identified CFSNs as having the potential to be a significant factor in the development of early intervention and prevention strategies in

local areas, resulting from collaborative working and collective identification of need in local areas. However, this study has named challenges for the Networks which can hinder the achievement of positive outcomes. Members of CFSNs have voiced their frustrations on a lack of clarity around the role and purpose of CFSNs and how it relates to the delivery of services via Tusla's PPFS approach. Issues were identified relating to securing and maintaining membership of relevant stakeholders. Long term concerns were noted around the absence of financial commitments to support the implementation of proposed activities developed through the networks. Collaborative and interagency working lends to a proactive response to addressing need and providing efficient and effective services, however CFSN members have reported they are unclear on their role and how they are representing the wider PPFS framework in their day-to-day work.

Statham (2011) reports challenges to interagency working through: commitment obstacles, with different levels of buy in and agency management not supporting the process; organisational challenges, differing approaches and remits among agencies, and obstacles to information sharing; contextual barriers which are created by constant organisational change, financial uncertainty and changes in political steer. Herein lies the requirement of the integration of CoP as a core concept for the PPFS module. This will be explored in greater detail in section 3.

1.6 Recommendations to Support and Enhance CFSN Practices

Cassidy et al. (2018) identified recommendations which will further support and enhance the practices of CFSNs. These recommendations highlight the requirement to resource CFSNs through comprehensive education and training programmes and funding; promote engagement; enhance the crossover between CFSN and Meitheal; and provide clarity on the role, purpose and contribution of each CFSN member in the process:

- A specific budget should be provided to support, for example, training events organised for CFSNs and to enable a response to be made to needs identified in the network. This would help to prevent participation fatigue and possibly increase members' long-term commitment to the network,

- Consideration should be given to organising broader training events across a Tusla ISA, with more specific actions tailored to local needs initiated within individual CFSNs. This would allow the efficient pooling of resources across an ISA, reduce the organisational burden on members of individual networks,

and facilitate the establishment of links between a broader range of professionals and practitioners across a wider area,

- The objective of the CFSNs should be clearly established and emphasised so that members are aware of their purpose for attending. Within this, the relevance of practitioners working at different levels of need must be further explored and supported so that professionals and practitioners recognise the value to their own work with families,

- The implications of boundaries across Tusla and other statutory services' catchment areas should be addressed, with contingencies worked out for how relationships across and between these can be managed in an efficient and effective manner,

- The formal relationship between the CFSNs and the Meitheal model should be explored further at the individual network level and across the wider system. The extent to which they should be formally linked should be examined in order to ensure that the CFSN has an appropriate balance in supporting the Meitheal model and improving service provision for families with unmet needs outside of the remit of Meitheal,

- Efforts to increase engagement with the CFSN model should continue to be made among statutory services and agencies, particularly at a higher management level, so that all relevant stakeholders can be facilitated to join the networks (Cassidy et al., 2018, p.19).

1.7 The Programme

The above recommendations identified a distinct need for a targeted educational programme for CFSN members which resulted in a collaborative partnership between Tusla and Institute of Technology Carlow. This approach was informed by Institute of Technology Carlow's (2018, p.18) Strategic Priority of co-designing programmes and curricula with stakeholders. The aim of the programme was to enable practitioners who are actively engaged in the CFSNs, from community, voluntary and statutory services, to develop their knowledge and skills. More specifically, practitioners would develop the knowledge of theories of early intervention, specifically on the subject of family support. They would have the skills to develop evidence-based programmes in their own practice to meet the needs of their service users earlier and more efficiently. They will also have developed skills in monitoring the implementation of

service provision and applying continuous improvement planning, ensuring fidelity to evidence-based practice. This aim was informed by evidence that 'prevention and early intervention draws on a range of well tested programmes which are low in cost and high in results which can have a lasting impact on all children, especially the most vulnerable' (Tusla, 2017, p.10). From this, the following five-week programme with specialist guest speakers was developed:

Week	Topic	Guest Speaker and Role
1	PPFS National Delivery Framework Critical Reflective Practice	**Amy Mulvihill** *National Project Officer, PPF*
2	Child and Youth Participation – Lundy Model of Participation Children's Rights Article 3 and Article 1	**Michelle Sheehan** *National Lead on Child and* *Youth Participation*
3	National Commissioning Strategy Local Implementation of Commissioning Strategy Communities of Practice	**Eifion Williams** *Service Director for Commissioning* **Joan Dunne** *Senior Manager PPFS* *Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary*
4	Signs os Safety Social Work and Early Intervention Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory	**Emily Hart** *Signs of Safety Practice Learning and Development Practice Lead* **Hazel Graham** *Social Work Team Leader Duty Intake and Assessment Team*
5	Adverse Childhood Experiences and Early Intervention	**Dr. Sarah Morton** *Director of Community Partnership Drug Programmes – UCD.*

