



# **Intergenerational Learning: An Evaluation of an Emerging Pedagogy**

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to those who have influenced me in their love of education and love of life, and those that have inspired me in their love of creativity, knowledge and learning. I would like to dedicate this work to my late father James and my brother Paul who have both had a great influence on me.

It is also dedicated to Amy, my dear neighbour and friend who passed away at the age of twenty-two, just weeks before she was due to graduate from TCD. Amy, has been an inspiration to me as I wrote this thesis. To my late parents-in-law Rita and Joe for their passion for life and knowledge; and for their love for their children and grandchildren.

Finally, I want to dedicate this work to the memory of Linda McNamara a wonderful wife to Gerry and a loving mother to Mark and Michael. Linda, a very creative writer in her own right will always be cherished and never forgotten.

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## **Abstract**

The rationale for this study was to address the lack of a coherent theoretical framework for intergenerational learning in higher education. To date little in-depth research has been undertaken evaluating the specific needs or contextualizing the benefits of lifelong learning for older people in higher education. In particular no in-depth research has been undertaken evaluating the needs of older people in the broader teaching, learning and research opportunities at third level.

The Dublin City University Intergenerational Learning Project (DCU ILP) began in 2008, as an emerging pedagogy that facilitates knowledge transfer and understanding between generations. An intergenerational learning 'space' was created on the DCU campus where older learners had the opportunity to meet with students from DCU in a reciprocal learning experience. Specific modules across a number of disciplines were designed and delivered over a four year period.

Both a narrative and a phenomenological research approach were used for this study. The findings were evaluated under four key themes. These were: (1) the experience of the older people who participated in the study, (2) the experience of the DCU students who participated in the study, (3) the outcomes for higher education (4) the outcomes for society. The conclusions drawn from this study indicate strongly that intergenerational learning at third level offers many benefits for older and younger students, higher education and society at large.

Recommendations are made to further develop intergenerational learning as a pedagogy that facilitates social learning, experiential learning, transformational learning and lifelong learning for both cohorts of students.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*Since life means growth, a living creature lives as truly and positively at one stage as another, with the same intrinsic fullness and the same absolute claims. Hence, education means the enterprise of supplying the conditions, which ensure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age. (Dewey, 1916:51)*

## 1.0 Introduction

The research question for this thesis explores how an intergenerational learning initiative, which began in Dublin City University (DCU) in 2008, might contribute to a new paradigm for intergenerational learning initiatives in other third level institutes now and in the future. It provides personal reasons for carrying out the study, which are outlined in Chapter 2. The rationale for the study places the topic within current thinking on the need to develop intergenerational relationships between the old and the young and on reasons to address the educational needs of an ageing population. The general purpose of the research is discussed and the structure and organization of the thesis is presented.

For this doctoral study, I evaluated the current research on intergenerational learning which is set mainly within the context of second level learning. I reflected that intergenerational learning might also have the potential to facilitate the sharing and exchange of knowledge across cultural, sociological, historical, political economic, scientific and educational pursuits in many fields of learning at third level. I believed that it had the capacity to facilitate the transfer of high quality learning including critical thinking, analytical and reflection skills. I believed that it had the potential to contribute to significant new pedagogical practices in higher education.

In addition, I hypothesized that to facilitate older and younger people learning together would provide older people with a sense of place or belonging in third level learning. I reflected on the words of W.B. Yeats who in 1928 in his poem ‘*Sailing to Bizantium*’ referred to Ireland as “no

*country for old men.*” This represented his disillusionment with the lack of value placed on the role of older people in Ireland during this time. (Yeats, 1928: The Tower). I also hypothesized that creating a sense of place for older people in third level learning had the potential to contribute to the quality of learning for younger third level students and more broadly, had the potential to benefit society.

The thesis attempts to explore the current theoretical understanding of intergenerational learning and to conceptualise its potential in third level learning through the evaluation of the Dublin City University Intergenerational Learning Project (DCU ILP). While the primary objective of the DCU ILP was to increase learning opportunities for older people in higher education, it became clear that this approach contained interesting opportunities for the development of teaching, learning and research possibilities for the third level students who participated in the study. In addition, an innovative concept emerged which was that the transfer of knowledge of information technology and applications became an educational tool, which fostered greater understanding and relationship building between the older and younger people who participated in this study. It fostered inquiry-based learning (Dewey, 1938 & Bruner, 1961) and in the process facilitated the development of critical thinking and analytical skills for both cohorts of students.

In essence, it is argued in this study that the DCU ILP demonstrated the benefits of social learning as espoused by both Bandura (1977) and the earlier work of Vygotsky’s (1929) theories of social learning. It confirms that people learn from one another, through such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling. This learning was facilitated through the creation of a space at third level where both generations could meet and learn together. The DCU ILP is about the creation of both a physical space and a virtual space where both generations can learn together through

dialogue and sharing of skills, knowledge and competences now and in the future.

This study is also an attempt to develop a theoretical framework, which integrates intergenerational learning into third level practices in teaching, learning and research. Initially a theoretical framework was developed through an analysis of the European Approaches to Intergenerational Lifelong Learning Project (The EAGLE Project: 2007). Later it became clear that this framework was limited. A broader conceptualization more appropriate to higher education was developed. The theoretical framework developed came through the integration of lifelong learning and social capital theory. This is further elaborated in chapter four and chapter five.

## **1.1 Chapter Structure**

In Chapter 1, I will provide an understanding of the current gap in intergenerational learning initiatives in third level learning. The rationale guiding this thesis is presented. I outline a brief introduction to the neglect of senior people in the literature on lifelong learning. A theoretical framework for intergenerational learning is provided through the lens of social capital theory and lifelong learning. A brief description of intergenerational learning and research to date in this field is provided in chapter 1. The emergence of a new philosophical understanding of the benefits of intergenerational learning in third level learning is also introduced in this Chapter.

## **1.2 Background to Study**

For centuries in both traditional and modern cultures, intergenerational learning has been the informal process within families for '*systematic transfer of knowledge, skills, competencies, norms and values between generations-and is as old as mankind*' (Hoff, 2007:126). Typically, the older people or grandparents of the family share their wisdom and are valued for their role in transferring values, culture and family custom and

traditions. Hatton Yeo and Newman have conducted much work in the field of intergenerational learning. They state that familial intergenerational learning is informal and involves multi-generational interaction. However, in modern more complex societies, the family alone no longer transmits this knowledge, and increasingly it is either lost or occurring outside of the family (Hatton Yeo & Newman, 2008:31). In addition, the rapid change in the way information is accessed and exchanged using new information communication technology and applications, leads to a gap in knowledge acquisition and a sense of social isolation for those left outside of the digital age. Selwyn, et al (2003) acknowledge that social commentators in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States are beginning to recognise that encouraging older adults' use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is essential for the creation of bona fide information societies.

The European Older People's Platform report (AGE Platform Europe) which evaluated media literacy, digital exclusion and older people suggested that '*across Europe, older people are arguably the most excluded group of citizens in terms of media literacy*' (2008:9). It contends that there is a strong link between the digital divide and social exclusion when it states that:

*'the digital divide is inseparable from broader forms of social inequalities, and that interventions which seek to provide access to and/or training in the use of ICT's are likely to be of limited impact unless they are embedded within a broader strategy for combating social exclusion.'* (AGE Platform Europe 2008:8)

This divide is for many older people socially debilitating and as a result leaves them excluded from much knowledge and information.

Many younger people no longer have the opportunity to learn from the wisdom and lived experiences of older people. Older people are usually defined as those over sixty-five years of age. This was outlined in the Irish government report '*A Social Portrait of Older People in Ireland.*' (2007). in

the opening chapter ‘*What do we mean by older people?*’ Older people are defined similar to the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2007) Ageing Report’s definition as the percentage of the population ‘*who are over sixty five years of age.*’ The publication notes ‘The Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2007 report) estimates that about 11.0 % of the population (467,900) were people aged sixty five or over in Ireland in 2006. The CSO report notes that Ireland has the lowest proportion of its population aged 65 and over among EU countries. This is well below the EU average of nearly 17%. More significantly, it estimates that the old dependency ratio (the population aged 65 and over as a proportion of the 15-64 age group) may increase from 16% in 2006 to 25% in 2026 in Ireland and from 25% to 37% for the EU. (Central Statistics Office Ireland 2007). Equally, younger people are frequently disconnected from accessing knowledge and wisdom, which was traditionally transferred between generations. These are attributes, which are important in developing the personal and professional competences, the knowledge and skills of younger people to help them meet the challenges of today. Intergenerational Learning has the potential to be an essential part of the transformative process of learning for younger and older people through relationship building and knowledge transfer between generations. Newman and Hatton-Yeo define new ways to develop intergenerational relationships when they state ‘*It can be of value to clarify how contemporary society has necessitated the creation of a new intergenerational learning paradigm and its future implications*’ (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008: 31). Two of the best-known researchers in the field of intergenerational learning, Hatton Yeo & Ohsako (2000), admit that it is being developed in a diverse and wide range of practical ways but with a limited theoretical or conceptual basis. In a UNESCO publication, they provide a broad definition of intergenerational programmes as ‘*vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations*’. (Hatton Yeo & Ohsako, 2000:3). Nevertheless, it is true to say that, the field lacks theoretical rigor.

This thesis attempts to develop new ways to facilitate this transfer of knowledge between generations and in the process to contribute towards the development of a new intergenerational learning paradigm. This is explored in the development of an intergenerational teaching and learning space in Dublin City University (DCU). An obvious space to develop this paradigm and to foster intergenerational learning relationships is within third level learning. Currently little or no teaching and learning initiatives are in place in many third level institutes to facilitate the transfer of knowledge through an intergenerational learning framework. The need to address this gap is the focus of this research study.

### **1.3 Rationale for Study**

The rationale for this project was originally driven by two key concepts:

1. A growing ageing population nationally and internationally.
2. Changing expectations of older people.

What has emerged from this study is a third element and that is the role of intergenerational learning to support the personal and professional development of third level students.

#### **1.3.1 Demographics of Ageing Population**

CARDI (The Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland) highlight the significance of the growth of the ageing population as a demographic phenomenon. By 2050, the world's population over 60 years of age is forecast to reach 2 billion. In Ireland by 2041, the number of people aged 75 and over is projected to reach almost 1 million with 30% of the population aged over sixty. This global increase in the ageing population will deeply impact on the personal, social, educational and economic spheres of every society in the 21st Century.

CARDI (2011) notes that this transition will need to be successfully managed if the outcome is to be a positive one. CARDI suggests that one of

the most profound social transformations in history will in fact be population ageing. The current era, has been defined as ‘*The age of ageing*’ (Magnus 2007:5). The truth of this is emphasized in the recent Irish Central Statistics Office report ‘*Regional Population Projections 2011-2026*’, which states that:

*‘The number of old persons (65 and over) will almost double in every region over the life-time of the projections. The very old population (those aged 80 and over) is projected to more than double by 2026, with the largest increase in the Mid-East (+ 170 %)’* (Regional Population Projections 2011-2026:4)

The increasing ageing population figure for Ireland is represented alongside comparative graphs for the ageing population in America, China, Japan and Europe, outside of Ireland. These are represented in Figure 1 Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4. Collectively these graphs demonstrate the remarkable increase to come in population ageing both at national level and within a global context.

## Future older population

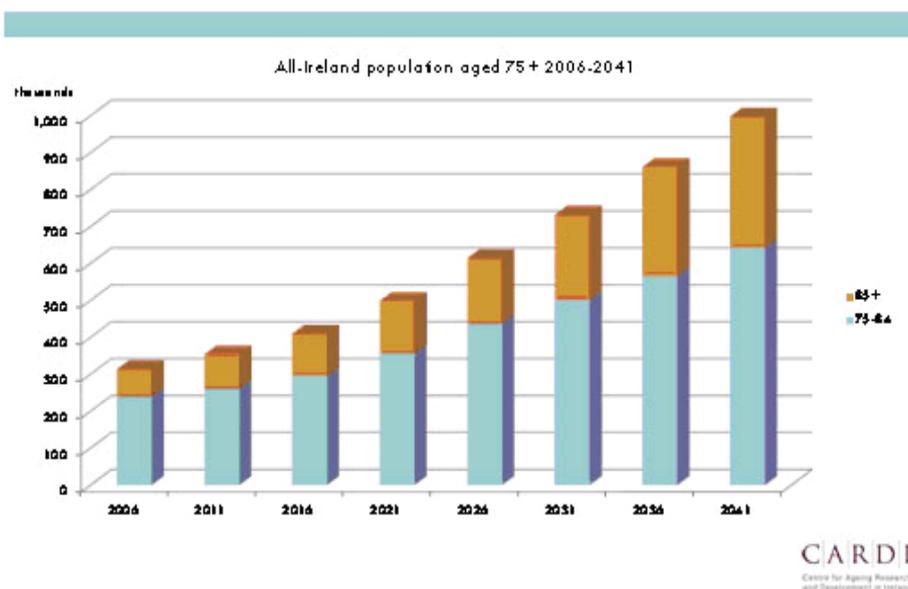


Figure 1 Increase in Ageing Population in Ireland 2006-2041 CARDI

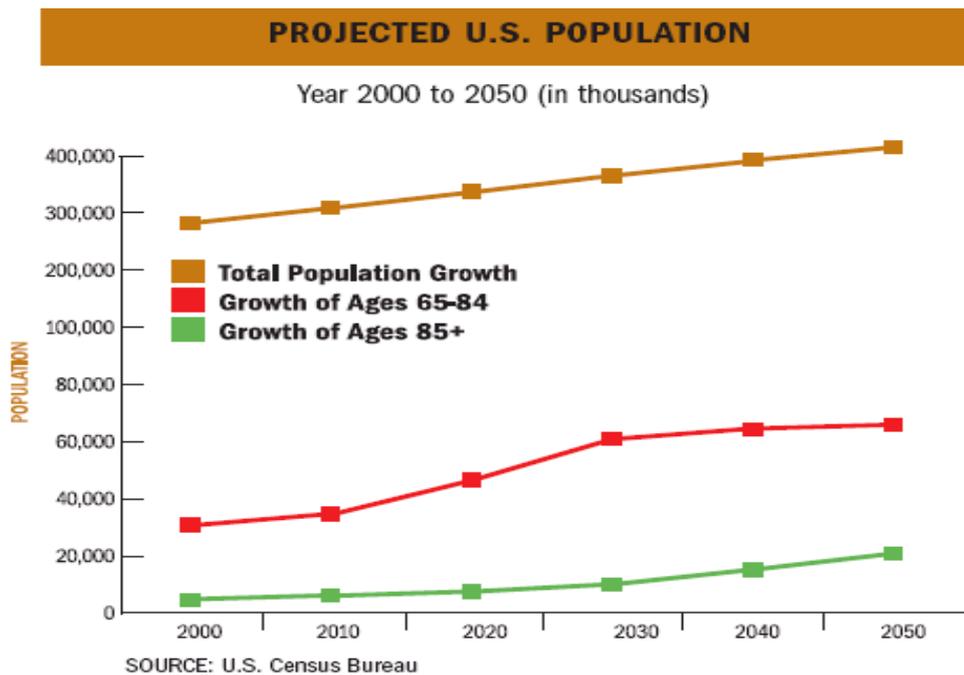


Figure 2 Increase in Ageing Population USA 2000-2050

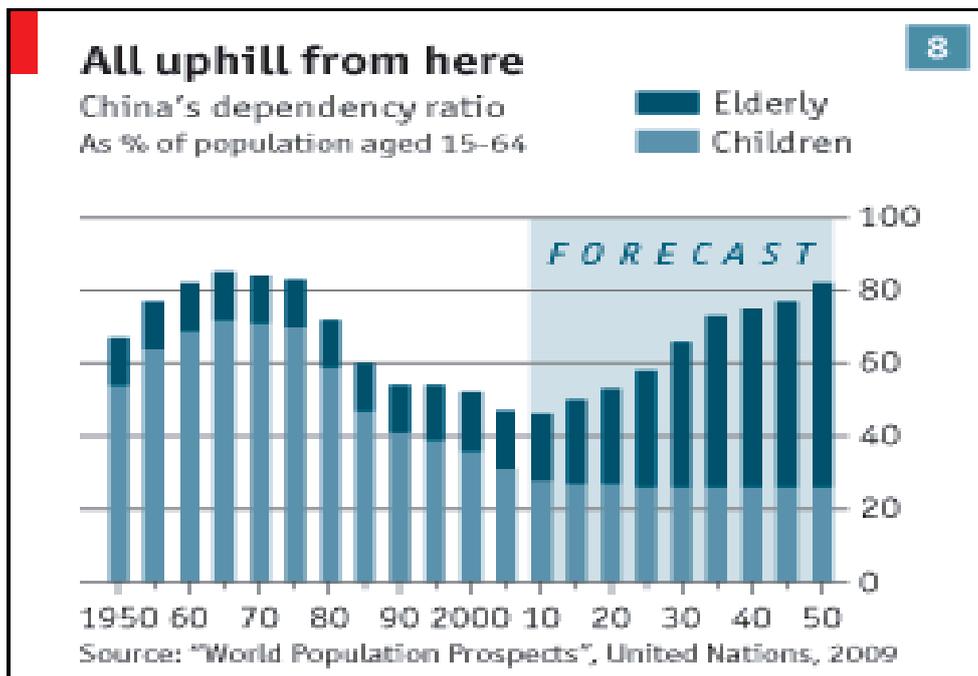
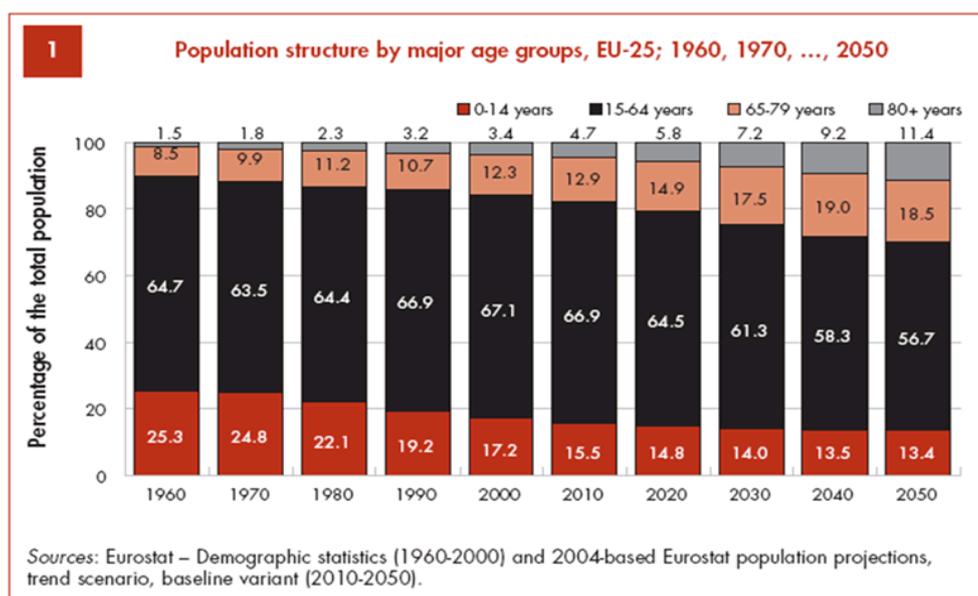


Figure 3 Increase in Ageing Population China 1950-2050.



**Figure 4 Increase in Ageing Population Europe 1960-2050**

All of the statistics both nationally and globally, demonstrate that the population is ageing because people are living longer than in previous generations. This is widely attributed to improved living standards and better medical care for older people. Some experts on aging say that within 50 years, the average person living in an industrialized nation with good access to health care will live to be at least 100.

Vaupel a leading researcher on demography and population ageing and the founding director of the laboratory of survival and longevity at Rostock, Germany's Max Planck Institute supports this assumption. He has written that advances in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of age-related diseases, such as cancer, will usher in an age where every second child born in the industrialized world has an even chance of reaching the century mark.