Section Two

2.1 Rationale

The rationale for the programme's inception was to enable practitioners who are represented on the Child and Family Support Networks to develop critical knowledge and practical skills in order to inform and enhance their own practice. The programme itself was evidence based and framed upon Cassidy et al.'s (2016) assertion that working collaboratively is an effective means of supporting children and young people and reduces siloes, often acting to complement their existing practice. Further to this, Social Care Ireland (2021) affirm that programmes like this, which offer continuous professional development opportunities, provide an important role in ensuring that practitioners are up to date with new, innovative tools which can ultimately enhance their professional skills and competencies.

2.2 Ethos

The project was initiated by the Senior CFSN Co-ordinator in Carlow on behalf of Tusla. As evidenced in the previous section of this paper, PPFS is an approach which relates to family support and early intervention which has particular significance to the CSFN members. The project was borne from an ethos of continuous professional development which originated from a need which was recognised within the Carlow CFSNs; and with the support and guidance of the Senior PPFS Manager for Carlow, Kilkenny and South Tipperary; the PPFS Regional Implementation Manager for the South; and the Tusla Area Manager. Underpinned by the Tusla National Strategy for Continuing Professional Development (Cullen and O'Grady, 2016, p. 2), the ethos of the project focused on staff 'at all levels in the development and delivery of high-quality services and will be supported to be reflective practitioners'. Similarly, the project is underpinned by one of Institute of Technology Carlow's (2018, p.15) core values of nurturing 'relationships with the communities we serve. We seek out and foster rewarding partnerships with our local, regional, national and international stakeholders. We encourage diversity and value the contributions made by all our learners, stakeholders and staff to our continuing success in empowering informed and engaged citizens'.

2.3 Co-Creation in Higher Education

In the context of co-creation between higher education institutes and industry, there is minimal literature on how to best achieve this process, despite growing recognition that industry involvement can, and should, play an integral role

in higher education in general (Shrivastava et al., 2022). A primary concern of the co-creation process was ensuring the development of a suitable and relevant module for students (practitioners) whilst marrying academic rigour to industry relevance and application of theory to practice (Shrivastava et al., 2022). In essence, this meant that the content needed to be constructively aligned to a Level 8 Certificate on the National Framework of Qualifications whilst maintaining significant focus on the learning that occurs outside of the conventional classroom, and within the communities the students practice in. From an assessment perspective, this meant recognising the learner's transformative learning journey through weekly reflective journals, incorporating opportunities for the learner to implement changes in their practice, reflecting on this and identifying solid learning outcomes. An essay critiquing and reviewing the relevant literature and theoretical concepts that underpinned the PPFS module ensured the academic rigour required of a Level 8 Certificate.

2.4 Learner Voice

Institute of Technology Carlow (2018) are committed to delivering transformative education based on a dedication to the creation of an environment where learners 'can acheive their full potential' (Institute of Technology Carlow, 2018, p.18). In order to achieve this, learners from the programme were asked to engage in a formal feedback process in order to firstly ascertain the level of knowledge of the various components before and after the completion of the Certificate programme. The results, presented below, clearly exemplifies how the programme achieves its aim to equip practitioners with the knowledge of theories of early intervention specifically on the subject of family support.

Level of Knowledge of the PPFS National Delivery Framework (Figure 1)

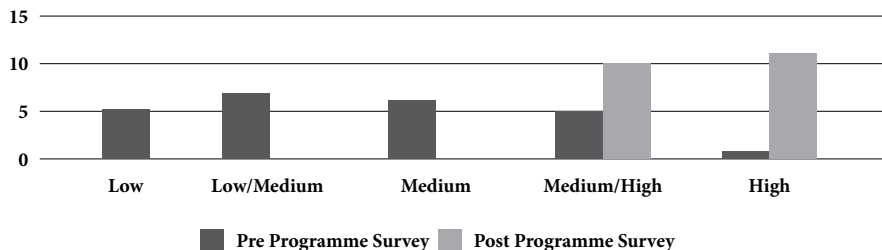**Please rate your level of knowledge of the PPFS National Delivery Framework**
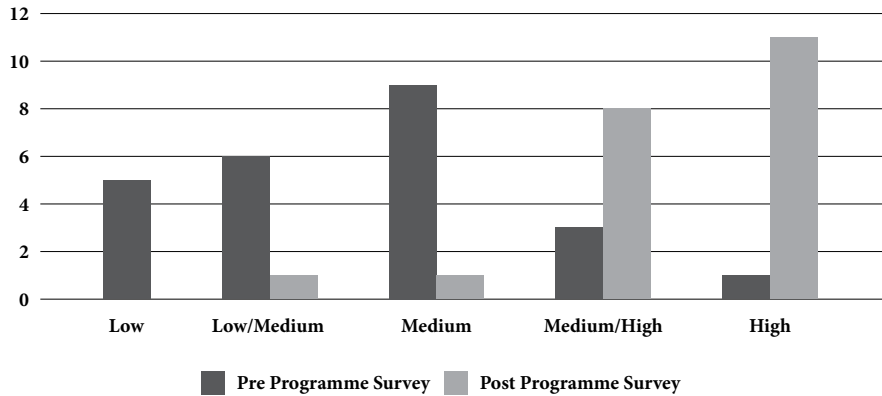
These findings are further strengthened by the qualitative findings where one learner revealed that:

> put simply, since becoming aware of my lack of knowledge around the PPFS Framework I am extremely motivated to learn more. As a result, I feel my knowledge base is developing significantly and I am more confident when supporting mothers and informing them of the different services Tusla provide.
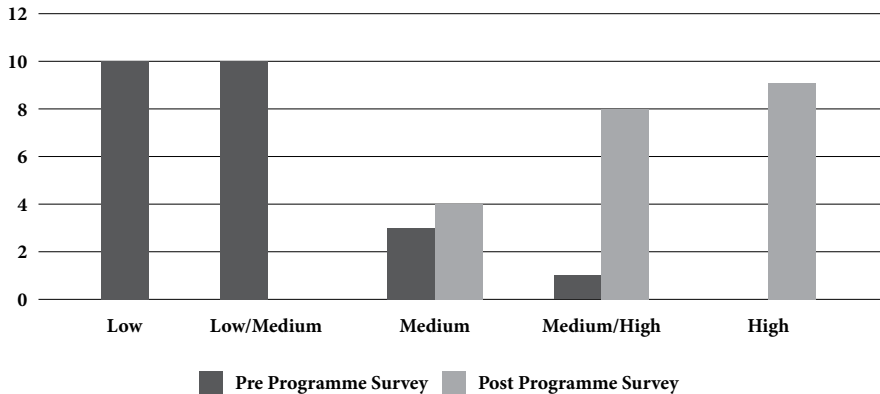
Level of Knowledge of Child and Youth Participation, the Lundy Model of Participation and Children's Rights Based Approach (Figure 2)

Please rate your level of knowledge Child and Youth Participation, the Lundy Model of Participation and Children's Rights Based approach
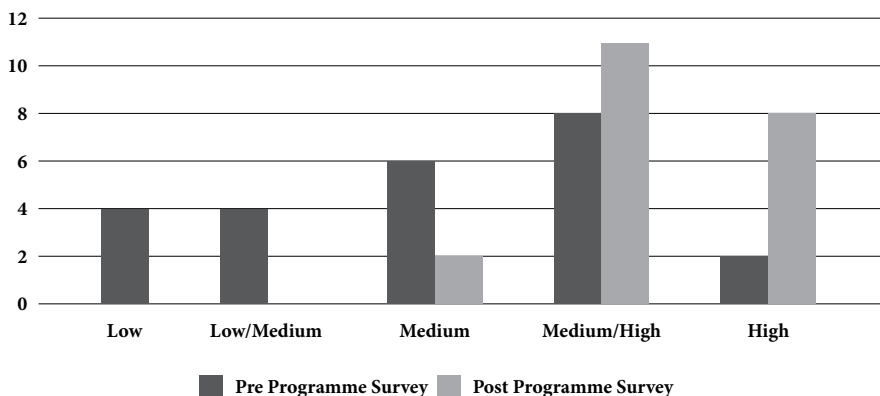
Level of Knowledge of the National Commissioning Strategy and your Role in the Local Implementation of the Commissioning Strategy (Figure 3)

Please rate your level of knowledge of the National Commissioning Strategy and your role in the local Implementation of the Commissioning Strategy

	Low	Low/Medium	Medium	Medium/High	High
Pre Programme Survey	10	10	3	1	0
Post Programme Survey	0	0	4	8	9

■ Pre Programme Survey   ■ Post Programme Survey

Level of Knowledge of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Role of Early Interventions (Figure 4)

Please rate your level of knowledge of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the role of Early Interventions

	Low	Low/Medium	Medium	Medium/High	High
Pre Programme Survey	4	4	6	8	2
Post Programme Survey	0	0	2	11	8

■ Pre Programme Survey   ■ Post Programme Survey

The other element of focus for the programme was to focus on practitioner skill development so that they could create evidence-based programmes in their own practice to meet the needs of their service users earlier and more efficiently.