*‘Although the belief that old-age mortality is intractable remains widespread, life expectancy is not approaching a limit,’* he writes (Vaupel, J and Kistowski K, 2006: 6). He states that during the first half of the 20th century, revolutionary advances in medicine and public health were responsible for raising the average life expectancy in the U.S. by more than 20 years -- from age 47 in 1900 to age 68 in 1950.

The challenge posed both within a local, national and global context is to find ways to integrate older people more fully into society and to enable older people to live full, independent healthy lives. This thesis argues that this can be partly supported through the provision of high quality educational opportunities in third level learning for older citizens. As Pinto, notes *'if learning through generations is the most ancient and most natural way to acquire knowledge and values, such discipline needs to be inserted into Education systems'* (Pinto, 2011:16).

### **1.3.2 Changing Expectations of Older People**

The baby boom generation is defined as those born shortly after world war two who are now entering their sixties. The minority of this group who did attend college in Ireland in the late 1960's and early 1970's, did so due largely to the then education minister's Donagh O'Malleys's (1967) successful policy of free access to secondary level day education for pupils from aged twelve to sixteen years of age .

Despite this initiative, there are many adults over sixty years, who did not have the benefit of second level education and who left school at fourteen years of age or less with only primary school education to pursue jobs in offices, factories and other workplaces. Many of these adults had left full time education prior to the 1967 initiative. As a result, there is a substantial number of this sector who did not have access to third level learning. These factors have for a long time determined the lack of older people in higher education learning. This is an issue, which was addressed in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2008) by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). It is also indirectly alluded to in the recent Trinity College Dublin (TCD) TILDA Report (2011).

As a very ambitious study of ageing carried out in Ireland, TILDA (2011) aimed to gain a better understanding of the lives of older people. This was chiefly for the purpose of developing policy, and targeting research and

resources for this sector. This report is to be highly commended in raising awareness of significant issues relevant for older people, yet it did not suggest solutions to enable older people to continue to be mentally stimulated through third level learning opportunities now and in the future. This is despite the fact that the report highlighted the benefits of previous educational opportunities attained by older people, which tended to contribute to their overall health and well-being. The report was based on previous educational attainment for older people as opposed to evaluating the benefits of future educational attainment for this cohort of students. The report uses a measure of quality of life defined as (CASP). CASP represents Control, Autonomy, Self-Realisation and Pleasure. Similar to other longitudinal studies of ageing, it is based on a model that conceptualises quality of life as needs satisfaction, thereby distinguishing quality of life from the factors that influence it. The model classifies needs into four domains as shown in table 1.

DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION
Control	The ability to actively participate in one's environment (e.g. <i>'my age prevents me from doing the things I would like to'</i> ).
Autonomy	The right of the individual to be free from the unwanted interference of others (e.g. <i>'I can do the things that I want to do'</i> ).
Self-realisation	The fulfillment of one's potential (e.g. <i>'I feel that life is full of opportunities'</i> ).
Pleasure	The sense of happiness or enjoyment derived from engaging with life (e.g. <i>'I look forward to each day'</i> ).

**Table 1 Needs Classified into Four Domains**

Control and autonomy are included as they are prerequisites for an individual's free participation in society. By including self-realisation and pleasure, the model captures the active and self-reflexive aspects of living that bring reward and happiness to people in later life.

The CASP-19 domains were represented by 19 statements, which were presented to participants as part of the self-completion questionnaire.

Participants were asked to indicate how often (often, sometimes, not often, or never) each statement applies to them. Responses were scored from zero to three and the mean scores for each domain and a total mean score are calculated. The total score could range from zero, representing a complete absence of quality of life, to 57, representing total satisfaction. The maximum score on the control domain is 12; on the three other domains, it was 15. The TILDA (2011) report found very significant research findings based on the educational attainment of previous opportunities for older people.

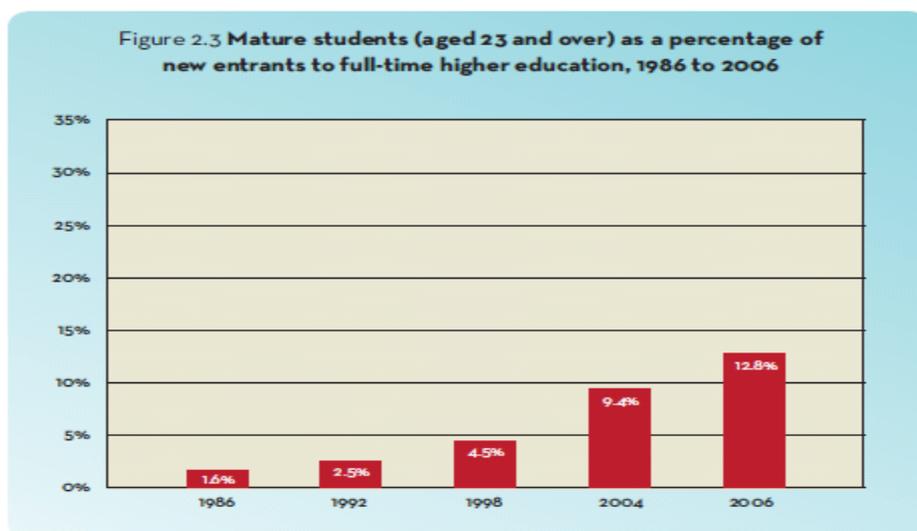
**Education:** It noted that the quality of life increases in the older population with level of education; those with a tertiary education have the best quality of life, while those who have primary or no education have the poorest (Table 10.5). This pattern is mirrored in three domains: control, pleasure and self-realisation, suggesting that there is a strong co-relation between educational attainment and the report notes that having more education equips people with a greater confidence in their ability to age well.

It is interesting to note that the TILDA study acknowledged the benefits of educational opportunities for older people. Yet this is related to previous educational attainment. This doctoral study evaluates the focus of the benefits of educational opportunities in higher education now and in the future for older people through intergenerational learning initiatives. In particular, it provides a focus on the factors that can influence CASP through the development of opportunities for older people in higher education.

	Primary/None		Secondary		Tertiary	
	Mean	95% CI	Mean	95% CI	Mean	95% CI
Total	41.4	41.0 - 41.8	42.7	42.4 - 43.0	43.9	43.6 - 44.2
Control	6.6	6.5 - 6.7	7.3	7.3 - 7.4	7.6	7.6 - 7.7
Autonomy	10.7	10.5 - 10.8	10.7	10.6 - 10.9	10.9	10.7 - 11.0
Pleasure	13.6	13.5 - 13.7	13.7	13.6 - 13.8	13.9	13.8 - 14.0
Self-realisation	10.3	10.1 - 10.4	10.8	10.7 - 10.9	11.4	11.3 - 11.6

**Figure 5 TILDA Report (2011)**

The HEA report (2008) addresses the issue of the lack of participation of adult learners in higher education. In this report, it is generally accepted that Ireland has made good progress in increasing the numbers of mature students entering full-time higher education from 1.6 per cent of students in 1986 to 12.8 per cent by 2006. While the report does not specifically deal with older people (it addresses a wider cohort of adults), it acknowledges that *'because of later expansion of second-level and higher education, the educational profile of our adult population remains poor by international standards and poses a particular challenge to policy makers.'* (2008:27) see (Figure 1.6). Here it is argued that low educational attainment in the labour force, particularly among older workers, is an issue of serious concern. The skills strategy forecasts that a significant proportion of Ireland's workforce in 2020 will remain low-skilled having less than upper-second level as their highest level of educational attainment. This HEA report advocates the need for policy initiatives to ensure improved participation in higher education by adult learners, which will be necessary to meet Ireland's skills needs now, and in the future. It highlights the need to address social inclusion in higher education.



**Figure 6 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. HEA report 2008-2013**

This thesis contends that in addition to evaluating the correlation between access to third level education and skills needs in the labour market, there is a need to evaluate access in terms of the contribution of older people to the cultural and intellectual knowledge in third level learning. Similar to this HEA report, it argues that frequently the most disadvantaged among our population in terms of access to third level learning are older people. This thesis argues that a broader reason to facilitate access to higher education for this group is to understand the contribution they have to make to the values-based knowledge and cultural capital of third level learning.

Ferriter (2001) provides an understanding of the change in education policy in the late 1960's. He contends that the widening of second level education to a greater cohort of students, was the first time that there was an initiative by the Irish government to develop a link between education and the advancement of economic prosperity. This was the first time that such an initiative provided any real opportunity for even a significant minority of the Irish population to have access to third level learning.

This of course was an era of third level learning which preceded the use of information technology as an essential skill in university learning. Today

this is a factor that can itself present older students without these skills with difficulties should they wish to return to new learning opportunities at third level. This is also because of changes in work-practices and new policies on retirement. Increasingly, some older people are retiring earlier than the mandatory retirement age of sixty-five. Many of these older people are interested in learning opportunities and have very different expectations than older people of similar age in previous generations.

### **1.3.3 Benefits of a Stimulated Mind in Ageing**

Current research in the field of gerontology and ageing has now gradually become very much focused on the need to stimulate mental thinking and cultivate a cognitively active mind in ageing. Work in this field of research undertaken by the world-renowned Alzheimer's expert Snowdon (1986, 2001) confirms this. His study was undertaken with a group of 678 ageing Catholic nuns in Minnesota, USA. This study has become more commonly known as the 'Nun Study' Snowdon (1986, 2001) argues that the nuns who were engaged in intellectual pursuits resisted the debilitating effects of ageing (Snowdon 1986:22). Some older people in the later part of their life discover creativity through developing painting, music, singing, drama, creative writing and other creative and artistic activities. In Ireland, this is evidenced through the Bealtaine Festival organized by Age and Opportunity, which takes place each year in the month of May. This is aimed at promoting creativity in ageing. Developing and embracing this creativity at third level together with the provision of additional teaching and learning opportunities, could potentially provide opportunities to enhance a stimulated mind in ageing. This could for many older people facilitate them to live more independently and promote their overall health and well-being. This is further discussed in the final chapter.

### **1.3.4 Neglect of Senior People in Lifelong Learning Literature**

Senior people have been mostly neglected in the literature on lifelong learning. They have been theoretically included in the broader concept but

have not been provided with specific conceptual and practical solutions that address their intellectual, emotional, social and educational needs and interests. The from *'cradle to grave'* educational philosophy superficially enunciated in every public policy document for many years, although admirable in theory, has never been fully developed in practice. For the most part senior people are invisible in educational reports and policy statements.

There is however a shift in more recent years to take account of senior people and their interest in new learning opportunities. In Ireland, this has chiefly been achieved through the advocacy programmes and policy documents of non-governmental organizations such as Age, Opportunity, and Age Action who actively work to promote the benefits of a healthy ageing population. The recent *'Don't Stop Me now'* report (2008) from The Irish National Adult Learning Organization, (AONTAS) was designed to address the learning needs of senior adults. Yet, the influence of these organizations and bodies has yet been slow to impact on initiatives at third level.

These groups and organizations who promote awareness and understanding of a positive attitude to ageing have for the most part focused on the benefits of a healthy body in ageing. In this study, what has emerged is the focus on the benefits of a stimulated mind in later life. This is in itself not new but what is innovative is the linking of a stimulated mind in ageing to the provision for teaching and learning initiatives for older people at third level. To date there have been little or no teaching and learning initiatives at many third level institutes that promote the benefits of a stimulated mind in ageing. No in-depth research has been undertaken evaluating the need to include senior people in broader teaching, learning and research opportunities at third level. They have been included in research opportunities usually only as subjects in the field of gerontology.

One of the most significant policy documents in the context of educational opportunities for senior people '*Implementing Equality for Senior People*' (2002) produced by the Equality Authority of Ireland, makes seventy two recommendations to improve the quality of life for senior people. Among these, it advocates that '*senior people should now be given the opportunity to avail of education both as an end in itself and as a means of acquiring formal qualifications*' (2002: Chapter 9). It was in answer to this document that I developed the (DCU) Intergenerational Learning Project (DCU ILP) in 2008.

### **1.3.5 A Space for Intergenerational Learning**

The Bologna Declaration (1999) has put in place a series of reforms needed to make European Higher Education systems more compatible and comparable, more competitive and attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents. This has been an important influence in developing the implementation of university lifelong learning. New policies include learning outcomes, credit systems, flexible pathways and the recognition of prior learning.

These developments are taking place within the context of a growing ageing population both nationally and internationally but no clear connection has been made between the two. In 2008, the European Universities Association devised a charter, which was an attempt by universities from twenty-nine countries to work collectively on a policy of embracing lifelong learning at third level. The European Universities Charter on Lifelong Learning (EUA 2008) was to address the growing challenges of modern Europe and in particular to address the issue of globalization and the acceleration of a growing ageing population both in Europe and around the world. Despite this, the introduction of the charter has, yet, no immediate impact on policies and practices to embrace the learning needs of older people in university learning. For older people, issues related to prior learning, flexible learning pathways, mode of delivery of courses, and other matters

related to access to third level learning still need to be addressed by third level institutes both at national and international level.

The Hunt Report an Irish governmental policy document by the economist Dr Colin Hunt was designed to chart a course for higher education in Ireland until 2030. It identified the three core roles of higher education as (1) Teaching and Learning, (2) Research, and (3) Engagement with the wider society. Here '*performativity*' is considered the meta-discourse in framing policy and practice in higher education learning. The focus of the report is to evaluate '*how the higher education system addresses the full range of its responsibilities towards society, including business, local communities, the wider education sector and the wider international world?*'(Hunt Report, 2010:6). Despite these fine words, the concept of intergenerational learning remains for the most part outside the remit of charters and policy documents within higher education.

#### **1.4 Intergenerational Learning Definition**

There is a limited conceptual understanding of the notion of intergenerational learning. In North America, the term '*intergenerational programming*' is used to refer to those activities or programmes which '*increase cooperation, interaction and exchange between people of different generations enabling them to share their talents and resources and support each other in relationships that benefit both the individual and their community*' (Generations United 2006: 1). Granville, a leading academic in the field of intergenerational learning, explicitly links social capital and intergenerational learning as a loosely applied description and argues that there can be a wide diversity in what practitioners mean by it. Granville concludes that an intergenerational approach is best described as a '*style of working that can lead to many different activities and outcomes*' (Granville 2002: 26).

### 1.4.1 Intergenerational Learning Research

Some work on the practice and rather less on the theory of intergenerational learning has been undertaken in recent years. Among the most influential of this was published as *Promoting Intergenerational Learning Policies, Research and Networking* (UNESCO, 2000). The lead researcher was Ohsako and the report was essentially an evaluation of previous research undertaken by Ohsako and Hatton-Yeo published in 1999.

The aim of the original research is described as twofold namely '*to highlight the importance of intergenerational programmes*' and '*to summarise key issues to underpin future research and policy development in the area*' (UNESCO, 2000: Foreword). The research consisted of a comparative study of intergenerational learning theory and practice as it has developed in ten countries across the world including Germany, Japan, China, America, England and Sweden. The report concludes by affirming the benefits of intergenerational learning arguing that '*irrespective of where we are in the world, the quality of the contact and connectivity of the young and old says much about the quality of all our lives*'.(2000: 21)

Cambridge & Simandiraki (2006) are primarily interested in intergenerational learning as a tool for healing and reconciliation. They refer to an intergenerational '*healing history*' project cited in the work of Ohsako and Cramer (1999) involving engagement between German youths and senior people who were former Jewish refugees. They draw on this example to demonstrate how intergenerational learning can impact on reconciliation in a post-conflict educational context. To further illuminate this argument, Cambridge & Simandiraki (2006) also describe an environmental educational initiative in which groups of senior people were involved with younger students in a project in Canada aimed at the improvement of people's relationship with their biophysical environment and the reconciliation of very differing generational views on environmental issues.

Kaplan (1998) also sees the benefits of intergenerational learning as being primarily related to the enhancement of social capital through lifelong learning. According to Kaplan, senior citizens generate community-based learning experiences not only for themselves but also for the young. Kaplan, based on a study of the Japanese experience, explains how intergenerational initiatives in Japan are:

*‘a ....powerful stabilizing force within Japanese society as they help people of all ages to pursue their educational objectives, arts and recreation interests, desired state of health and welfare, environmental preservation and community development goals and attain a sense of well-being.’* (Kaplan, 1998: 2)

#### **1.4.2 Intergenerational Learning a High Quality Pedagogy**

A significant learning outcome arising from this thesis is the understanding that intergenerational learning has evolved from the field of gerontology and now has a very significant potential contribution within pedagogical practices at all levels of formal and non- formal education. Through this study, intergenerational learning is evaluated as pedagogy for older people but in addition, its role in the development of younger students is considered.

The research shows that the learning engaged in between the generations becomes a dialogical process. This contributes to relationship building where learning is shared through these new relationships. The multi-generational perspective of intergenerational learning provides a microcosm of ideas, concepts and reflections, which has the potential to enhance teaching, learning and research at both primary and second level, but in particular in third level learning. In the process of teaching and learning together, dialogue and understanding between generations provides opportunities that have the potential to break down stereotypes of ageing.

The existence and practice of intergenerational learning promotes the concept of lifelong learning in a very visible way. The deliberate creation of

a space for intergenerational learning places greater value on the role of older people in society. In addition, older people are presented with an opportunity of sharing the skills and expertise necessary for both the personal and professional development of third level students. In this study, skills related to dealing with stress management, study skills and time management were transferred from retired professionals to the younger third level students. This transfer of knowledge is further developed in the findings and recommendations chapter of this study.

## **1.5 Philosophical Understanding of Shared Wisdom and Expertise**

My concept of intergenerational learning has been influenced by the recent work of the Irish philosopher and lecturer Purcell (2011). He questions what it is to be human. Purcell inquires about the contrast in the growth patterns between the human and the animal kingdom. He draws on the work of the Swiss human biologist Portmann and observes that a significant difference is the ability of humans to transfer culture from one generation to the next. This he believes is the most significant contrast in the growth or ageing pattern between that of the animal kingdom and humans. (Portmann, 1979:75-92)

Portmann questions why there is such a contrast in the ageing process between species, and concludes that this lies in man's ability to seek knowledge, truth and understanding. This he believes is the sole reason that *'the tradition of the human community is passed on by the older generation to the younger generation.'* (Portmann, 1979:75).

## **1.6 Summary and Thesis Organization**

This section provides an understanding of the background to the study. Both the research question and the rationale for the study are presented. The general purpose of the study is outlined. Chapter two provides an overview of the context and in addition a description of the DCU Intergenerational

Learning project, which began in 2008 and continues until the present day. Chapter three gives an understanding of the literature that has guided this study. This is in particular the literature on life-long learning, social capital theory, social theories of learning, experiential learning and the literature and policy documents related to ageing and intergenerational learning.

Chapter four provides an understanding of the research methodologies used for this study. It provides an analysis of the research methods, the ethical guidelines and the rigour and validity process applied to this study. Finally, it provides a new theoretical framework that emerged as part of this study. The findings are presented in chapter five and chapter six. Chapter seven provides the recommendations on the application of intergenerational learning as high quality pedagogy in third level learning based on the research findings. Chapter 8 provides the conclusions and recommendations. The research question is linked to each chapter and the strengths and challenges of intergenerational learning at third level are addressed. Recommendations are provided for future research in this area at third level as a contribution to the lives of the older people, DCU students, and higher education and to society.

## **Chapter 2: Context**

### **2.0 Introduction to DCU Intergenerational Learning Project**

In this chapter, I provide a context to the development of the DCU ILP. My personal understanding of intergenerational learning through my own teaching experience through my subsequent development of this concept for my master's thesis is outlined for this doctoral study. A description of the DCU ILP is provided which discusses the participation of the older students, DCU students and the tutors. A time-line of the development and implementation of the modules is outlined. The subsequent development of the research, teaching and learning opportunities, which emerged from the project to the wider DCU community, is indicated. This description was adapted from a Business Plan which was collectively created by the tutors of the DCU ILP and myself in our attempt to broaden and develop the sustainability of this concept in a third level context. This business plan was designed by our team as a solution to address the current need to seek external funding outside of higher education. This has been identified as essential in supporting the development of an intergenerational learning space at third level.

### **2.1 Context of DCU ILP Development**

The background and origin of the project and subsequently the research approach evolved from my experience of teaching university students and in addition, my involvement as a teacher in an educational outreach programme. The latter was with a group of active retired students from 1996 until 2009. This outreach programme (funded by the Vocational Educational Committee (VEC)) was established to facilitate research into the local history of older students' environs. Most of these learners had left school in the 1940's and 1950's at fourteen years of age to pursue work opportunities and to rear children. One learner had recently returned to university to undertake an undergraduate degree in theology and philosophy. Another student had been a member of the Dublin Historical Society for many years.

In 2006, a person who had obtained a Masters in Local History joined the group. Two students had previously actively engaged in researching the history of the area for a local history book commissioned by the Irish Country Women's Association (ICA). This class became a very enjoyable learning space through the sharing of oral and written accounts handed down from previous generations. This inspired the students to become more involved in academic research. Together we published two books on the local history of the area and its environs. Both publications also contained short stories on the lived experience of these older people which provided an insight into the social, cultural and historical perspectives that had shaped their experiences of living in Ireland in the 1930's, the 1940's, the 1950's up to the present day.

For these students, knowledge was found through sharing their own lived experiences, and their understanding of local cultural knowledge and local folklore. My role as teacher changed and I was becoming more the learner through my involvement with this older group of students. Through their interpretation of past events, their personal meaning and experience I began to better understand my own knowledge of historical events and experiences but in addition, I began to experience the meaning of transformational learning. Mezirow (1991) states that '*A specific constructivist assumptions underlying transformation theory include a conviction that meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books and that the personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction and communication*' (Mezirow, 1991: xiv). I observed that these students had a wealth of knowledge and a love of learning that combined with a sense of humour, collectively made the learning experience very enriching for me as a teacher. This approach to teaching and learning provided both students and teacher with a rich experience of knowledge sharing and scholarship.

## 2.2 Intergenerational Learning - Personal Understanding

I found myself inspired by their love of learning for its own sake. This was expressed in their delight in acquiring new knowledge but also the importance with which they viewed their weekly classes. For them the class represented a sense of belonging, a space where knowledge could be exchanged both formally and informally. This class was not determined by grades or certificates but where learning took place for the love of learning. I began to reflect on how our roles as both teacher and learner were changing, and how both were being transformed by this experience. This for me became my first understanding of the concept of learning between generations or intergenerational learning.

This led me to explore the potential of intergenerational learning as a pedagogy, which had the potential to be educational, entertaining and informative between generations. I believed that this subsequently would contribute to the quality of teaching and learning if it were initiated within educational practices in a conscious and professional way. I was conscious of the role of education as a transformative process, which according to Mezirow is:

*‘to help learners to become more imaginative, intuitive, and critically reflective of assumptions; to become more rational through effective participation in critical discourse; and to acquire meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, integrative, discriminating, and open to alternative points of view. By doing this we may help others, and perhaps ourselves, move toward a fuller and more dependable understanding of the meaning of our mutual experience.’ (Mezirow, 1991:224)*

I noted that currently, there was little opportunity for third level students to meet with and learn from older people. I reflected on the possible benefits of merging two distinct forms of educational experience within a third level context. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner state: *‘Formal education is highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, curriculum driven, and formally recognized with grades, diplomas, or certificates’* (Merriam, Caffarella et al,

2007: 29). They also believe that the term non-formal has been used most often to describe organized learning outside of the formal education system. These offerings tend to be short-term, voluntary, and have few if any prerequisites. However, they typically have a curriculum and often a facilitator. I believed that non-formal learning could also include learning in the formal arena when concepts are adapted to the unique needs of individual students.

### **2.3 Intergenerational Learning Master's Thesis**

Subsequently, I studied for a Masters in E-Learning in the School of Education Studies DCU from 2002-2004 (Corrigan: 2004). As my experience as a teacher had been so beneficial during my time with the active retired students, I decided that for my master's dissertation, I would pilot a three month intergenerational learning project between this group of older retired students and a local VEC community second level college. This college was identified as a socio-economically disadvantaged school which in recent years, had also provided for an increasing number of non-national students. The aim of this project was to enable the transition year (TY) students to share their knowledge of information technology in return for shared stories and the lived experience of the older students.

The IT skills focused on use of the internet, emailing and use of MS Publisher to make cards. The students tutored on a one-to-one basis, which allowed the older students to progress at their own pace. The older students shared their experience of life as teenagers in Ireland in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. This sharing led to further discussions of the differences and similarities between their experience of teenage life and that of the younger people today.

During the course of the project, I observed the development of greater understanding between the generations and the facilitation of a new social relationship between both groups of participants. It was evident that

previous perceptions were being re-evaluated and redefined. There were a number of unexpected positive outcomes from the pilot. The School Principal confirmed that student attendance rose significantly on the days when the older people attended. Another outcome reported was the benefits of the project to non-national students, a number of whom were residing in Ireland without any close relatives. They were afforded the opportunity to meet with an older Irish person for the first time and forge new and valued relationships in their new country of residence.

Finally this project evolved into a further learning initiative between the college and the active retired students. This was when a number of the older students volunteered to attend the college on a weekly basis to provide support and tuition for some of the students with literacy difficulties. This was achieved by using a shared-reading project. The forging of new relationships between the two was evidenced when the TY students requested that the older students should be invited to attend the TY Graduation day. It was clear that within twelve weeks, much of the learning engaged in between the relationship building between generations had facilitated both groups of students.

## **2.4 Intergenerational Learning Doctoral Thesis**

Influenced by the very significant learning outcomes of this study, I decided to further develop the concept for my doctoral thesis. I wished to create a space on the Dublin City University ( DCU) campus where both older and younger students could be presented with an opportunity to meet and learn together. This was to be achieved through the development of both formal and informal learning opportunities. This initiative became the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project Pilot Study (ILP), which I led in DCU and subsequently become the focus of this doctoral study. Golde and Walker (2006) argue that doctoral education programmes should be structured to prepare students as '*stewards of the discipline*'-scholars who imaginatively generate new knowledge and critically conserve valuable

ideas. They state that this is to transform those new understandings through writing, teaching and application.

I imagined that an intergenerational learning space on a third level campus had the potential to become firstly a gateway into third level learning for the older people who participated in the study. Secondly, it could provide an opportunity for third level students to develop their personal and professional skills, knowledge and competences through relationship building between the two cohorts of students. Thirdly, it could provide a modular approach to third level learning for the older students through providing both entry and exit points suitable to their needs. The older people as lifelong learners could build from a module to a Certificate, Diploma to a BA/BSC, to an MA, to a PHD. This flexibility does not currently exist in many third level institutes either nationally or internationally. I reflected that this would embrace the concept of lifelong learning in DCU. In addition, it would provide DCU and a wider spectrum of third level institutes who integrate a space for intergenerational learning practices, with a unique profile. The inclusion of older people embraces the essence of education as promoting the rights of all to educational opportunities, regardless of age. As Yeaxlee stated that *'The case for lifelong education rests ultimately upon the nature and needs of the human personality in such a way that no individual can rightly be regarded as outside of its scope, the social reasons for fostering it are as powerful as the personal'* (Yeaxlee ,1929: 31).

I reflected that a very innovative and unique experience could be introduced to younger third level students. This was that for the first time in DCU, they could now be presented with opportunities to transfer their learning/competences and skills to older people. This was in exchange for the lived experiences of older people, with the added advantage of gaining the expertise of retired professionals who participated in this study.

## 2.5 Project Description

### 2.5.1 Project Embedding within DCU

The DCU Intergenerational Learning Project (DCU ILP) initially started as a proof of concept and initial material for a doctoral thesis in February 2008. After talks with the association Age and Opportunity, and with their financial backing, the education officer in that organization and I designed and developed two initial modules for both the older and younger students. These modules were designed chiefly to meet the educational needs of the older learners but also to attract the interest of the third level students. This was in essence to create a learning organization or create an ethos where both older and younger people could meet and learn together on a third level campus. I was cognizant of McNiff, McNamara and O'Hara who drawing on the work of Senge (1993) observed that '*a learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they can create and change their reality. This reflects a learned attitude where learning is viewed as a lifelong and co-operative process which emerges from discussion and dialogue*' ( McNiff, McNamara & O'Hara, 2000: 319). I believed that the development of an intergenerational project on a university campus had the potential to bring together people of all generations to learn from the cultures and traditions of each other. This was a new framework in the context of third level learning for both cohorts of students.

The initial two modules designed to address this need were:

1. Introduction to Information Technology for older and younger people today.
2. Introduction to Understanding the Media Today.

The project initially was for one semester only. This was from the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2008 to the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2008. There were two reasons for running a project for one semester only. These were:

- To evaluate the success of the project.
- To evaluate the sustainability of the project for the future in DCU.

As it was the first time that such an initiative had taken place in DCU, it was important to evaluate the project carefully. This was to prevent spending dedicated funds, time and effort on the project should it be deemed unnecessary by the university, the DCU students or the older people who participated. While it was, clear to me during my time teaching these active retired students, that they had the potential to engage in third level learning, it was yet unclear if the concept of intergenerational learning at third level could be a successful venture. This concept had never been previously tried or tested within DCU. Therefore, to integrate this project brought its own risks. These were:

- Could high quality teaching and learning between both generations successfully occur in third level learning?
- Could the DCU students benefit from this experience?
- Could the older people who participated find this experience of benefit to them?
- Could the university benefit from Intergenerational Learning through the creation of a space within both physical and virtual dimensions?

I believed that a necessary requirement would be to evaluate the sustainability of the project. To do this, it was necessary to research the quality of the modules, the benefits of informal and formal learning, the reflections of both the older and younger people who participated in this study, and the reflections of the tutors and lecturers.

## **2.6 Origin of First Module for DCU ILP**

Following my completion of the Master in E-Learning in the School of Education Studies DCU, I believed that access to knowledge for older people through their introduction to information technology (IT) skills had

the potential to provide great advantages for them. It could transform the quality of their lives and provide a tool for them to access relevant learning opportunities.

This knowledge emerged through my research with my own group of active retired students as part of my master's thesis dissertation. I had noticed that the active retired students, whom I facilitated, began to have a new interest in the concept of information technology. This new interest in information technology had begun to emerge for them through their involvement in the local history class and through their conversations with family members. This had inspired them to develop their knowledge by having access to local history websites, to genealogy sites, the earliest published census site, and other websites of interest to them.

In 2003, six of the students began to participate in a local information technology class, which, was designed as an introduction to IT skills. Soon all six students dropped out of this course at an early stage. Among the reasons cited were the following:

- The fast delivery meant that the older students felt lost or left behind.
- Inability by the older students to understand how knowledge of hardware and software of computers and spreadsheets could be used by them on a daily basis.
- Lack of handouts in a format suitable to their needs.
- Lack of a clear description of each weekly task outlined on a step-by-step basis.
- No textbook or material available to address the needs of the older students.
- Inability within the class to address the particular needs of some of the older students. Issues such as visual needs, auditory or mobility needs were not addressed within the class delivery of IT skills.

- Lack of patience or intolerance demonstrated by either family members or teacher preventing the older person in acquiring the relevant IT skills at a time and pace suitable to their needs.

## **2.7 Solution - Acquiring IT Skills**

I had a very positive experience as an adult student studying for a master in the School of Education Studies in DCU. I believed that the transfer of information technology skills could be both taught and acquired in a way that was conducive to the needs of the older person. A great advantage for me studying as a part-time mature student was the encouragement, enthusiasm and support, which I had received from the School. This was achieved through a blended approach to teaching and learning which was facilitated through my engagement with my supervisor Dr Margaret Farren and the programme chair Professor Gerry McNamara. This was through emails, and use of an online learning discussion forum. This support was demonstrated to me through regular dialogue, through the patience, commitment and enthusiasm of the chair, supervisor and lecturers on this programme.

Baume (2010) has used Kirkpatrick's work on evaluation as one method of potentially assisting with the measurement of impact of learning. Kirkpatrick's (1994) four areas for evaluation of learning are:

- Reaction-how the learners react to the learning process.
  - Learning-the extent to which the learners gain knowledge and skills.
  - Behaviour-capability to perform the learned skills while on the job.
  - Results-includes such items as monetary, efficiency, morale.
- (Kirkpatrick, 1994)

Baume paraphrased these into the following questions:

- Did people like it?
- What have they learned from it?

- Have they applied what they learned to their practice?
- Has results improved? (Baume, D. 2010).

As with Baume, I believed that for these older learners if the learning process was to have an impact, the solution could now be found through developing effective teaching and learning strategies suitable to their needs within a third level context. Creating a space for older people to meet and learn with third level students was now potentially the most important element in enabling them to acquire the relevant IT skills suitable to their needs. The following typology, which, I devised, provided a number of solutions in addressing this gap.

- Invite older people to be part of the DCU campus. This was to engage them in an opportunity to participate in high quality teaching and learning opportunities at third level. This was to be achieved initially for them as a gateway into third level learning.
- Create a sense of belonging for older people by creating a space on campus for them to meet with third level students, tutors and lecturers.
- As many universities today have high quality IT laboratories, overhead projectors and whiteboard facilities, these could be used to enable older people to acquire the relevant IT skills with comfort and ease.
- The vast majority of university students today use the technology with ease. These students are well placed to transfer their knowledge of the technology to the older people.
- In transferring the tools of knowledge, for example the IT skills, this potentially could lead to the natural exchange of knowledge sharing between generations. Older people now had the opportunity to share their tacit knowledge, expertise and insight in return for the transfer of IT skills by the younger students.
- Providing the older students with a tutor on a one-to-one basis, had the potential for them to acquire the information technology skills at a pace and delivery suitable to their needs.

- The DCU students would be entrusted with the role of facilitator. This had the potential to develop their professional skills and knowledge through their new role as teacher or mentor.
- The design of the course content was required to be cognizant of the needs of the older students. This was an essential aspect of the project if the transfer of IT skills was to be successfully achieved by these students.
- Younger students would be encouraged to help with the design and presentation of the curriculum and course materials. This had the potential to contribute to their professional development and skills.
- The provision of course material suitable to the needs of the older students would require more attention to the design of handouts with a step-by-step approach. This was in a format that could be easily read by the older person. For example, the size of font would be designed to facilitate older people with poor eyesight. Auditory and mobility needs of older students would also be accommodated.
- A tutor would facilitate the overall delivery and content of the course material. Ideally, some of these tutors could be mature students who had an empathy with the needs of the older people. These were tutors drawn from current students or alumni to further immerse the older learners in the culture and ethos of the university.
- Ability to create a teaching and learning ethos on a third level campus that was conducive to the needs of the older learners. This was to create an environment that facilitated older learners by being patient, humorous and knowledgeable and by being generally user friendly in its physical layout. This was to enable the older people to be at ease so that their learning needs could be addressed. (See Appendix L).

## **2.8 Introduction to Understanding the Media**

This module was designed in collaboration with lecturers from the School of Communications in DCU. Drawing on the expertise of these lecturers, the

module was designed to embrace an understanding of media policy and practices and in addition, it was designed to provide a diverse understanding of the representation of senior people in the media today. This was explored through the representation of senior people in television, in advertising, and in print media. Moreover, the student's were presented with workshops in understanding the art and craft of radio broadcasting. Both the senior and younger students who participated in this module were encouraged to present their creative or personal stories in the format of a radio broadcast story. What emerged from the latter experience was the production of a collection of stories from the senior students in the form of a CD produced by the third level students and titled by the Communications lecturer Marie Louise O'Donnell as '*A kind of short story*'. It was produced as a CD since the DCU students did not want to lose the rich narrative engaged in by both the older students and the mature DCU students as part of this module. They requested that the CD should be produced, (See Appendix A).

## **2.9 Older Students Description**

The older students were recruited from organizations for older people such as Age and Opportunity, Age Action, OWN (The Older Women's Network), the Aer Lingus active retired groups, University of the Third Age, An Post retired staff Monday club, in addition to representatives from the Older People's Parliament. They were generally aged between sixty to eighty five years of age. The project has now involved over three hundred different older learners. A significant number of older learners have now completed two years of modules, progressing from one level to the next.

The majority of older learners who join the ILP have no previous third level learning experience. Some of them never had a chance to complete second level education. There have been some learners with professional qualifications see table 2.

<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>NUMBERS</b>
Engineers	3
Retired schoolteachers	10
Retired school principal	1
Retired nursing staff	5
Masters Degrees	3
Two master's Degrees	1
B.Commerce Degree	2
DCU retired Staff Member	1
Ex religious Nun	1
Ex religious Brothers	2

**Table 2 Learners with Professional Qualifications**

Many of the senior people who participated were retired from professional practices including retired engineers, project managers, clerical workers, civil servants, and many retired airline staff. Two learners were currently studying for degrees in DCU and used the course to update their required computer skills as part of their study.

### **2.9.1 Older Students Gender**

The ILP has managed to attract a sizable number of older men to participate in the learning opportunities offered through the project. In total, 132 older men have participated in the study to date. This can be attributed to two main factors: one of the ILP tutors, a graduate of the School of Education Studies, wrote her undergraduate thesis on older men and education, and through her research and personal contacts, was able to attract members of An Post retired staff Monday Club to the project. The fact that the project started with ICT modules has been a factor in this success, enticing more men who wanted to update their skills on computers. In addition, some of the older men have reflected on the benefits of having courses available to them on a third level campus, which was a factor for them participating in

the project. As less than five per cent of the men who participated in the project had ever completed a degree in the past, they considered this a great opportunity to be part of a learning opportunity, which they had not had before.

### **2.9.2 Catchment Area**

Even though the learners were originally recruited from areas close to the university, some recent developments have extended the catchment area: the project has attracted the attention of U3A, the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age, mostly through their group in Sutton North Dublin, and has thus brought learners from the Sutton/Howth area; Similarly, it also attracted the attention of older people from a wider catchment area such as Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and Maynooth. Some of these students have made enquiries about the provision in the future of a similar project in universities closer to their home.

### **2.9.3. Student Mentors One to One**

The students who act as mentors to the older learners have so far been drawn from all faculties of the university, from undergraduate as well as postgraduate levels. One unexpected aspect of the DCU ILP has been the popularity of the project amongst international students, who have at times made up a big percentage of the student volunteers. These are students who are from India, China, Japan, Africa, North America, Egypt, Eastern Europe and Western Europe. At the beginning of each semester, an email is sent to the student body, presenting the project and asking for volunteers, and a growing number of students have been responding. To date, over four hundred DCU student volunteers have participated in the study. This is despite the fact that when I first approached the DCU student's union in 2008, I was told by a student representative that I would be lucky to have six student volunteers because of their other commitments on a Saturday

morning. This morning was deemed the most suitable for both the DCU student volunteers and the older people who participated in the project.

#### **2.9.4. Tutors**

The tutors have been recruited from current students or alumni. They have been chosen because of their ability to provide confidence and support to the older students and their ability to use suitable teaching and learning strategies. Most of the tutors are current or past students from the School of Education Studies. These often-mature students could identify with the needs of the older learners. Two tutors are from the School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies (SALIS). Both these initially joined the project as student volunteers and as a result, they were invited to remain as tutors. Lecturers who have participated in the project to date have been from the School of Communications. However, there is a growing interest from lecturers from around the college to participate in the study by becoming an invited guest lecturer for one or two sessions.

Some tutors left the project but others were recruited from the ranks of the student volunteers, having been identified for their empathy with learners, and their passion for the concept of intergenerational learning. The current tutors include three School of Education graduates, who have been involved since year 2, and who had a special interest in lifelong learning as part of their undergraduate work; one current School of Education student who had volunteered for two years before joining the tutors, one SALIS PhD student whose research on social media and young people led her to create and manage the ILP's social media presence, and one SALIS post-doctoral researcher.