Coupled with this, the aim was that they would develop skills in monitoring the implementation of service provision and applying continuous improvement planning, ensuring fidelity to evidence-based practice. The increase in their own confidence levels in understanding and using these skills and competencies is also evident.

Level of knowledge of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Practice and how it Relates to Practice (Figure 5)

Please rate your level of knowledge of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and critical practice and how it relates to your practice
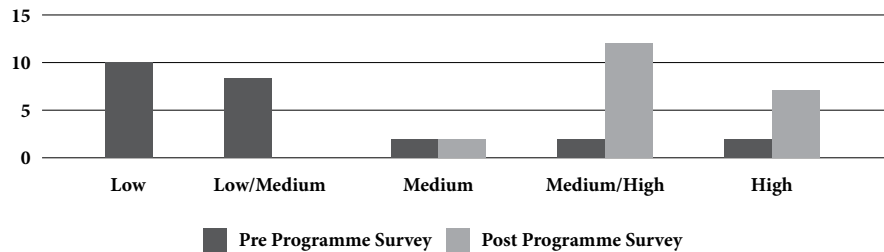
Level of Knowledge of Working within Communities of Practice (Figure 6)

Please rate your level of knowledge of working within Communities of Practice
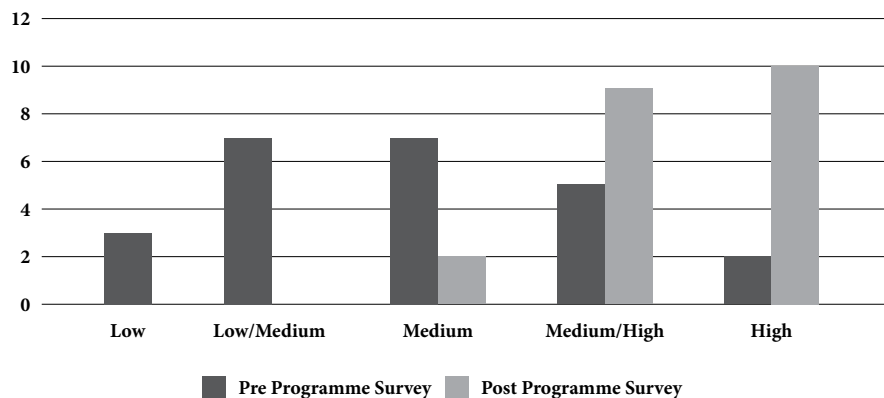
From a qualitative perspective, learners further noted that:

> the theoretical understanding of the concept gave me a great insight of its importance and application in practice. The application of commissioning in my day-to-day practice will benefit me as a practitioner, as well as the agency that I am working for in, engaging in different support practices for families, and in identifying the best possible intervention for the individual, even though it might be provided by me or the organization that I am working for.

Similarly, the transformative effect of this learning experience is evident as another learner noted:

> I thought I knew about the services available in Carlow for children, young people and families, but I didn't know the range of services and how flexible and diverse they are. I have learnt so much from the course, our excellent lecturer; the guest speakers; the recommended reading and most of all from the other students, it was such a privilege to hear how others delivered their services and how they overcame obstacles to achieve amazing results. I have never before been involved in a learning environment as powerful as this.

This section has addressed the practical aspects of the co-creation and facilitation of the PPFS. By presenting the quantitative and qualitative data, it has demonstrated how the project has not only achieved its aims, but it has kept the learner voice and experience at the centre of it journey.