#### **2.9.5 Training Students**

Training for all student volunteers has become a mandatory part of the project. This is to enable the DCU students to become familiar with the overall ethos and philosophy of intergenerational learning. The DCU

volunteer students participate in a training programme, which takes place on the first day of the project. This is usually in the format of a relaxed and informal question and answer session where the teaching and learning strategies are outlined. It is emphasized to the students that it is not necessary for them to be IT experts, but instead what is most important is that they transfer the IT skills with patience and an ease that enables the older students to feel comfortable. The DCU students are invited to participate and discuss their ideas in relation to the forthcoming semester.

## **2.10 Project Timeline**

The progression and development of the project is demonstrated in the following time line. Initially the project began for one semester only, but because of the success of that semester the university, the older people who participated and the organizations who were actively involved in the recruitment of older people, requested that the project continue and develop. The project, which began for one semester, has continued to develop to the current semester, in 2011. However, lack of funding has continued to be an issue, which prevents the project from developing to its fullest potential.

### **Year One**

From February to April 2008, one module titled ‘Understanding the media today.’ and one initiation to ICT module (in three separate classes) were organised for older learners (60+) by tutors, with the help of DCU student volunteers. In addition, some of the library staff in DCU volunteered to run a library session, which demonstrated in particular, the online resources available both in DCU and in other university libraries. This was the first time that many of the older learners were in a university library and it was the first time that many of them had access to online library resources.

## **Year Two**

From September 2008 to May 2009, the project obtained an E-Benefit grant from the Department of Telecommunications, which allowed the introduction of three separate ICT classes, with dedicated tutors and DCU volunteers in each of the Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced classes. That year, the project volunteers received a Special Merit award as part of the Age Action Celebrate IT Irish Silver Surfer Award 2009, as IT Volunteers of the Year.

## **Year Three**

From September 2009 to May 2010, in addition to the three information communication technology (ICT classes), the project saw the provision of a taster module in Science, designed and delivered by a science student, and a taster module in Creative Writing. A project website was created, as a means of keeping the older learners informed of the various topics in the classes, with *'how to'* illustrated instructions, and a section for material produced by the learners themselves, such as photographs, poems, presentations, and pieces of creative writing. A blog was concurrently introduced as a means of giving older learners a voice in the social media environment; learners, students and tutors all wrote blog posts, and the blog was publicised through a Twitter account.

In December 2009, two older learners and two DCU student volunteers attended a conference on lifelong learning in Paris. In May 2010, a committee representing learners, students and tutors organised a national conference to present the project and initiate a conversation nationally. The Share IT conference was opened by Senator Frances Fitzgerald as well as DCU president Ferdinand von Prondznski, (see Appendix I). Each class of learners and students organised presentations on older people and the internet, older people and learning, and their personal experiences in a multigenerational, multicultural learning environment. Three other workshops were also organised and very well attended. These were:

- Older learners and third level education.
- Older learners and health.
- Older learners and social media.

That year, the project was short-listed by the Irish Learning Technology Association (ILTA) for a Jennifer Burke award.

#### **Year Four**

From September 2010 to May 2011, two more ICT modules were added to the project, which now offered 2 beginners classes, 1 intermediate class, 1 advanced class, and one social media module. Each semester an additional seminar series was introduced. There is now also an “Intergenerational Conversation” around a topic. For example a ‘*Conversation on Writing*’, with Professor Jenny Williams from SALIS and a ‘*Conversation on Psychology and Personal Development*’ with Paul King, from the School of Education Studies. This is due to continue with a ‘*Conversation on 2.0 Life writing*’ and a ‘*Conversation on introduction to psychology.*’ The latter will be presented by first year psychology students from the School of Nursing DCU. The seminars take place during the week as a way to introduce the older learners to the campus life on a weekday basis.

#### **2010 Introduction to Third Level Learning Through Blogging and Social Media**

The DCU ILP blog and website was designed by a DCU ILP tutor, Dr Cathy Fowley who researched the benefits of the use of blogs for younger people for her doctoral study. Through her involvement in the project as a student volunteer and later as a tutor, she evaluated the benefits of blogs and 2.0 Life writing as a contribution to the benefits of the use of social media for both the younger and older students who participated in the project.

This module was introduced to facilitate progression of the senior people into using social media as a way of enabling them to participate more fully

in third level learning and in society. This was designed with the aim of giving them a voice in third level learning. In addition, it was to encourage senior people to share their opinions and reflections and to enable them to develop critical thinking skills relevant for third level learning. Through blog conversations with the third level students who participated in this study, the senior people were encouraged to engage in conversations through comments and links. Because of this initiative, the older students were encouraged to write their own stories and to recall previous experiences, which they believed, would benefit the personal and professional learning of the third level students who participated in this study, (See Appendix C). One older student has since been working on completing her novel and another older student is working on completing her memoirs, which she began before she joined the project. The latter part of this module has resulted in the design and development of a website and blogspot dedicated to the reflections and sharing of information between the DCU students and the senior people who have participated in this study. (DCU Intergenerational Learning Blog.

### **2010 Introduction to Science Module**

In addition to the original modules, both the senior people and the DCU students were introduced to a science module. This was composed of a combined lecture and discussion session in which concepts such as Pre-Newtonian Physics, Introduction to Understanding the inside of a star; Introduction to Electricity; Magnetism and Galileo and Galilean Frames of Reference were discussed between both the senior people and the third level students. This was facilitated using relevant websites and current populist science magazines to engage both generations in discussion related to physics and science concepts. The aim of this module was to engage both groups of students in a greater understanding of the science world and in integrating the senior students more fully in third level learning.

## **2.11 Project Turning Point**

In year 4, the coordinator of the Masters in Business Management from the DCU Business School, has introduced the ILP as a possible option on the masters programme, earning credits for the students who volunteered and subsequently wrote a research report. At the same time, the chair of the post graduate psychology programme in the School of Nursing also offered credits for psychology students who took part in the project and used their conversations with the older learners as an essential component of their reflective log. Whilst we are in the process of assessing both initiatives, initial results seem to indicate a great benefit both to the project and to the DCU students who took part. The Uaneen module has been developed in DCU as a credit module to award students for service learning or other additional learning opportunities in which they have participated during their time on campus. Last year the coordinator of the Uaneen module presented the DCUILP project as an example of high quality learning engaged in by third level students at a conference on service learning held in Bryant University, Rhode Island, in November 2010.

## **2.12 Research Opportunities**

As a parallel development, many DCU students chose the DCU ILP as the subject for some of their research papers or projects. The DCU ILP thus benefited them as subject matter, as well as providing them with tutors who acted as mentors to the students. The students are also encouraged to present their research during the module sessions, and are asked to write a blogpost on the research, which is then published on the DCU ILP blog.

The older people have been invited to participate in research initiatives by GOOGLE. The GOOGLE staff invited them to participate in researching how older people might be better able to use the internet with ease. Many of the older students have been invited to participate in the research of the DCU students, in particular in research, which evaluates the use of IT by

older people, and in research related to the provision of more user-friendly technology and applications for older people in the future. The latter research was conducted by students from the school of computing who participated in the study on a voluntary basis. This was in addition to students from the DCU Business School who joined the project initially to achieve credits but who subsequently developed their own research postgraduate thesis related to the use of the internet for older people, (See Appendix B).

The project has also resulted in research papers at academic conferences both nationally and internationally. A paper has been presented for the Educational Studies Association Ireland (ESAI) in 2009, 2010 and 2011. The paper has been presented in 2011 at the annual American Educational Research Association (AERA). A paper will also be presented at the first European Network of Intergenerational Learning (ENIL) Conference, which will be held in Rome in November 2011.

### **2.13 DCU ILP Project Awards and Recognition**

To date the project has been awarded the Irish Times Living Dublin Award in 2008, which celebrated efforts to improve the quality of the lives of people living in the Dublin Region. This was awarded under the category of third level college participation. In 2009, the DCU ILP received a Volunteer Highly Commended Award from Age Action. In addition, the researcher was invited to address the President of Ireland in DCU during the launch of the DCU Strategic Plan in 2010. In 2011, the project was invited to be presented as a case study to representatives from the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources who together with the EU Commission evaluate policy and projects for ICT inclusion throughout Europe. The project has received funding from Age and Opportunity in 2008, the Learning Innovation Unit DCU in 2010 and it has been awarded funding from the Department of Communications Energy and Natural Resources in 2009 and in 2011. The project has been invited to participate at

the ‘*Digital Future Forum*’ in Farmleigh House on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2011. This is a government forum to discuss the national debate on digital inclusion for the future. In his inaugural speech in July 2010, the DCU President Brian McCraith referred to the project when he said:

*Together with stakeholder partners, we will explore how we can make DCU an Age-Friendly University. This will build on the pioneering work of the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project in the School of Education Studies and which aims to bring together third level students and senior learners in a third level environment.’* (President of DCU Inaugural Speech: 2010)

## **2.14 Intergenerational Learning - A New Concept Embedded in DCU**

The DCU ILP has been successfully embedded in DCU, and with the arrival of the new President in DCU Professor Brian McCraith, there is now a university initiative to make DCU an age-friendly university. In November 2011, the President of DCU is to launch the new Age Friendly policy document for DCU. I have been requested to be a part of the group who have contributed to and designed this document. In addition, the Age Friendly document advocates that the project should be an integral part of the DCU Age Friendly Policy.

## **2.15 Summary**

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide an understanding of the context that has guided the development of the DCU ILP since 2008. Chapter two outlines the context to the introduction and development of the DCU ILP, which began in 2008, and which continues to develop to the present day. I have provided an understanding of the lived experiences of the older people who have influenced this study. I attempt to frame these experiences within the context of their meeting and learning together on a third level campus with younger third level students. This involves a dynamic interplay of the assumptions that framed my original research question. My research assumption is that while intergenerational learning facilitates the benefits of

a stimulated mind in ageing, it also supports both the personal and professional development of older people and third level students together. Chapter three provides an overview of the literature, which has informed the theoretical and philosophical framework that has guided this study. In particular, it evaluates Social Capital Theory and a theory on lifelong learning. In addition, an evaluation of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice theory was conducted and this has informed the theoretical framework for this study.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### 3.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the background to the study. In the first part of this chapter, I provide an understanding of the policy documents and literature on lifelong learning and social capital theory. Both these fields of study provide a conceptual understanding, which have significantly influenced the theoretical and philosophical framework that has guided this research thesis. I also provide an understanding of social cognitive theory, transformational learning, experiential learning and self-directed learning. These are educational theories, which are embedded in the psychological and humanistic assumptions that have guided the literature on adult education. In the final part of this chapter, I provide a description of the theory of '*communities of practice*' and a summary of the literature review that has guided this study.

My intention is to highlight how, despite policy documents and the literature, which defines the benefits of lifelong learning, older people are still neglected in learning opportunities in particular in third level. I have attempted to address this gap through the conscious development of a Community of Practice at third level, which has the potential to support intergenerational learning. This space facilitates social cognitive learning, transformational learning, self-directed learning and experiential learning in a naturalistic context. This has the potential to contribute to the richness of learning experiences through relationship building between both older and younger people and in turn to the development of lifelong learning and the growth of social capital. This occurs through the deliberate creation of an intergenerational learning community in third level learning.

### 3.1 Lifelong Learning Origin

*'Learning is not a product of schooling but the lifelong attempt to acquire it'* Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

The words of physicist and Nobel Laureate Albert Einstein (1879-1955) encapsulate the essence that learning is in fact life long. Since early times, lifelong learning has been embedded within the Chinese, Indian, Greek and European traditions. The notion of wisdom handed down from elders in tribes is synonymous with the transfer of knowledge between generations. This transfer of knowledge from the old to the young was considered an essential aspect of lifelong learning in many eastern and African cultures for many centuries. (Arth, 1968, Uchendu, 1965, Shelton, 1965). Shelton (1965) drawing on the work of Simmons (1995) noted that the elder Ibo people in Nigeria were considered to be 'the arbiters of dispute, the libraries of tradition and the storehouse of proverbs' (2009:242). Gelpi writing in the 1960's and the 1970's, stated that lifelong education isn't a new idea- it lies within Chinese, Indian, Greek / European traditions. Throughout history, adults have tried to pursue both formal and informal learning opportunities to transform their lives. *'The ideas and practices associated with lifelong learning are far from being new social phenomena'* (Hake, 1999:53), The Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Renaissance are examples of eras in which there was a great increase in learning activities. These emerged from the need to adapt to rapid change through new cultural and economic developments.

### 3.2 The Danish Folk School Model

Lifelong learning, as a theoretical concept, can be traced back to the Danish Folk School Model. According to John Dewey (1916), *'a teacher has no ontologically privileged position but is another participant in the conversation of learning.'* (1916:44). The Danish Folk School model originated from the Danish writer, poet and philosopher Grundtvig (1783-1872). He attempted to provide a school that promoted the lifelong interests,

the personal growth and a sense of cultural identity for the students who participated. Grundtvig, like Dewey, embraced the concept of learning as conversation and dialogue shared between learners and teacher. He believed that people of all ages who wanted to learn should be facilitated to come together and learn from each other. In recent times, he has become synonymous with the EU approach to life long learning. This has been manifested in the collaborative understanding of lifelong learning in Europe through the EU Grundtvig programme. Launched in 2000, this aims to provide adults with additional ways to improve their knowledge and skills facilitate their personal development and improve their employment prospects. It also helps to tackle problems associated with Europe's ageing population. The focus of these EU projects is on the promotion of lifelong learning throughout Europe.

The Danish Folk School popularized learning circles whose characteristics were voluntary participation, a focus on learning situations rather than subject matter and the use of discussion as a main method. Both Grundtvig and Dewey believed strongly in the idea that the experience of education must be applicable in everyday life. Similar to the latter day Multiple Intelligence theory espoused by Gardner (1983), Grundtvig believed that to embrace all knowledge, schools could embrace the multi-faceted dimensions of learning and that schools should educate for life. The Danish Folk schools therefore became a microcosm of the wider community. He believed that the schools should not hold exams because education and enlightenment was in itself a sufficient reward.

Grundtvig mirrored the conceptual understanding of the roles of schools, which was later enunciated by Dewey (1916) that schools were a microcosm of the community outside, and that all the diversity of the community should be fully represented within school learning. Both Grundtvig and Dewey were similar in philosophical understanding in that they espoused the humanistic dimension of schooling. As Jarvis (2004) argues, Dewey's

understanding of knowledge as essentially '*humanistic in quality not because it is about human products in the past, but because of what it does in liberating human intelligence and human sympathy*' (Dewey 19196:23) cited in Jarvis 2004:41). Grundtvig's philosophy highlighted that '*a folk high school becomes what it is because of the individuals of which it is made*'. Learning happens across social positions and differences – the teacher learns from the student and vice versa in a living exchange and mutual teaching. For Grundtvig dialogue across differences was essential – the ideal was that people must learn to bear with the differences of each other before enlightenment can be realized.

### **3.2.1 Lifelong Learning Theoretical Concept for 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Following Dewey, seminal American writers in the field of lifelong learning including Lewin (1935), Kolb (1984) Knowles (1990) and Mezirow (1991) perceived adult education as an expression of developing the self. Radical political dialogue in the 1960's in Europe and South America were chiefly influenced through the work of Illich (1970) and Freire (1972). Illich condemned the institutionalization of education and the rise of the expert class who controlled it. He believed that knowledge should be created by people not for people. He supported free unhampered participation and access to learning tools (Finger and Asun, 2001:13). Friere taught that through critical reflection, individuals might become conscious of realities other than those in which they have been socialized. His understanding of education was based on the concept that education is never neutral. Freire in his seminal work '*The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*' (1972), reflected that educational structures are consciously created by dominant groups in society to encourage others to be passive and to accept oppression. Freire believed that education played a pivotal role in enabling the oppressed to redefine their own worth and their own role in society. This was in conflict with the role that had been placed upon them by the dominant classes.

For Freire (1972), education is highlighting the dignity of the human being in its fullest terms. Freire believed that a very significant role for educators was facilitating people to understand that their sense of self and self-efficacy lies beyond any boundaries imposed upon them by other dominant classes. He provided a critique of education at its most negative, functioning as a one-way communication where the teacher speaks and the students become objects as listeners. This evoked for him, the concept that education was likened to banking with the students as 'accounts' where the teacher places instalments of learning. Freire advocated a more humanist approach to education through the process of socialization by questioning what is theory, what is knowledge and what is society? This was ultimately to enable the oppressed classes in Brazil to re-evaluate their own role and value in society independent of how they were perceived by the more dominant classes. This humanist understanding of education became a predominant philosophical concept in lifelong learning in the USA and subsequently in the western world.

This ideology was embedded in the concept of lifelong learning. It gained greater prominence with the development of policy documents through The Council of Europe (1970), The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1977) and UNESCO (1949, 1960, and 2000). It emerged more forcefully as a concept in the 1970s as a direct result of initiatives from these international bodies. Because of the influence of these international bodies, policy documents on learning for life took root in America from the late 1960's where the term lifelong learning became common. This was used firstly in the context of adult education. What was perceived to be the most significant understanding of lifelong learning emerged from an initiative, which evolved from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report, *Learning to Be* (1972).

*The Learning to Be* or the Faure Report (1972) assumed that education as a life long process essential for human beings and in light of this, it is argued that the whole concept of education needed to be reconsidered. As Jarvis commented, the Delors Report echoed the sentiments of this report (1996) in which it was claimed that learning had four pillars: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.* (Jarvis 2004:64) This was significant in that this wider understanding of lifelong learning was soon adapted into lifelong education in Canada and the USA. Lifelong education now became the new role for institutions of higher education in North America. Most of the institutions who did adopt a policy of lifelong learning did so through acknowledging and crediting prior learning of mature students who participated in learning opportunities at third level. Some years later, the UNESCO report '*Learning: the Treasure Within*' (1996) was issued as a follow-up to the Faure Report (1972).

These initial policy documents did provide a basis, which was later defined by Field as a conceptual understanding of lifelong, learning as '*a framework that was expansive and all-encompassing.*' (Field, 2006:2) The theory outlined in many of the policy documents was in practice a narrower understanding than that espoused by the broader life learning agenda. This skepticism is noted by Field when he reflects that '*Lifelong learning and the new educational order is rather a loose and all encompassing term stretching way too far to have much purchase on reality.*' (Field, 2006:3) For Field, the breadth of lifelong learning is 'breathtakingly imaginative' Yet, Field warns that '*.. when subjected to closer inspection, much of the policy interest in lifelong learning has in fact been preoccupied with a rather narrower agenda, namely the development of a more productive and efficient workforce.*' (Field, 2006: 3). This critical interpretation of the broad understanding of lifelong learning espoused in many of the policy documents was once again in the public domain in 2000. This time it was the EU policy document *The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, which

attempted to provide a more expansive and all encompassing understanding of lifelong learning.

### **3.2.2 Memorandum on Lifelong Learning 2000**

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) published soon after the Lisbon Council meeting, is the seminal document, which sets out the EU vision for lifelong learning. It emphasized the central role of education and training systems in bringing about change and the necessity for them to adapt in order to do so. It states:

- Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training.
- Lifelong learning must become the guiding principle. (Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000:3).

The aim of the Memorandum was to develop a comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning strategy for Europe. It proposed to:

- Guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society;
- Visibly raise levels of investment in human resources in order to place priority on Europe's most important asset – its people;
- Develop effective teaching and learning methods and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and life wide learning;
- Significantly improve the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly non-formal and informal learning;
- Ensure that everyone can easily access good quality information and advice about learning opportunities throughout Europe and throughout their lives;

- Provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible, in their own communities and supported through ICT-based facilities wherever appropriate.
- A framework of partnership should help to mobilise resources in favour of lifelong learning at all levels. This Memorandum closes, in Section 5, with examples of how European level actions can assist Member States to make progress. Working together to put lifelong learning into practice is the best way forward it is suggested;
- To build an inclusive society which offers equal opportunities for access to quality learning throughout life to all people, and in which education and training provision is based first and foremost on the needs and demands of individuals;
- To adjust the ways in which education and training is provided, and how paid working life is organised, so that people can participate in learning throughout their lives and can plan for themselves how they combine learning, working and family life;
- To achieve higher overall levels of education and qualification in all sectors, to ensure high-quality provision of education and training, and at the same time to ensure that principle of subsidiarity in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using variable forms of partnership;
- To encourage and equip people to participate more actively once more in all spheres of modern public life, especially in social and political life at all levels of the community, including at European level;
- The key to success will be to build on a sense of shared responsibility for lifelong learning among all the key actors – the Member States, the European institutions, the Social Partners and the world of enterprise; regional and local authorities, those who work in education and training of all kinds, civil society organisations, associations and groupings; and, last but not least, individual citizens themselves. Our shared aim is to

build a Europe in which everyone has the opportunity to develop their potential to the full, to feel that they can contribute and that they can belong. (Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000: 4).

Member states were actively encouraged to vigorously pursue the lifelong learning agenda. The Memorandum also referred to the need to utilize resources in support of essential aims. It proposed a central role for the European Social Fund (ESF), the EU's financial instrument for investing in human resources and promoting employment policy. (Pepin 2007:130). It charged an Education Council with monitoring progress across member states via benchmarking in a two year reporting cycle. (Memorandum on Lifelong Learning 2000:20).

### **3.2.3 Critique of Memorandum on Lifelong Learning**

The Memorandum stresses two important aims for lifelong learning: promoting active citizenship and promoting employability. However, it has been criticized on the basis that greater prominence has been accorded to employability. Whereas active citizenship is defined as participation by individuals in all spheres of social and economic life, employability is regarded as a *'core dimension of active citizenship'* (Memorandum on Lifelong Learning 2000:5). References to social cohesion are extensive in the document but the implication throughout is that this will be achieved through employment. In their critique of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, Borg & Mayo point to a *'discursive shift which places a reduced emphasis on the role of institutions in learning and stresses the importance of the learner'*. Their conclusion is that *'by implication, any failure in this regard is to be blamed not on the system but on the individual'*. (Borg & Mayo, 2005: 207)). They point to an inherent tension between the humanist basis of adult education and the economic rationale of lifelong learning.

Jones points out that many EU documents recognize a broader rationale for lifelong learning than the mere economic (Jones, 2005:252). However,

Jarvis claims that, *‘despite the rhetoric about learning enriching humanity, the main emphasis in planning in all of these documents is that the end result will be employability, since the welfare state will be built around it’*. (Jarvis, 2004: 19) The sequencing of priorities in the OECD statement reads as follows, *‘Success in realizing lifelong learning will be an important factor in promoting employment, economic development, democracy and social cohesion in the years ahead’*. This tends to support such an interpretation (OECD 1996). Longworth and Davies also put forward a vision of lifelong learning as *‘a survival issue for all of us for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.’* (Longworth & Davies, 1996:145). They believe that lifelong learning is *‘a necessary companion to the age of information, it will allow us to understand better its implications for the lives of every one of us and allow the human race to develop its potential in more positive ways than hitherto.’* (Longworth & Davies,1996:147).

#### **3.2.4 EUA (2008) Charter on Lifelong Learning**

The European Universities Association (EUA), Charter for Life Long Learning (2008) defines three significant factors, which currently present a challenge to universities both at a national and global level. These are:

- The increasing speed of globalization.
- The demographic transformation of Europe into an increasingly ageing society.
- The rapid pace of technological change.(EUA, 2008:3)

To address these challenges, the EU has called for a collective understanding, re defining the role of European universities both from a national and international perspective. The Bologna Agreement (1999) was already moving towards a commonality of understanding in that process. The purpose was to make academic degrees and standards more closely aligned throughout universities in Europe. Twenty-nine European Education ministers signed this declaration. In keeping with the spirit of the Bologna

process, the European Universities Association (EUA) has developed The European Universities Charter on Lifelong Learning (2008) as a collective policy document devised between European universities to address and face the challenges for European universities. This charter contends that *‘European societies are missing out on a huge pool of readily available human talent.’* Moreover, comparing higher education participation rates in Europe with those in other world regions makes disturbing reading and calls for action (EUA Charter, 2008:4)

This is a significant document on lifelong learning as it recognizes the collective responsibility of European universities to a huge pool of resources and talents within university learning. The overall aim is to achieve this by striving to actively involve a whole cohort of senior students currently outside of third level learning. While this is a substantial move that potentially might embrace a new cohort of senior people in third level learning, it is still in its infancy stages. Moreover, it is still awaiting backing from governments and regional partners. For it is written *‘in the form of ‘commitments’ from universities in addressing the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, with a set of matching commitments for governments and regional partners to make’* This is to *‘assist Europe’s universities in developing their specific role as lifelong learning institutions forming a central pillar of the Europe of Knowledge’.* (2008:4)

The ‘commitments’ are divided into a typology of ten factors outlined as follows:

- Embedding concepts of widening access and lifelong learning in their institutional strategies.
- Providing education and learning to a diversified student population.
- Adapting study programmes to ensure they are designed to widen participation and attract returning adult learners.
- Providing appropriate guidance and counseling services.

- Recognizing prior learning.
- Embracing lifelong learning in quality culture.
- Strengthening the relationship between research, teaching and innovation in a perspective of lifelong learning.
- Consolidating reforms to promote a flexible and creative learning environment for all students.
- Developing partnerships at local, regional, national and international level to provide attractive and relevant programmes.
- Acting as role models of lifelong learning institutions. (EUA Charter, 2008:4)

Although these ‘*commitments*’ are admirable in theory, they provide an abstract understanding of how their aims can be achieved. This is because they do not provide any practical solutions nor a cohesive policy to address the issues of access to lifelong learning for senior people in third level. The fact that the ‘*commitments*’ are left to governments around Europe to match both at a local and international level, their application remains as an ideology as opposed to an action that has had any relevant impact for senior people both nationally and throughout Europe.

### **3.2.5 Learning for Life (Ireland 2000) - National Strategy for Higher Education (Ireland 2011)**

In Ireland the white paper on adult education ‘*Learning for Life*’ (2000), was the first attempt to develop the concept of Lifelong Learning within government policy. In the Foreword, the then Minister of State Willie O’Dea for the Department of Education and Science stated that the paper was advocated by the government as a ‘*blueprint for the future development and expansion of adult education, for a strengthened focus on access, quality, flexibility and responsiveness*’ (Learning for Life, Foreword: 2000). The government designed the White Paper as a comprehensive and structured approach to adult education in Ireland ‘*to promote democracy and social cohesion.*’(2000:1). This new policy, together with the

proliferation of international reports on lifelong learning already mentioned, popularized the idea and put the concept on the educational map in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty first century.

One year after this report, issues associated with lack of transportation, financial barriers, geographic and social isolation were issues that were presented as overriding difficulties, which continued to preclude many older people from learning opportunities in the wider adult education-learning sector. The learning needs of senior learners were yet to be grasped in government policy documents. Lifelong learning was for the most part an ideological concept that remained outside of the remit of many senior people in Ireland.

### **The National Strategy for Higher Education Ireland 2011**

The National Strategy for Higher Education 2011 outlines the aim of the overall national policy in Ireland for higher education over the next twenty years. Among its chief aims are the following:

1. Higher education students of the future should have an excellent teaching and learning experience, informed by up-to-date research and facilitated by a high-quality learning environment, with state-of-the-art learning resources, such as libraries, laboratories, and e-learning facilities.
2. Higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students, and use this feedback to inform institutional and programme management, as well as national policy.
3. Every student should learn in an environment that is informed by research, scholarship and up-to-date practice and knowledge
4. The Irish higher education system must continue to develop clear routes of progression and transfer, as well as non-traditional entry routes. (The National Strategy for Higher Education Ireland, 2011: 17).

The strategy also noted that all students, whether full-time or part-time, on-campus or off-campus, should be equally supported by the funding model used to allocate resources to and within institutions. Undergraduate students should be encouraged to spend some time in a work or service situation, and formally acknowledge such work through accreditation or inclusion in the student's diploma supplement. Routes of progression should be flexible into, within and across higher education institutions. A national framework for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) must be developed and recognised by all higher education institutions.

The above aspirations can be more succinctly summarized under the following three headings:

1. A more flexible system, with a greater choice of provision and modes of learning for an increasingly diverse cohort of students;
2. Improvements in the quality of the student experience, the quality of teaching and learning and the relevance of learning outcomes;
3. Ensuring that higher education connects more effectively with wider social, economic and enterprise needs through its staff, the quality of its graduates, the relevance of its programmes, the quality of its research and its ability to translate that into high value jobs and real benefits for society.

Although both the White Paper 2000, and the National Strategy for Higher Education Ireland 2011, appear to be a genuine attempt to embrace the concept of lifelong learning in Ireland, both reports lack conceptual and theoretical understanding to fully embrace the needs of senior learners. To date, any attempt to develop lifelong learning at a national level is ad-hoc and localized. Pinto (2011) provides very substantial reasons as to why older people should not be excluded from learning opportunities, in particular those related to opportunities that enable older people to be entrepreneurs. She states:

*'We should not neglect the importance and potential of older people. Furthermore, it is possible and desirable to look at the challenging trends of demography as an opportunity to develop new emerging solutions'.* (Pinto, 2011:4). One of the reasons she cites is that: Demographic ageing is creating a new and very extensive set of services and products. Older people are in a better position to understand and envisage the best market opportunities in an endless number of fields. Older people's potential as advisors, managers or other positions should be taken into consideration.' (Pinto, 2011:4).

### **3.3. Social Capital Theory**

The concept has attracted the attention of academics, economists and politicians alike since its origins in the work of Jacobs (1962) and Bourdieu (1972) to Putnam's seminal *Bowling Alone* (1995). The latter espoused social capital as a philosophical theory around communities or groups who value the collective coming together of individuals for a common goal. The concept and theory of social capital has become transferable across many disciplines with an understanding of its capacity to provide social support, social integration and social cohesion across a broad spectrum of academic, political and business pursuits. Social capital represents the quality of networks between individuals and society. Measures of social capital are usually defined by trust, membership of clubs and societies. The World Bank defines social capital as the relationships that shape societal interactions and the glue that holds it all together. Lin summarises a philosophical understanding of social capital when he says that *'the premise behind the notion of social capital is rather simple and straightforward: investment in social relations with expected returns'* (Lin 2001: 11).

Putnam defines social capital as the networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives'. (1995: 664-665) Based on the Putnam model of social capital theory, an important feature is that it is a property of groups rather than of individuals. The literature suggests four main theoretical strands, all of which are

interwined. Broadly, these are defined as collective self- efficacy, social trust/reciprocity, participation in voluntary organisations and social integration for the benefit of society. (Lochner et al, 1999) The concept can also be broken down into ‘structural’ and ‘*cognitive*’ social capital. Structural components refer to roles, rules, precedents, behaviours, networks and institutions. These may bond individuals in groups to each other; bridge divides between societal groups or vertically integrates groups with different levels of power and influence in a society, leading to social inclusion. ‘*Cognitive social capital*’ describes the values, norms attitudes and beliefs that produce cooperative behaviour. (Colletta and Cullen, 2000). Cognitive and structural forms of social capital are usually connected and mutually reinforce relationship building.

Much of the empirical research to date has been hampered by a lack of depth of investigation of social capital. Variables used to characterize social capital have generally been non-specific and lack subtlety, with very few studies relying on theory-driven, ‘*a priori*’ hypothesis testing. For example, trust may be a characteristic of social capital and collective efficacy an outcome, or vice versa. However, they are mutually dependent. This leads to difficulties in measuring and evaluating the cause and effect. The most commonly studied aspects of social capital, have been perceptions of the trustworthiness of others and (to a lesser degree) participation in voluntary associations. Other components of social capital that have been featured are the psychological sense of community, neighbourhood cohesion and community competence. (Lochner et al (1999)).

A significant problem in evaluating the benefits of social capital is the fact that most of the existing literature assumes that social capital is based on geographically defined areas. However, a community may be of family, friends or people from the same ethnic, lifestyle or religious group. There are an infinite number of grouping levels, from the family/household to country. A number of different groupings, all of which have different levels

of social capital, may influence an individual and only some of which can be represented geographically. The start of one community and the end of another are not always clear and communities influence each other. Moreover, improved transport and communications allow communities based on culture (in the widest sense) to be geographically dispersed.

The factors and variables which determine the extent to which individuals are able to interact in a purposeful and collective way is likely to be influenced by the policies and interventions of local and national governments and the impact of power relations, group integration and opportunities within a society. Bourdieu (1980, 1984; 1998) Burt (1995) Coleman (1988) Ericson (1995), Flap, (1991) Lin, (1982, 1999) Portes, (1998) Putnam, (1993, 1995a, 2000) are some of the seminal writers who have engaged in the discussion on both the benefits and the limitations of social capital theory. While it is difficult to evaluate the broad understanding of all of these writers into one comprehensive philosophical understanding of social capital theory, Lin (1982, 1999, 2001) attempts to summarises the overall theoretical framework of social capital theory into three distinct components:

Lin notes that the three essential elements, which emerge because of the application of social capital theory as:

The Structural benefits of social capital. Lin (2001) defines this as the '*embeddedness*' of social capital. Opportunities created by social capital. For Lin this is defined as the '*accessibility*' of social capital. The Action orientated aspects of social capital that is provided in the strength of individuals coming together in the pursuit of a common goal. (Lin, 2001:12)

Lin's (2001) definition of social capital concurs with the concept espoused by Putnam (1995) as bonding, bridging and trust. Bonding usually refers to the networks that exist among those similar to ourselves who share the same values. Bridging in social capital theory is determined as forging links with

those unlike us in terms of different cultural, political or ethnic values. Linking refers to networks with those who have power such as government departments and business links. Social Capital theory recognizes that it is necessary to have all three elements present for social capital to be embedded in its fullest form and potential.

The social resources theory espoused by Lin (1982) concerning resources embedded in social networks is perceived by him as leading to improved socio economic status. Bourdieu (1985) defines the volume of social capital, as a function of the size of the network and the volume of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic) owned by networked individuals. What all the research suggests is that social capital is not merely about social relations and networks. Its very existence provides an awareness of the benefits of shared resources that are embedded and accessed by different cultural and ethnic they are united together for one common cause. Relationships based on reciprocity, bridging bonding and trust become an essential component of social capital theory.

Putnam (1993) argued for the significance of social capital and the quality of civic life in the cultivation of a democratic society. Putnam (1993) defined the dimensions of social capital in the following statement *'Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them'* (1993: 24)

Bourdieu's (1995) seminal works on the need to move from a narrow conception of power and inequality is usually represented for him as the wealthy classes having power and influence on the status-quo of education and society. This imbalance influenced him to draw on the concept of capital has having a far broader remit for the common good. This for Bourdieu is capital represented around key concepts such as cultural, social and symbolic capital. In one of his seminal papers (1985d; 1992f), he

distinguishes between his understanding of class and that of Marxism. For Bourdieu, power and influence originate not only from possession of material resources but also from possession of cultural and social resources. For Bourdieu, the key concept is the value that is placed on social and cultural capital. For him every individual has a store of capital that differs according to class, to experience, to educational attainment and to economic opportunity. Bourdieu believes that collectively this wealth of collective capital has much to contribute to the common good. This can be achieved through the creation of social spaces together.

For John Field (2003:1-2) the central tenet of social capital theory is that *'relationships matter'*. Fields (2003) provides an explanation of social capital theory, which is closely aligned to the traditional concepts of communities or neighborhoods. He says. *'We hear quite a lot about social capital at the moment. To some extent, this is probably old wine in a new bottle: people now say 'social capital' where once they might have said 'community' or more simply 'neighborhood'.*' (2003: 22.) Central to his philosophy is the idea that *'social networks are a valuable asset'*.

Fields makes explicit the educational dimension of social capital – *'the relationship between social capital and lifelong learning is one area where this approach can start to make sense'* (Field, 2003: 91). He argues however that *'we still know very little about the way peoples' networks affect their access to learning ... in other words, how do our social networks help us to create and exchange, knowledge and attitudes that in turn allow us to tap in to other benefits?'* (Field, 2003: 101). Field concludes that if we have more social capital, stronger and more extensive networks, then there is likely to be more learning-taking place than with people who have less social capital.

### **3.4 Social Cognitive Theory of Learning**

Social learning theories combine both the behaviorist and cognitive approaches to learning. Social learning theory originates from the work of Bandura (1977) who proposed that learning occurs through four main stages of imitation. Bandura focused on the internal mental processes, which occurred through observation. This learning is generated through:

- Close contact
- Imitation of superiors
- Understanding of concepts
- Role model behaviour.

Bandura based his ideas on the previous work of Rotter (1945) who believed that the effect of behaviour has an impact on the motivation of people so that they engage in that specific behaviour. If one believes that there is a high probability of a positive outcome, then one will be more likely to engage in positive outcomes behaviour. Bandura expanded on Rotter's idea and developed a theory of social learning which is inclusive of aspects of behavioral and cognitive learning. His theory added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. Known as observational learning (or modeling), this type of learning can be used to explain a wide variety of behaviors. There are three core concepts at the heart of social learning theory. First is the idea that people can learn through observation. Next is the idea that internal mental states are an essential part of this process. Social learning suggests that a collection of environmental and psychological factors influence behaviour. Social learning theory requires three elements to learn and model behaviour. These are attention, retention (remembering what one observed), reproduction (ability to reproduce the behaviour) and motivation in order to adopt the behavior.

Bandura's research has provided a holistic understanding of the benefits of social learning engaged in by the learner. Initial work in this area began in the 1940's with Miller and Dollard (1941) and culminated in the Bobo doll experiment (1962, 1963). This was designed to discover patterns of behaviour in part by applying social learning theory and to demonstrate that individuals shaping their own behaviour after the action of models learned similar behaviours. The theory, which Bandura developed later, evolved into social cognitive theory. Here self-efficacy emerged as a major component. This theory has as its core the view that people are self-reflective and self-regulating. Bandura's work built on the earlier work of Vygotsky (1933) a psychologist and social constructivist. According to Vygotsky, social interaction plays an important role in the learning process. He proposed the zone of proximal development theory (ZPD) where learners construct the new knowledge through socially mediated interaction. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) states:

*'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. Vygotsky (1978:57).*

A second aspect of Vygotsky's theory is the idea that the potential for cognitive development depends upon the 'Zone of proximal development (ZPD)' this is a level of development attained when children engage in social behaviour. Full development of the ZPD depends upon full social interaction. The range of skill that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone. Vygotsky's theory was an attempt to explain consciousness as the product of socialization. In

the learning of language, our first utterances with peers or adults are for the purpose of communication but once mastered they become internalized and allow ‘inner speech’

### **3.5 Transformational Learning**

Transformative learning is the learning that occurs as we construct the meaning of our lives. Influenced by Freire (1972), by Kuhn (1970, 1996) and Habermas (1971), Mezirow (1991) believed that transformational learning is ‘a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate and reformulate the meaning of their experience’ (Cranton 1994:22). Mezirow (1991) believed that specific constructivist assumptions underlying transformational theory include a conviction that meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books and that, the personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are obtained and validated through human interaction and communication.

Mezirow was also influenced by the work of Candy (1989) who provided a typology of constructivist thought. Among this typology are the following:

1. People participate in the construction of reality.
2. Commonly accepted categories or understanding is socially constructed, not derived from observation.
1. Given forms of understanding, depend on the vicissitudes of social processes, not on the empirical validity of the perspective.
2. Forms of negotiated understanding are integrally connected with other human activities.
3. Human interactions are based on intricate social roles, the rules governing which are often implicit.(Candy: 1989: 98)

Mezirow acknowledges that his concept of transformational theory:

*‘grows out of the cognitive revolution in psychology and psychotherapy instigated by scores of studies that have found*

*that it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being and performance.’ (1991; xiii).*

Mezirow specifically sets out to explain the way adult learning is structured, and to determine the means in which the frames of reference through which we view and interpret our experience are changed or transformed.