Section 3

3.1 Delivery of PPFS Programme

The facilitator delivered this programme through adopting a transformative learning perspective, as defined by Mezirow (1991) as an approach which positions critical reflection as a distinguishing characteristic, acting as a vehicle by which one questions the validity of their worldview. The students' life experiences provided a starting point for transformational learning (Mezirow, 1997). When transformational learning is part of a course of study, the role of the teacher is to establish an environment characterized by trust and care, and to facilitate sensitive relationships among the participants (Taylor, 1998). This is primarily achieved through rational discourse which serves as the primary catalyst for transformation and is necessary to validate what and how one

understands, or to arrive at a best judgement regarding a belief. This brings in the social and group element of transformative learning, as shared and interactive discourse becomes central to making meaning and developing understanding (Mezirow, 1997). Through this combination of reflection and discourse, the students were able to make shifts in their mindset which produced a more inclusive worldview, allowing for a greater understanding of the diversity and complexities which can lead families to require support under PPFS, resulting in an empathetic approach towards family support as an effective prevention and early intervention measure to promote best possible outcomes for children and young people.

The use of transformative learning as a theory was also considered important for practitioner awareness as through engaging in suitable interventions with families involving respectful discourse, practitioners become a catalyst or starting point for transformative learning in the lives of the families and individuals they support with the desired outcome being a shift in views and subsequently behaviour. Therefore, it is necessary for practitioners to have first-hand insight and experience in order to understand their client's experiences and to effectively facilitate the process. To achieve this, Mezirow (1997) describes a transformative learning environment as one in which participants have full information, are free from coercion, can become critically reflective of assumptions, are empathetic and good listeners, and are willing to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view. This mirrors the approach required for effective collaborative practice and service delivery within CFSNs. In line with transformative learning principles, this course was structured towards fostering personal development of the students rather than developing specific competencies.

3.2 Communities of Practice

A CoP is defined as a group of people who come together to share common interests and goals aimed at improving their skills by working alongside more experienced members and being involved in increasingly complicated tasks (Lave and Wenger, 1991). CoPs are identified through the existence of three distinct, key elements: domain, community, and practice. The individual CFSN members and their work with families and young people in the community represent the *communities in practice*. The process, impact and functioning of the CFSNs is underpinned by the concept of *communities of practice*, recognising the common goal of family support and best practice that all members share (domain), the wealth of knowledge specific and nuanced to

their local community (practice), and the vital professional relationships that are built through a collective partnership approach where members promote best practice and learn the intricacies of local family support work from each other (community).

Learning is 'an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 50) or, more simply, a process of social participation where the nature of the situation impacts significantly on the process itself. CoPs enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that, given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this (Wenger, 2015).

It is the combination of three elements that constitutes a CoP:

1. **Domain:**
    Refers to a shared endeavour, goal or area of interest. In the context of PPFS and the CFSNs, this refers to achieving best practice in family support.

2. **Community:**
    Reflects the relationships that are created through consistent interaction, discussion, and information sharing which results in a supportive community where members can learn from each other.

3. **Practice:**
    Refers to the requirement for participants to be practitioners as it forms the space where learning and knowledge can be both created and implemented whilst ensuring shared context and understanding.

This results in what Wenger (1998) coined as mutual engagement which refers to norms and social interactions built by community members and leads to the creation of shared meaning on issues or problems, effectively binding its members together as a social entity, achieving social cohesion (Agrifoglio, 2015). This was further enhanced within this programme through the use of specialist guest speakers from Tusla each week where experienced members shared direct practice knowledge, relevant and specific to PPFS. Similar to CFSNs, CoPs are privileged sites for developing, maintaining, and sharing practice-based knowledge. Through adopting a CoP approach, practitioners can address the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and

sharing, as well as the more explicit aspects (Wenger, 2015). This aligns to the aforementioned Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) led What Works (Tusla, 2013) initiative which:

- is about working together to ensure that Ireland is one of the best countries in the world for our children and young people to grow up.

- is about bringing together, sharing, questioning, and using all the evidence we have about what works to improve children and young people's lives today so that they may have brighter tomorrows.

- is about fostering persistent curiosity amongst those working to improve the lives of children and young people in Ireland.

- is about supporting those working with and for children, young people, and their families in doing the right things, in the right way and at the right time.

3.3 Conclusion

Learning outcomes of the PPFS programme included to create new and enhanced existing working relationships with partners in the community, develop a better understanding of services in participant's own area and an in-depth knowledge of the procedures involved in accessing and engaging in these services whilst identifying blocks to engagement in interagency work. As a result of completing this programme, practitioners were motivated and refreshed by engaging in continuous professional development, through acquiring knowledge on the most recent research and approaches, supporting communities of practice and the engagement in and development of CFSNs, subsequently enhancing working relationships and network outputs. This paper adds to the existing literature surrounding success in adult, community, and further education by demonstrating how a lifelong learning programme was co-created, facilitated and evaluated in a meaningful and impactful way, with the adult learner at the core.

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