### 3.6 Experiential Learning and Self-Directed Learning

Dewey in defining a philosophy of education in 1938 said that there was a need to develop ‘*a theory of experience in order that education may be conducted upon the basis of experience*’ (Dewey 1938). Kolb (1984) is credited with having developed the concept of experiential learning as a four phase cyclical process. This is defined in figure 7.

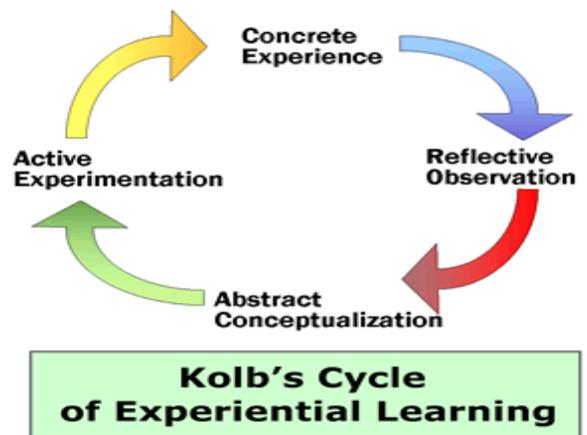


image by Karin Kirk

**Figure 7 Experiential learning a four phase cyclical process**

Experiential learning is a well-known model in education. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb 1984) defines experiential learning as ‘*the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience*’.

Andresen, Boud & Cohen (2000) provide a list of criteria for experience-based learning. These are:

- The goal of experience-based learning involves something personally significant or meaningful to the students.
- Students should be personally engaged.
- Reflective thought and opportunities for students to write or discuss their experiences should be ongoing throughout the process.
- The whole person is involved, meaning not just their intellect but also their senses, their feelings and their personalities.
- Students should be recognized for prior learning they bring into the process.
- Teachers need to establish a sense of trust, respect, openness, and concern for the well-being of the students.

Experiential learning is now established as a significant part of educational philosophy and practice. Clearly, the involvement of senior people at third level has potentially much to bring to the learning process because of their own inherent store of knowledge gained through the experience of living.

Garrison (1997) (cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 2007:30) presents a model of self-directed learning which *'integrates self management, self monitoring and motivational dimensions to reflect a meaningful and worthwhile approach to self directed learning.'* This is a model for lifelong learning which influenced this research project, since it emphasizes the cognitive and motivational value of intergenerational learning. In this framework, learning becomes self-directed learning. Knowles affirms this form of learning as *'the ability of the individual to learn for himself, as the 'theological foundation' of adult education.'* (1995: 96).

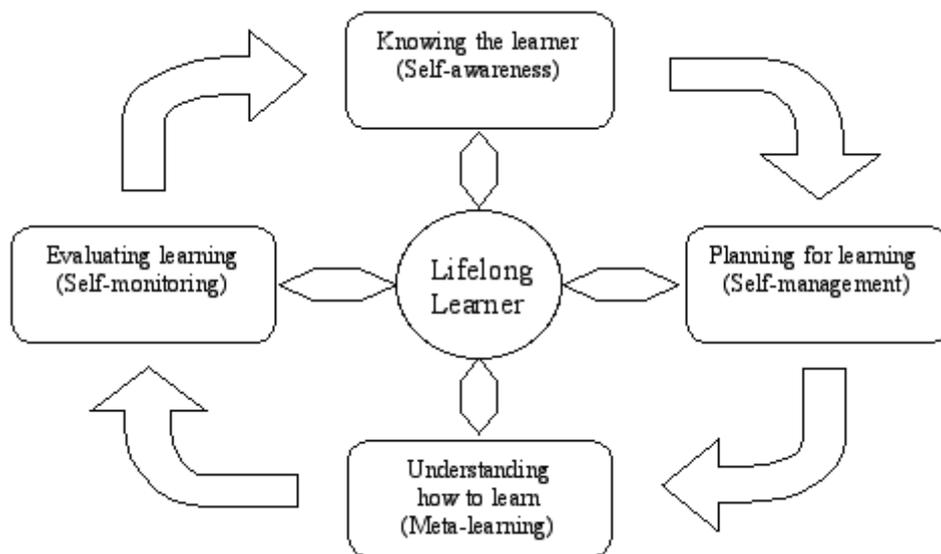


Figure 8 Garrison's (1997) model of self-directed learning

### 3.7 Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) believe that participation in social practice is the fundamental form of learning. In social cognitive learning, there is an emphasis on social learning, interactions among individuals, cooperation and socially shared cognition. The learning community's model centres on the advancement of the collective knowledge of the community and in this way helps the development of the individual student learning.

The social anthropologist Jean Lave based most of her work on the concept of 're-conceiving' learners, learning and educational institutions in terms of social practice. Joined by Etienne Wenger a teacher, together they developed the notion of communities of practice. Their work was first published in 1991 titled "*Situated Learning*." Their concept "Legitimate peripheral participation" identified the need to collectively bring people together to meet in an equitable learning environment where both the teaching and learning between participants was valued. Their model was soon adopted for use in organizations, schools and colleges. According to Wenger (1998) a community of practice has three dimensions. These are defined as:

What is it about its joint enterprise as understood and constantly renegotiated by its members. How it functions-this is mutual engagement, which brings members together. What capability it has produced-the shared repertoire of communal resources, artifacts, vocabulary and styles that the members have developed over time.

Lave and Wenger believed that communities of practice are everywhere, whether that is at work, school, at home, in the office, in civic, in cultural or in leisure interests. According to Lave and Wenger, we define ourselves because we are in a common pursuit together. This can take the shape of both formal and informal learning activities together. Relationships become important as part of a community of practice. The notion espoused by Putnam (1991), as *'bridging and bonding'* as part of social capital theory is also important within communities of practice. Both Wenger and Lave believed that for a community of practice to function successfully, it requires shared ideas, commitments and mutual understanding of shared aims between its members.

Lave and Wenger illustrate their theory by observations of different apprenticeships for example, navy quartermasters, midwives and non-drinking members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Initially people join communities and learn at the periphery. Gradually as they become more competent or develop their self-esteem and confidence, they move more to the *'centre'* of participation. Wenger in particular evaluates the notion of identity as intrinsic to the concept of power and belonging. He states that:

*'Identity is a locus of social selfhood and by the same token a locus of social power. On the one hand is the power to belong, to be a certain person, to claim a place with the legitimacy of membership; and on the other it is the vulnerability of belonging to, identifying with, and being part of some communities that contribute to defining who we are and thus have a hold on us. Rooted in our identities, power derives from belonging as well as from exercising control over what we belong to.'* (Wenger, 2008: 207)

The following diagram highlights the conceptual understanding of communities of practice as defined by Lave and Wenger (1991):

Tennant (1997) has stated that Lave and Wenger's concept of situatedness involves people being full participants in the world and in generating meaning. In this context, the participants not only learn from talk but they learn to talk and it is this orientation, which promotes the need to understand learning in context. A Community of Practice therefore becomes more than a group who have come together to share their experiential learning.

Within their conceptual analysis of communities of practice Lave and Wenger discuss their understanding of teaching and learning. This they see as a process of the planned and the emergent within communities of practice. As they state:

*'Pedagogical debates traditionally focus on such choices as authority versus freedom, instruction versus discovery, individual versus collaborative learning, or lecturing versus hands-on experience.....What matters is the interaction of the planned and the emergent-that is, the ability of teaching and learning to interact so as to become structuring resources for each other.'* (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 267)

### **3.8 Summary**

Three main themes run through this chapter. The first is that lifelong learning has been perceived as a '*from cradle to grave*' concept. Through intergenerational learning, it can now be perceived in its fullest potential in terms of its ability to transfer wisdom and knowledge from the old to the young. In return, the transfer of competences and skills from the young to the old has the potential to contribute to high quality learning through relationship building between generations. This process is a method of operationalising social capital theory, which highlights the reciprocal benefits of learning manifested in social capital and cultural capital gain. This is achieved by intergenerational learning in the bridging and bonding

relationships, which are forged when both older and younger people are provided with an opportunity of meeting and learning together.

The second theme is that social learning, transformational learning, self-directed learning and experiential learning have the potential to contribute to the richness of learning experiences at third level through a social space that facilitates meaningful engagement between older and younger people. The third theme is that the conscious creation of such a space at third level can facilitate a Community of Practice that has the potential to develop a new pedagogical practice in higher education. This has the potential to contribute to the affective and cognitive overall well-being of older and younger people.

The research literature on intergenerational learning outlined in Chapter 1, highlights just how rich this learning can be between generations but it is also recognizes that to date intergenerational learning initiatives are ad-hoc and fragmented. All three themes are interconnected in this study. The literature review chapter demonstrates that there is still a lack in government policy both at a national and international level to fully implement intergenerational practices in third level institutes. If such a policy was realized, this could potentially have far-reaching consequences for higher education, for older people, for younger people and for society. This is especially significant at a time when there is such uncertainty at a global level in terms of socio-economic stability. Relationship building between generations fosters a solidarity that draws on historical experiences to facilitate the development of competences and skills now and in the future. Pinto (2011) highlights the need to bring intergenerational learning onto the agenda in particular through lifelong learning educational practices. The fact that both intergenerational learning and lifelong learning have not been intrinsically linked in the past, at least not into third level learning, requires the question to be asked: To what extent will this division continue in the

future? In chapter four, I outline the research methodology and the research methods used in this doctoral thesis.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **4.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will address the research design and method chosen for the study. The research philosophy underpinning the design was drawn from a combination of phenomenology, narrative discourse theory and the use of *'fourth generation evaluation.'* These approaches were chosen to evaluate the reflections and narratives of the participants as an essential aspect of the construction and interpretation of the research findings. The concept articulates fourth generation evaluation (FGE) developed by Lincoln and Guba (1989). This enabled me as a researcher to put in place the democratic and collaborative processes that demonstrated to the stakeholders that their opinions and views were not only valued but also were an integral aspect of the research evaluation.

### **4.1 Research Approach used in Study**

A phenomenological approach was adopted for this study, as Schutz (1967) believes that *'the phenomenologist attempts to see things from the person's point of view'* (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975:14) Husserl (1970) believed that knowledge should be a return to the lived world, the world of experience. I adapted the phenomenological approach to the research since in my previous experience of facilitating a group of active retired students; I had come to understand that the rich narrative of older people had potentially much to contribute to the learning as a high quality pedagogical practice.

Van Manen states that *'phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning of lived experience'* (Van Manen, 1990:10). Phenomenology was chosen for this research as it had the potential to provide a degree of depth and richness by focusing on the meaning of the narrative related by both the older and younger students who participated in the study. This was intended to draw

meaning from everyday existence in the lives of these students regardless of particular cultures (ethnography), certain social groups (sociology), historical periods (history) or mental types (psychology) or to an individual's personal life history (biography). It was used to provide a space where all of these experiences could merge and where learning could be gleaned from the collective lived experiences regardless of these factors that can sometimes divide us in differing economic, social, cultural and geographic contexts. Phenomenology as a philosophy was chosen since it provides an opportunity to look beyond these divides and to view and understand what is common between us, local and universal in our understanding of our collective lived experiences.

Van Manen defines the ultimate aim of phenomenology as 'the search for what it is to be human' (Van Manen, 1990:12). He believes that hermeneutic phenomenological research enables us to come to a *'fuller grasp of what it means to be in the world as a man, or a woman, a child taking into account the socio cultural and the historical traditions that have given meaning to our ways of being in the world.'* (Van Manen 1990:13). Throughout the entire process of this research study, I was cognizant of phenomenological philosophical assumptions, which I believed were essential in interpreting the meaning of the discourse and dialogue engaged in by the participants and interpreted by me as the researcher. Van Manen defines the concept of phenomenology as having scientific rigour in a broad sense. This is because it is a *'systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective study of its subject matter or lived experience.'* (Van Manen, 1990: 11). He defines this as *'systematic'* in that it uses specially practiced modes of questioning, reflecting, focusing and intuiting. It is explicit in that it attempts to articulate through the content of the research methods employed to understand the structures of meaning embedded in the lived experience.

## **4.2 Phenomenology for Intergenerational Learning**

Gowan and Blankenship (1994) conducted an intergenerational learning phenomenology study in America. Their phenomenological approach was used to describe fundamental changes in the way college graduates interpreted the meaning of their experiences during a period of weekly visits with older homebound persons. The students conducted life history interviews drawing upon social and historical frameworks. Their approach provided a microcosm of how intergenerational learning processes may work.

The researchers found 'ontological change' in student's perceptions of what it means to grow old. Students experienced a conflict between previously unreflective assumptions about old people and those that emerged through the deepening relationship with the real life people they were getting to know. This phenomenological approach was used to evaluate the transformational change in the student's consciousness of what it is to be ageing. Similarly, the phenomenological approach used in the study of the DCU ILP was used to reflect on the ontological change in the older and younger student's perception of their understanding of each other and in particular, in the way this knowledge was used to enhance the quality of learning engaged in between the younger and older students.

## **4.3 Researching Intergenerational Learning**

Rosenberg, Layne et al outline the main issues in researching intergenerational studies (IG) in particular the emergence of intergenerational studies and gerontology in higher education. They state that in the American context, higher education responded with the development of academic curricula, research and involvement in applied programmes. The reason for this was that the multidisciplinary nature of both gerontology and intergenerational studies was recognized and had the capacity to enhance learning in a variety of disciplines and departments. The

disciplines tended to be in early childhood education, home economics, social work, sociology and gerontology. They state that the development of courses and programmes was *'often dependent on a key committed leader and the availability of external funding'* (Rosenberg, Layne et al, 1997: 24).

This research also contends that intergenerational studies is still a new arrival and strives to gain the recognition in academia that it richly deserves. They outline the two issues currently facing intergenerational studies. It is interesting to note that the two issues outlined by them in the late 1990's are still prevalent today. This they define as intergenerational studies laboring *'under two handicaps'*. (Rosenberg Layne et al 1997:23) First, the field lacks a research foundation crucial for academic acceptance and second, the 1990's up to the present day has offered little financial support for new research and training programs. For the most part in America, they state that federal funding has not supported academic programmes in intergenerational studies.

This requires them to ask the question *'Is Intergenerational Studies a new academic discipline?'* (Rosenberg Layne et al 1997: 23). Put as a research question they believe that this enables intergenerational studies to be evaluated via appropriate research methodologies. Newman wrote that the *'time has come....to recognize intergenerational studies as a viable discipline, with a valuable body of knowledge, a solid theoretical framework and broad research opportunities.'* (Newman 1994:2). However, Rosenberg Layne et al (1997) contend that there is still a long way to go as they believe that intergenerational studies is *'still busy building the solid empirical knowledge base and literature necessary to a scientific discipline, and much of the literature is not theoretically grounded'*.

The greatest weakness they believe is that IG is still in its infancy in attempts to build a unique theoretical framework. They cite Roberts and Benston (1990) Cliff (1994) Newman (1995) as among the academics who attempt to build this framework. I was cognizant of the criticism of the

previous researchers in the study of intergenerational learning in particular in the study of intergenerational learning at third level. I wanted to ensure that this research might go some way towards addressing the current inherent weakness in this area in terms of trying to help to build *'the solid empirical knowledge that is necessary if intergenerational learning is to gain recognition in higher education'*. (Rosenberg Layne et al 1997:17-31)

#### **4.4 Researcher Role in Phenomenology**

The philosophical assumption in phenomenology is that theory should be based on experiences and as these are varied, there is no one reality. Cohen et al (2000) suggest that in phenomenology, subjectivity is welcomed and biases need to be acknowledged. Ideas evolve and change over time. Briggs and Coleman contend that the 'world of the educational researcher is different from the world of the natural science researcher-all educational research needs to be grounded in people's experience.'(Briggs and Coleman 2007:24).

Adopting this phenomenological approach to research, I as the researcher became an integral part of the research. The researcher-based on my experience as a practitioner in my role as tutor, lecturer and coordinator-valued the tacit knowledge, the insight, the humour, the competences, the skills and the reflections which both the older people and the younger students could bring to this experience. This made my role as researcher an integral part of the research. As Briggs and Coleman state 'First, interpretative researchers recognize that they are part of, rather than separate from the research topic they investigate'. (Briggs and Coleman 2007: 24). This facilitated a naturalistic and researcher-as-participant approach.

#### **4.5 Narrative as a Research Methodology**

Andrews says that *'Humans are imbricated in narrative'* (Andrews 2007: 43). Labov (1982) too thinks there is a special relationship between people and stories. An experience-centred approach assumes that sequential logical

orderings of human experience into narrative are not just characteristics of humans, but make us human. Ricoeur says that '*Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated in a narrative mode.*' (Ricoeur 1984:52) Reissman (2008) contends that stories are social artifacts telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group. She, through her use of narrative engages in a process of critical reflection. She asks '*How do these contexts enter into storytelling? How is a story co produced in complex choreography—in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, and history and culture?*'(Reissman 2008:42). She believes that dialogic performance analysis attempts to deal with these questions applied here to ethnographic and interview data about identities. The investigator becomes an active presence in the text. It draws on and extends theoretical traditions that emphasize the importance of interaction, including symbolic interaction theory and to a lesser extent, aspects of conversational analysis. Bakhtin argues that a given word is:

*'saturated with ideology and meanings from previous usage; analysts never encounter a word from a "pure position"-it is not a neutral repository of an idea. An utterance carries the traces of other utterances, past and present, as words carry history on their backs'.* (Bakhtin 1981, cited in Reissman, 2008:107)

In my quest to ensure integrity, rigor and accurate interpretation of meaning, I was conscious of the words of Reissman who stated that investigators do not have access to the 'real thing' only the speaker's imitation. This is derived from Aristotle's notion of mimesis, which involves both action and experience. She states that narratives are '*event-centred-depicting human action-and they are experience-centred at several levels*'. (Reissman 2008:108) 'Mimesis' for Aristotle was the capturing of 'life in action'. Bruner draws on the work of Ricoeur (1984) and compares the kinship between '*being in history*' and '*telling about it*' noting that the two have a certain '*mutual belongingness*'. (Bruner; 1990: 47).

A narrative approach in research begins with the process of interviewing. Mishler (1979) reconceptualizes research interviewing as a discursive accomplishment. The standardized protocol gives way to conversation where interviewers can develop narrative accounts and this has the potential to render events and experiences as meaningful in a collaborative way. The interviews became an integral part of the study as a means to capture the narrative accounts of the participants in this study. Mello (2002) in evaluating the role of narrative as a modern research approach states that:

*A shift in perspective within the qualitative paradigm, toward narration and away from description, requires that we recognize, even more strongly, that our findings, analyses, and conclusions represent proximal and/or transactional representations of what data show (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1962). We have, therefore, reduced the role of our work away from the hierarchical position of creating conclusive knowledge to that of interpreting and storytelling personal experience; we do this with voices that are both idiosyncratic and dependent on individual perceptions..* (Mello, 2002:232)

#### **4.5.1 Philosophical Assumptions of Narrative as a Research Method**

In using narrative as an integral part of the combined research methodologies for this study, I was conscious of the philosophical assumptions implied in the use of narrative as a research method. Punch (2009) contends that:

*'much education research data occurs "naturally" in story form as in oral life histories, and biographical interviewing....thus there is a storied character to much qualitative data, and thinking about stories in the data can enable us to think creatively about collecting and interpreting data* '(Punch, 2009:190)

Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994) believe that narratives and stories are a valuable way to understand lived experiences and they note that stories are often concerned with empowerment. They believe that contemporary

anthropology and feminism regularly emphasize the study of lives from the narrator's point of view but with data seen as a shared production with the researcher. They cite the use of stories in many research settings such as the studies in medical and illness studies (Brody, 1987, Coles, 1989), in studies in education (Goodson, 1992), in studies of major life events and trauma (Reissman, 1993). Both Punch and Manning and Cullum-Swan contend that the story is frequently a feasible way of collecting data '*because it is such a common device in everyday interaction*' (Punch, 2009: 191).

Elliot (2005) makes a very pertinent enquiry within the realm of qualitative research and asks how can qualitative data in narrative and story form be explored and analysed? Elliot (2005) answers this question with the confirmation that there is no single approach, and that researchers borrow ideas from literary studies and sociolinguistics to assist their analysis. She notes the three part analytic framework used by Mishler (1995) that of meaning, structure and interactional context and the two part framework used by Lieblich et al (1998) that of content and form. For this study, I was cognizant of Giorgi's (1995) framework to evaluate the collected narrative as part of this study. I evaluated the meaning, structure and interactional context to provide a valid and rigorous approach to the research findings.

Clandinin and Connolly (1994, 2000) use stories as an integral part of their research namely the use of oral and life histories, biographies and autobiographies and personal experience methods. Further analysis of the use of stories required me as the researcher to evaluate the meaning, the structure and the interactional stories related to me as part of this research study. This was in particular to evaluate the social, the historical and cultural context in which the stories were told. Clandinin and Connolly, influenced by Dewey, draw on narrative as a way to elucidate a central criterion of experience. They view narratives as social constructions located within power structures and social milieux '*the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future-each point has a past experiential*

*base and leads to an experiential future.*' (Clandinan and Connolly 2000:2)  
This for them is the key to understanding education through a reflexive moving forward and backwards between the personal and the social simultaneously thinking about the past, present and future, and to do so in ever-expanding social milieux.(Clandinan and Connolly 2000: 2),

They delve deep into the philosophical assumptions that define narrative inquiry by simply asking the question '*What makes a good narrative? Beyond Reliability, Validity and Generalizability?*' They provided a comprehensive response in that they compare this to the same argument that defines other qualitative methods:

*'Like other qualitative methods, narratives rely on criteria other than validity, reliability and generalizability. It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research. The language and criteria for the conduct of narrative inquiry are under development in the research community.'* (Clandinan and Connolly 2000:7)

They draw on the work of other qualitative researchers to define the criteria been used for this form of research approach. Van Maanen's (1988) *apparency* and *verisimilitude* criteria places emphasis on recognizibility of the field in the research text. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *transferability*, takes the emphasis away from generalizability. What Clandin and Connolly perceive as good criteria in narrative research is narrative that has '*an explanatory, invitational quality, as having authenticity, as having adequacy and plausibility.*'(Clandinan and Connolly 2000:185)

Freeman further defines the concept of narrative as a research approach. Citing the philosopher David Carr (1986), he confirms that '*Narrative requires narration and narration has as its core a dimension of distance.*' (Freeman1990:175) For Freeman, what is essential to the storyteller's position is the advantage of hindsight. This brings with it a freedom from the constraint of the present. As Carr notes that hindsight or the narrative of

past events occupies ‘... a position after, above or outside the events narrated.’ (Carr 1986:60)

I evaluated that where hindsight, narrative of past events and tacit knowledge is usually transferred in third level learning through the use of text books, lecturer input or online scholarly learning journals, this now had the potential to be transferred through the shared dialogue shared between the DCU students and the older people as part of this study. This shared dialogue was evaluated in its contribution to the learning for the older people, the third level students, and its contribution to third level learning and ultimately its contribution as a societal benefit.

#### **4.6 Semi-Structured Interviews and Pilot Study**

Ribbins defines the essence of interviewing when he says that ‘*For me the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in somebody else’s mind but not to put things there*’. Truth and validity in the way the researcher interprets the meaning is also expressed by Ribbins when he concurs that ‘*we interview people to explore their views in ways that cannot be achieved in other forms of research and report our findings in as near as we reasonably can their own words.*’ (Ribbins 2007:208)

The data was collected by semi-structured interviews using a face-to-face format and aided by an interview guide. Initially the semi-structured interviewed was used as a pilot with colleagues, family and friends. Six interviews in total were conducted as part of the pilot study. I was cognizant of the words of Youngman (1978) cited in Briggs and Coleman (2007: 232) that the research analysis ‘*does not start the day after the last item of data is collected ...the analytical strategies must be planned early in the research process.*’ (1978:3). Following comments and reflections generated because of the initial pilot study, this determined the questions for the semi-structured interviews. The piloting of interviews enabled me to be intuitive to the concerns of the students in participating in the research. In the words

of Guba and Lincoln, they enabled me to obtain prior knowledge to determine what is *salient* in the *emic* views of the respondents. (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 175).

The interview questions primarily focused on a conceptual analysis of the topic and so related to thematic questions. Semi-structured interviews can be described as guided conversations (Ribbins, 2007) and in phenomenological studies, they are usually audio taped and transcribed verbatim, all interviews were taped and within twenty-four hours after the interview, they were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts then became the focus of analysis.

The focus of the interview was to acquire an understanding of the student's experience of their involvement in the DCU ILP. In addition, it was to provide a semi-biographical approach to understand the lived experiences of the students who participated in the study. This was engaged in a way that was unobtrusive the interview began with initial words of appreciation and then the question began '*Tell me a little about yourself?*' As a teacher working with active retired students and with third level students, I understood that this question would not cause insult or create difficulty for the respondents.

As Silverman notes, for interview, subjects construct not just narratives but an understanding of the construction of the social world. He believes that '*the primary issue is to generate data which gives an authentic insight into people's experiences.*' (Silverman, 2001:87). This striving for authenticity and fair representation as part of the DCU ILP data analysis, was closely aligned to the definition provided by Charmaz as remaining consistent to the meaning of the researched. '*We start with the experiencing person and try to share his or her subjective view. Our task is objective in the sense that we try to describe it with depth and detail. In doing so, we try to represent the person's view fairly and portray it as consistent with his or her meanings.*' (Charmaz 1995:54). I as the researcher was particularly conscious of Denzin who acknowledges that 'What the subject tells us is

itself something that has been shaped by prior cultural understandings.’ (Denzin, 1991:68).

Denzin defines the real intricacy of searching for meaning in the language used by the subject. ‘Language, which is our window into the subject’s world (and our world), plays tricks. It displaces the very thing it is supposed to represent, so that what is always given is a trace of other things, not the thing-lived experience-itself.’(Denzin, 1991:68). There are additional difficulties to be overcome in addition to the notion that the language used can in itself present a difficulty for valid interpretation.

The coding, categorization and typologizing of stories results in only telling part of the lived experience rather than the ‘*wholeness*’ (Charmaz 1995:60). This means that a variety of representations occur from the moment of ‘*primary experience*’ to the readings of the researchers textual presentations of findings, the relating the story to the researcher and the transcribing and analyzing that is subsequently undertaken by the researcher. These issues as well as practical are also an epistemological and theoretical concern. I wished to maintain the ‘wholeness’ of the stories related to me by searching for categorization of main themes and sub-themes and yet never to lose the wholeness of the narrative related to me by either the older person or the DCU student.

Glassner and Loughlin believe that one way to address this is to understand that interactional research starts from a belief that ‘*people create and maintain meaningful worlds.*’(Glassner & Loughlin, 1987:34-5). Denzin in Schmitt (1993)) acknowledges this dilemma and contends that ‘*there is no way to stuff a real-live person between the covers of a text,*’ (Denzin, 1993:130). We can as researchers describe truthfully delimited segments of real-live persons lives. Denzin believes that in delimiting, we may get *closer* to people’s lived experience. Charmaz (1995) recognizes that many people do not want themselves revealed in their fullness and that this in fact might result in deeper, fuller conceptualizations of those elements of the subject’s

lives that are the most interested in understanding. I as the researcher concurred that this in fact had occurred with some of the participants as part of the interview process. This was when anonymity and confidentiality was assured in relation to the semi-structured interviews and when through the interview process the students were made aware that their narrative was valued. This contributed to the transfer of rich aspects of lived experiences commented by one of the participants as ‘this (the interview) is growing legs of its own.’ This contributed to the rich quality of the data for analysis.

#### **4.6.1 Interview Context**

The interviews were conducted in Dublin City University (DCU) and in particular in the Helix Restaurant over tea or coffee or in the researchers’s office. Lincoln and Guba (1989) believe that a consequence of the relativist ontology that undergrids constructivism is that the study should be pursued in a natural setting. The participants were requested to suggest the most suitable place for them and with the exception of one older participant (where the interview was conducted in her home), all of the stakeholders requested that the interviews be conducted in DCU.

This was later noted by some of the older students as an opportunity to visit the university again and which they had expressed a delight in relating to their families, in particular to sons or daughters or grandchildren who had themselves obtained their degrees in DCU. This created a naturalistic setting since the participants were familiar with these physical surroundings and so a naturalistic setting was created whereby the participant felt at ease being interviewed in either of these two locations.

The interviews lasted for approximately one-hour. A non-directive style of questioning using open-ended questions was used. A biographical approach was used to encourage the participants to transfer knowledge of their life (this was led by me asking the question ‘*Tell me a little about you?*’ The respondent in the case of the older people usually began in a chronological

order beginning with the earlier part of their life, for example their early school days, their first time to begin work and significant life events i.e. when they were married, the children and grandchildren that were now a significant part of their life. For the younger students this usually began in a more contemporary context, in particular relating their experience as a third level student and reflecting on their experience as a student for example, why they had chosen their academic course. They also related about their belonging to family and for the international students, they reflected on their families, their country, and their university at home.

This was followed by more direction as appropriate for example their reflections on their participation in the DCU ILP. The students were asked to reflect on what advice-based on their lived experience- they would give to the older or younger generation. This was vice-versa depending on the student who was been interviewed from each cohort of students. Participants were also invited to reflect on their understanding of third level learning and on their interest in reading and/or learning. This was included to provide a sharing of knowledge that had the potential to benefit and enhance the quality of learning for both generations. The biographical nature of the questions, in particular for the older students was to draw meaning from their lived experiences and this was to later evaluate how this data might contribute to the learning for the third level students. This is later discussed and developed in chapters five and six of this doctoral study.

The questions were designed to value the lived experience of the participants and in particular, to evaluate the learning they had gained because of their participation in the study. The interview questions were designed to probe but the researcher was mindful to develop an objective stance in her questioning approach. This was to ensure the participants could reflect in a non-judge mental or non-biased way. One issue that created concern for me as the researcher was to evaluate the benefits of the project for both the older and younger students who participated in this

study. The use of the word '*benefit*' brought with it a bias that required the students to comment on the positive aspects of the project. One of the reasons for this was that prior to the interviews, I had identified that many of the DCU students and in particular the older students had commented on the benefits for them of being involved in this project. While I was conscious that a necessary aspect of the research was to evaluate the benefits for both cohorts of students, I addressed this at the end of each interview by asking the respondents if there was anything else they would like to add at the close of the interview. This was to provide the respondents with an opportunity to discuss negative aspects of the project which might have emerged for them and which they would like to address in the future.

In addition to the face-to-face interviews, where this was not possible to conduct, participants were invited to send an email to the researcher outlining their reflections on their participation in the DCU ILP. In addition, the researcher met very briefly with the DCU students during her weekly work as lecturer in DCU and with the older learners at the end of the Saturday classes. This led to informal discussions about the project. Ribbins acknowledges the benefits of chat '*as an (apparently) serendipitous interview.*' (Ribbins, 2009: 211). Taking the advice of Ribbins, I as the researcher undertook to record the reflections of these '*serendipitous interviews*' within twenty-four hours after they had occurred. This was to ensure accuracy of interpretation and to ensure that meaning was not lost. Some of the older participants had chosen to ring the researcher to discuss their reflections by phone. On invitation by the researcher, the participants were invited to a subsequent follow up face-to-face interview in DCU.

#### **4.7 Blogs as a Research Approach**

A related web information sharing technology is the '*blog*'. A blog is a web site that contains dated entries in reverse chronological order (most recent first) about a particular topic. Functioning as an online journal, blogs can be written by one person or a group of contributors. Entries contain

commentary and links to other web sites, and images as well as a search facility may be included. Because blogs engage people in knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate, they often attract a large and dedicated readership. They can also facilitate the drawing together of small virtual groupings of individuals interested in co-constructing knowledge around a common topic within a community of practice. The DCU ILP developed its own blog space.

This was facilitated in particular through the DCU ILP tutor Dr Cathy Fowley who had evaluated the benefits of blogs to capture the narrative of younger people as part of her own doctoral thesis study. In 2009, through her work as a student volunteer and later as a tutor, she began to evaluate the benefits of a blog space that had the potential to capture the narrative of both the older and the younger students who were engaged in the DCU ILP. In particular, she wanted to promote the narrative of the older participants through an online social media presence. This she believed was to enable the intergenerational conversation to take place on line between both the older students and the DCU students.

It is not surprising, that blogs have been widely adopted by users for interpersonal ends, as is evident from the most prevalent category of blogs: those with content analogous to a personal diary, or journal, with the additional functionality of two-way communication (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004, 2005; Lenhart & Fox; Schiano, Nardi, Gumbrecht & Swartz, 2004; Viegas, 2005). Most blogs are interactive, in that they afford participants the opportunity to post comments (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). An important factor affecting the proliferation of blogs is ease of use, a consequence of the wide variety of software applications and hosting sites available to users. These tools enable/empower anyone with access to a computer and the internet to create and maintain a blog, as little technical knowledge (e.g., HTML) is required. Blogging tools afford different levels of privacy, ranging from password-protected sites to publicly listed and

accessible sites, although the majority of users do not restrict access to content. (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Yet for most of the older and younger participants on the DCU ILP, they had not previously used blogs as a way to write their opinions, reflections, points of view. Examples of the narratives of the DCU students and the tutors are in the Appendices, (See Appendix F and Appendix H).

Schiano et al (2004) conducted an ethnographic study of bloggers to explore the use of this technology for personal expression and communication. Their findings suggest that users were aware of their intended audience and expected feedback from their audience through multiple communication channels, including face-to-face and through comments on their blog entries. This was a useful medium for the DCU participants in that it provided both cohorts of students with an alternative communication medium suitable to their specific needs. For example, it was not always possible to find a suitable time to conduct a semi-structured interview with the DCU students. The blog emerged as a very useful medium for them to draw on their reflections of their experience as part of the DCU ILP. The creation of the blog fostered the concept of the DCU ILP as a community of practice both offline and online. The reflections of some of the DCU students from this blog are presented in the appendix E.

I believed that the use of the DCU ILP blog as part of this thesis study would be a useful research method to capture the narrative of both the older and younger students who participated. This was for me a new experience as a researcher using the blog as a research tool. An interesting feature of the study is that the older students-many of them using a blog space for the first time- used this space to write their own biographical stories or segments of their biographical stories on line. These narratives placed on the DCU ILP blog emerged through the development of the DCU ILP. While these blog biographies were not analysed as part of the doctoral study, they provide examples of the richness of reflection and insight provided by the

older students. These narratives are featured in the appendix F to demonstrate the potential of engaging the voice of older people in teaching and learning practices at third level now and in the future. This is in particular in engaging them in critical reflection and reminiscences that have the potential to enrich other pedagogical practices in third level. These stories were supported through the creative writing module and the 2.0 Life writing workshops as part of the DCU ILP. These stories are in the Appendix section. (See Appendix C and Appendix K).

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

I adopted a phenomenological approach to the data analysis. This was in essence because as a researcher and teacher, I was aware that the narrative of both the older and younger students had the potential to be concrete descriptions that were rich in meaning and interpretation. Phenomenological research characteristically starts with concrete descriptions of lived situations, often first-person accounts, which are in everyday language. This was in keeping with the ethos of the study, which was to value the conversations, analysis and reflections from all the participants who wished to be interviewed. However, I also identified that the richness of data could be identified through a further selection of these interviews.

The process was to be inclusive of as many participants who were willing to participate. This was through their consent to be interviewed or to volunteer to write their reflections on the DCU ILP blog. As many of the older students were participating in a third level research process for the first time, I did not wish to set a prescribed number of interviews. In total, there were thirty two interviews conducted with the older learners and eight interviews with the DCU students. These interviews were recorded and listened to between 2009 and 2011 as a means to evaluate the data emerging from all interviews and to evaluate the data through constant comparative analysis of emerging themes. The overall interviews provided the data for the emerging themes. Because of the large data sampling involved in this large number of

interviews, for the purpose of this study, ten of these interviews were analysed in-depth as a sample study for the thesis. These were selected chiefly on the basis that their narrative, in particular their biographical narrative provided a richness of meaning for the study. They were representative of gender, of differing lived cultural experiences and influences. A sample of these interviews is provided in the Appendices. (See Appendix F).

Eight interviews were conducted with the DCU students. It is interesting to note that the DCU student's preference was to use the blog as a medium to place their reflections. This was a two-fold purpose. The DCU students tended to be very busy with weekly lectures and tutorials, which left little time to be interviewed on a one on one basis. I believed that the DCU students used the blog as this was the most naturalistic context for them. These blog reflections were also used to evaluate the emerging themes.

While all phenomenology is descriptive in the sense of aiming to describe rather than explain, a number of scholars and researchers distinguish between descriptive phenomenology versus interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology. With descriptive Husserlian inspired phenomenology the researchers aim to reveal essential general meaning structures of a phenomenon. They remain close to what is given to them in all its richness and complexity and restrict themselves to *'making assertions which are supported by appropriate intuitive validations'* (Mohanty, 1983, cited in Giorgi, 1986:9).

Interpretative phenomenology, in contrast, has emerged from the work of hermeneutic philosophers (including Heidegger (1962), Gadamer (1960) and Ricoeur (1975) ) who argue for our embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships, and the inescapable *'historicity'* of all understanding. *'The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation'*, says Heidegger (1962:37). Interpretation is not an additional procedure: it constitutes an inevitable and basic structure of our

being-in-the- world. We experience a thing as something it has already been interpreted. The division between these *'descriptive'* and *'interpretive'* variants of phenomenology finds reflection in research. Giorgi (1985) similar to Husserl has provided the impetus for what Van Manen (1990) call the open lifeworld approach of Dahlberg et al (2008) of a dialogical approach. I concur with Langdridge when he states that in practice there are no hard and fast boundaries between description and interpretation as *'such boundaries would be antithetical to the spirit of the phenomenological tradition that prizes individuality and creativity'* (Langdridge, 2008:113).

What became a very interesting part of the data analysis was the depth of the interview responses in terms of the volume of meaning and interpretation that was provided in particular by the older students. This became self-explanatory in describing and analysing their lived experience but also the way they described their experience as part of the project. This was by drawing on abstract concepts such as developing their confidence, providing them with a stimulated mind, opening a window to another world. The latter was relating to their use of IT skills gained during their time on campus. My concern when analysing the data was that the richness of the data would be lost should I 'cut' the data or just provide a sentence or two from the respondents. From a phenomenological perspective, I chose to allow the data to speak for itself and in making this decision; I have chosen to leave some extracts in full paragraphs.

#### **4.8.1 Bloom's Domains of Learning Framework**

Influenced by Bloom's domain of learning framework which views learning as defined into three categories, I sought to evaluate the data broadly within these categories. These are the cognitive outcomes, the affective and the psychomotor or competences acquired through learning. These were used to provide the meaning and bracketing which would enable me to interpret the key themes emerging from the data. When the older students reflected on the benefits of their participation in the project because of their newly

acquired IT skills, this was placed under the heading of psycho meter competences and skills. Where phrases related to finding a new confidence or phrases for example ‘now I realize that I still have a brain’, these were placed under affective and cognitive domains of learning. Blooms (1956) domains of learning are represented in the figure below. This was used in addition to the Giorgi (1985) framework for analyzing data.

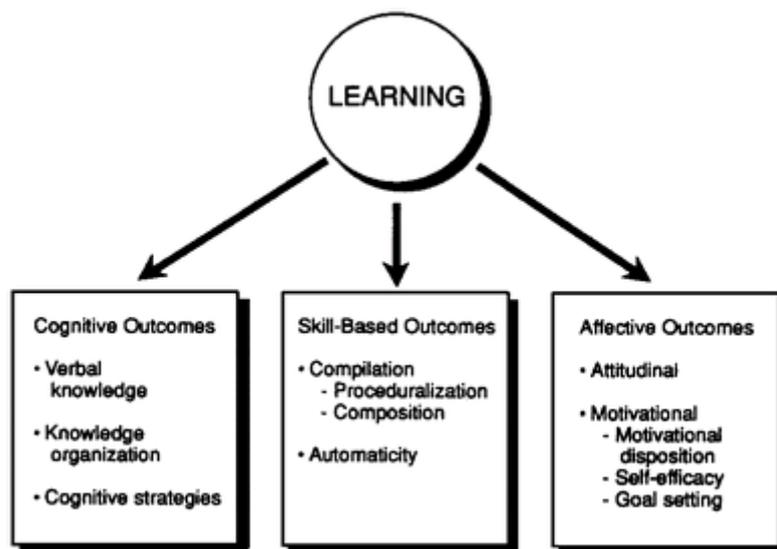


Figure 9 Blooms domains of learning

#### 4.8.2 Giorgi's Framework

I performed the analysis according to the principles of Giorgi’s (1985) phenomenological analysis through the following four stages:

- Reading all the material to obtain an overall impression and bracketing previous preconceptions;
- Identifying units of meaning, representing different aspects of the students experiences and coding for these;
- Condensing and abstracting the meaning within each of the coded groups;
- Summarizing phrases, sentences and paragraphs were the main elements of analysis.

At all times I wanted to remain true to the overall meaning units; taking them apart through summarizing phrases and sentences yet ensuring that the overall meaning unit was retained. My focus was on summarizing phrases, sentences and paragraphs to evaluate the main elements of analysis.

Denzin and Lincoln describe the collection of processes as *bricolage*-‘*a pieced together, close-knit set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation*’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:5). They go on to look at the skills of the bricoleur-the flexible, creative, intuitive researcher who is searching for an in depth understanding of complex social phenomena. From sifting and searching through the data analysis I was mindful of Denzin and Lincoln’s symbolic image of the researcher as ‘*bricoleur*’ whose ‘*labour is a complex, quiltlike ,bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage- a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations....connecting the parts to the whole.*’ (2003;9).

I found this a very intensive but equally enriching part of the research process. One example of ‘*a reflexive collage*’ was when I interviewed one of the older students who told me as part of his biography that ‘*there was nothing remarkable about that (his early school days) except that one of the students, my little pal, was Seamus Heaney*’ (See appendix F). All of my understanding and love of Heaney’s work became known when this older student spoke about the characters he recalled who have since become part of the folklore of Heaney’s poems. It was as if the ‘*quiltlike bricolage*’, the ‘*reflexive collage*’ began to move back and forth between meaning and interpretation and fused both my own lived experience in my role as researcher with my knowledge of the poet, his work and this older students own lived experience.

#### **4.9 Ethical Considerations**

The Ethical guidelines conduct and codes of practice as set down by Dublin City University have been adhered to at all times as part of this research study, (See Appendix E). Cohen et al (2007) state that beneficence and non-maleficence ensures that respect for the person is maintained at all times. All respondents were assured respect for their opinions, conversations and dialogue at the beginning, during and at the conclusion of the research process. This was ensured by inviting all participants to attend a meeting at

the beginning of the pilot study and subsequently at the beginning of each semester to make them aware that this project was initially a pilot study for my doctoral thesis. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity and this anonymity was assured for future publications.

All the above ethical considerations have been adhered to as part of this study. A recent new comer to the field of research is the use of narrative transferred from blogs. I as the researcher was conscious of the ethical issues, which the use of a virtual environment might present as part of the research findings. Madge cited in Briggs and Coleman (2007) points out that '*online (sic) research....raises critical issues of risk and safety to the human subject*'. Hence, online researchers may encounter conflicts between the requirements of research and its possible benefits'. Madge also contends that '*The Internet has opened up a wide range of new ways to examine human interactions in new contexts, and from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches*' (Madge: 2006:2).

The benefits of this forum in obtaining research data is that it provides an opportunity which could not otherwise be possible to acquire either through face-to-face, telephone or other means of communication. As it was not possible to meet face to face with all of the participants of the project, I received the consent of the participants of the DCU ILP to use their reflections on the ILP Blog as part of the research data. These students willingly provided this consent and acknowledged that if these reflections were placed voluntarily on an open online space such as the DCU ILP Blog, then these reflections could also be used as part of this research.

In the overall ethical conduct that guided this research, I was conscious of Sammons (1989) who highlights the ethical role of the researcher so that the findings are presented in such a way that they are not misleading and are understandable to those who read it. All of the documentation related to the interviews has been tape-recorded interviews and these have been stored confidentially as part of the ethical practice of this research project.

#### **4.10 Study Validity and Rigor**

In phenomenology, the task of sorting out the qualities that relate to the researchers experience of the phenomenon is referred to as bracketing (Drew, 2004). There is a conflict of thinking in relation to when bracketing begins in a research study. Some writers suggest that it is an aspect of interviewing style, highlighting the difficulty encountered in phrasing questions without implying personal beliefs and values (Munhall, 1994; Beech 1999). Giorgi notes that reflecting on biases before data analysis takes place is no guarantee that biases might still occur. Using the Giorgi (1985) framework, I analysed the data and developed the themes from meaning units. There was much reflection around the naming of themes provided by the typology initially from the European Approaches to Intergenerational Learning (EAGLE Project 2006) which is presented in chapter 5, and later from the theoretical framework which emerged through this doctoral study, which is also discussed in chapter 5.

For O’Leary (2004) the standard indicator of applicability is generalizability. Arising from the findings from the data, I have provided in the Recommendations Chapter some possible recommendations for this study to a wider context. This is in particular in the suitability of this model to be transferred to other third level institutes both nationally and internationally and in terms of societal benefits now and in the future.

Lincoln and Guba (2001) provide a guidelines and checklist for constructivist evaluation and this was adhered to as part of this study. The guidelines are as follows:

- 1. Identifying the stakeholders:** For the purpose of this study, this was identifying as many older and younger participants who were willing to be interviewed participate in conversations or group discussions by inviting all students to participate in the research process. This was to capture a broad focus of students, which would embrace their previous and current teaching

and learning experience, gender, values and diverse cultural and socio-economic perspectives.

**2. Organizing the evaluation:** Selecting the initial team of evaluators, which for the most part was I as the researcher but in addition was also the stakeholders, which was inclusive of the tutors, the DCU students, the older students and others i.e. guest lecturers who participated in the project.

**3. Sorting out constructions, claims, concerns and issues resolved by consensus, setting these aside as possible case components.** This was identified in particular through conducting interviews with the participants and then identifying some of these interviews as possible case components. The data was then coded into a series of themes. For example, evaluating the benefits of participation in the DCU ILP for the older learners, benefits of participation for the DCU students;

**4. Collecting additional information through conversations generated in a naturalistic context that frequently contributed substantial information to the overall research themes and findings, which emerged.**

**5. Developing intergroup constructions.** This was chiefly developed through conducting conversations between various groups of stakeholders i.e. the tutors, the DCU students and the older students. Organising discussion groups with both the DCU students and the older learners to evaluate their collective viewpoints together. This was in addition to the data gained from individual interviews and discussion with both the DCU students and the older learners. The result is as defined by Lincoln and Guba's '*composite construction that includes all forms of the evaluand constructions as well as their relevant claims, concerns and issues.*' (Lincoln & Guba, 2001:5)

**6. Reporting on the results for Step 5 i.e. the production of several reports tailored to the claims, concerns and issues of specific stakeholder groups.**

For the project, the two main stakeholder groups were determined as the older people who participated in the study and the DCU student group.

#### **4.11 Summary**

In this chapter, a description is provided of the research methodologies used for this study. The research approach is described. A phenomenological approach together with the use of narrative as a research methodology for this study is outlined. The philosophical assumptions in the use of narrative are described. The research methods are discussed. This was the use of semi-structured interviews in addition to the use of the DCU ILP blog site. Both methods were used as a means to capture the narrative of both the older and the younger students who participated in the study. The data analysis methodology is also described. The ethical guidelines are discussed and the validity and the rigor of the study are outlined. Chapters five and six provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings, which emerged through the theoretical framework developed by me (Corrigan, 2011) for this study.

## **Chapter 5: Data Analysis Part 1**

### **5.0. Introduction**

What emerged from the data was a collection of themes, some common to the older students, other themes common to the body of DCU students who participated in this study. Chapter five and chapter six presents the key findings obtained from the interviews, conversations and blog reflections, which included the narrative of the older people and the DCU students who participated in this study. These chapters also include the narrative of DCU staff and students who did not participate in the project directly, but who experienced the project from their attendance at the DCU Intergenerational Learning Conference, which took place in DCU in April 2008 and in May 2010. Their comments are transcribed from their own personal Blogs in which they presented their reflections. All of these findings are further categorized into themes, which are guided by the Theoretical Framework, which I will now outline.

### **5.1 Theoretical Framework and Research Design**

Initially, I was influenced by the Eagle Project (2006), which received funding under the Socrates/Grundtvig strand of the Lifelong Learning Programme. This project brought together interested parties across Europe. It had the following aims and objectives: To generate an inventory that promotes and evaluates research by bringing in-depth insight into (a) the potential as well as the limitations of trans-inter-generational and later life formal and informal learning (b) the policies, concepts, analyses, frameworks, experiences and empirical evidence available around intergenerational learning and (c) the models of good practice developed and in particular, good practice cases which are capable of being generalized, transferred, localized and useful to generate policy and practice recommendations (Eagle EU project: 2006). I was interested in this project as a theoretical framework for this study.

As part of this study, five *fields of learning* were identified to define a theoretical framework, which could be used to evaluate the range of intergenerational practices across the EU partner countries who were participating in this study. The fields of learning were identified as the following:

<b>Fields of Learning</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Inclusive Knowledge Society Skills</b>	This is described as building, shaping or improving knowledge society skills or competences with the aim of improving social inclusion between generations.
<b>Individual Competence Development</b>	This is the acquisition, sharing and dissemination of knowledge in a 'downstream' and ' <i>upstream</i> ' mode.
<b>Societal/Economic Consultancy/Exchange</b>	This framework, intergenerational learning is linked to engaging the expertise of senior people to the inexperience of younger students and this exchange of knowledge is used for the benefit of social and economic exchange
<b>Continuity and Development of Societal Values</b>	Here intergenerational learning is conceptualized as facilitating the transfer of societal values across age groups, ethnicities, religions, and differing cultural and social backgrounds.
<b>Productive Cultural Assimilation:</b>	In this case, intergenerational learning is perceived as a process which assists in ' <i>assimilating</i> ' cultures, fostering mutual understanding and tolerance of identities and developing ' <i>sufficient communalities</i> ' so as to be able to promote ' <i>citizenship and civil society</i> '.

**Table 3 Framework of five fields of learning, EU EAGLE Project 2006**

### **5.1.1. Five Fields of Learning Framework - EAGLE Project Relation to Study**

These five fields of learning framework, which emerged from the EAGLE EU project (2006), was used initially as a theoretical lens to evaluate the learning outcomes of the students' participation in the DCU ILP. I discovered that through the lens of this framework, it was possible to identify the potential for quality learning shared between generations. It

soon became clear that this framework was limited in that it did not take account of the possibilities of integrating a range of voices across the generations, in enhancing higher education learning and research. The framework identified by the EAGLE project (2006) was not directly related to teaching, learning and research at third level. I as researcher therefore sought to create a framework, which more fully embraced the concept of intergenerational learning at third level. This was a framework which has the potential to evaluate the benefits for the senior people, the younger students, the quality of academic learning, and the societal benefits of an intergenerational learning initiative set within a third level context.

## **5.2 New Theoretical Framework**

The new framework was developed through my reading around key concepts related to Intergenerational Learning and by using the data analysis to define Intergenerational Learning as a Community of Practice defined by combining Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice (1991) with Social Capital Theory ((Bourdieu, 1986, 1989, Putnam 1995, Perez, 1983, Field, 2003, Balattie and Falk, 2002) I was convinced that a broader conceptual framework through which to analyse the potential of the DCU ILP as a tool was needed. In this Chapter, I use Field's (2003) social capital theory and Lave, Wenger's Community of Practice outlined in Figure 5.31, and Figure 11 from which emerged a new theoretical framework for this research study.

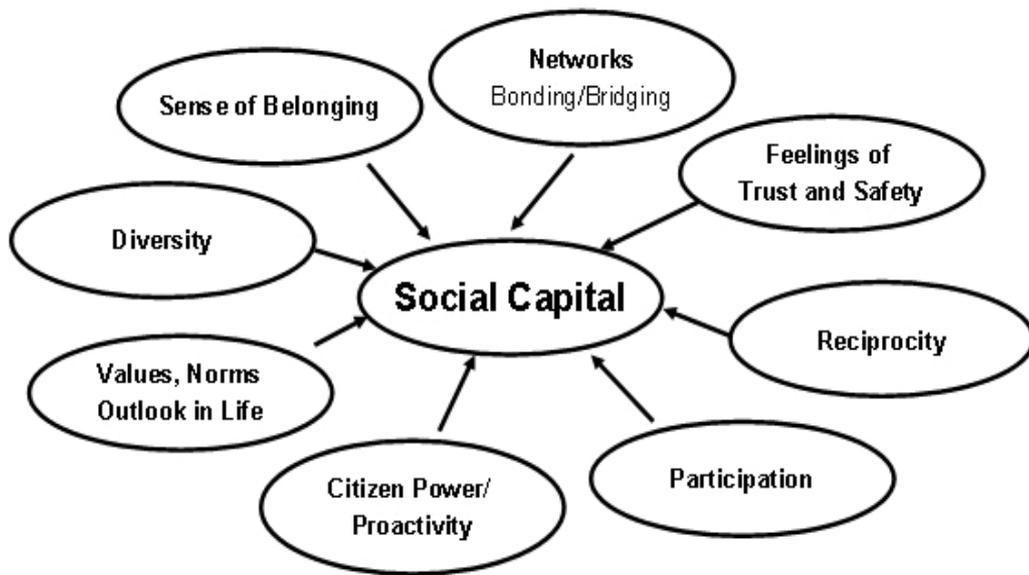


Figure 10 Social Capital Theory (Field 2003)

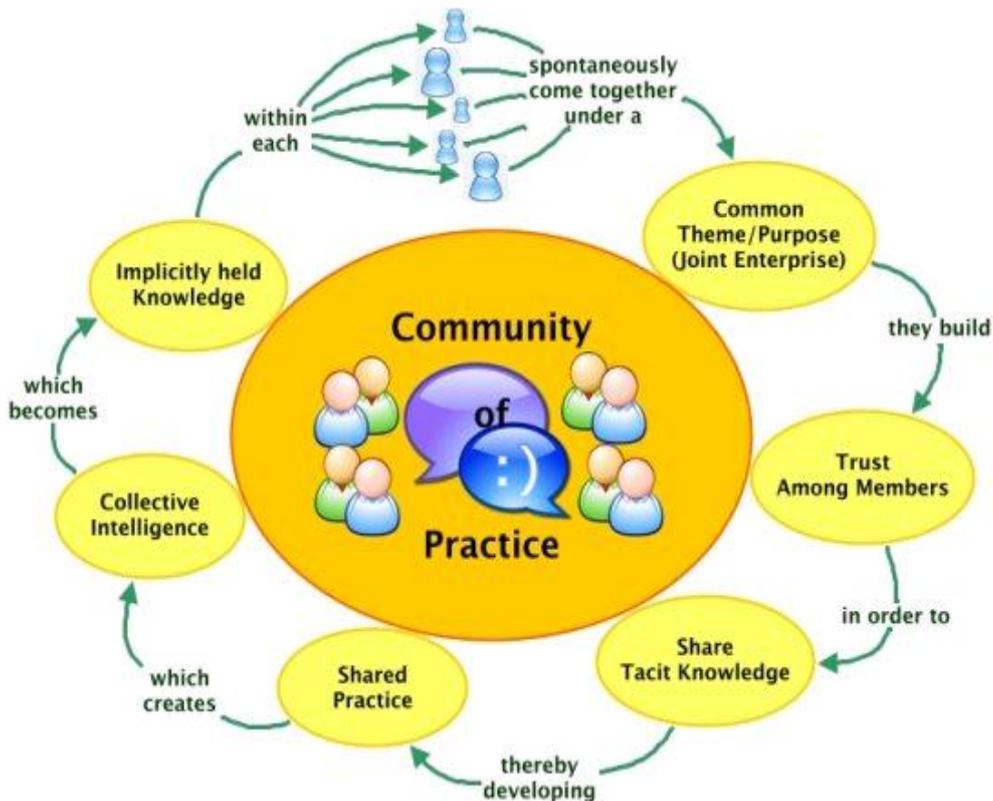


Figure 11 Lave and Wenger (1991) Community of Practice

This new framework enabled me to understand that Intergenerational Learning at third level could be conceptualised as a Community of Practice

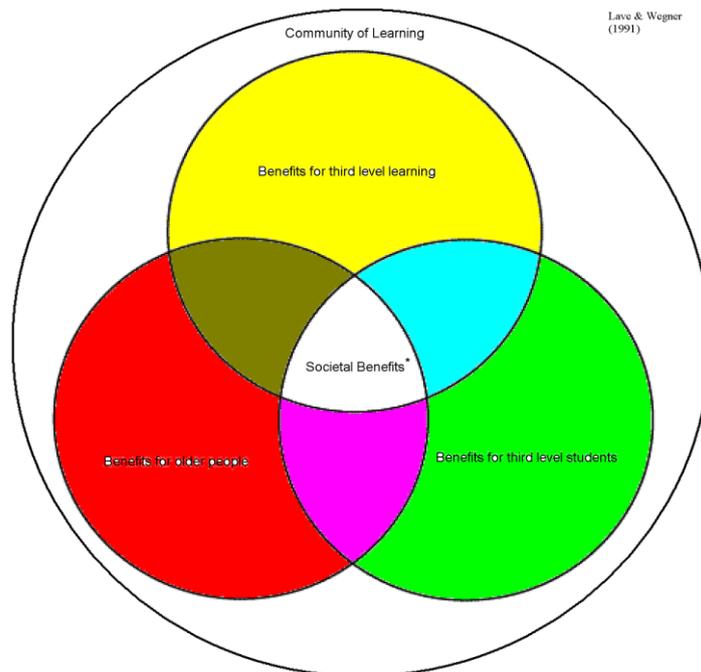
(Lave and Wenger,1991) which had as its very existence shared practice, collective intelligence, trust among members that when combined, had a common purpose of providing high quality teaching and learning opportunities between generations in a third level context. This concept was also set within the framework of Social Capital Theory (Field, 1993) where both the older and younger students who participated in this study valued participation, diversity, feelings of trust and safety and a sense of belonging. This was unique in that for the first time in DCU, it provided a community, which shared the dialogue and knowledge of an eclectic mix of students of all ages, cultures, socio-economic contexts and experiences. In particular, it was the first time that many DCU students had the opportunity to meet with people of all ages as part of their formal and informal learning at third level.

This new theoretical framework was used to develop a conceptual lens through which the research data together and the literature were evaluated. Four key concepts emerged through the new theoretical framework. These were:

- The benefits of Intergenerational Learning at third level as a significant contribution for the older people who participated in the study.
- The benefits of Intergenerational Learning at third level as a significant contribution for the third level students who participated in the study.
- The benefits of intergenerational learning as a significant contribution to higher education learning.
- The benefits of integration of both older and younger people in third level learning as a wider societal benefit.

The new theoretical framework, which emerged using Field's (2003) Social Capital Theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of practice, influenced a new theoretical framework for this doctoral study. This new framework is represented as a venn diagram and each circle represents the benefits of the DCU Intergenerational Learning as four main themes. These are defined as the benefits of intergenerational learning at third level (1) for

the older people who participated in the study, (2) for the DCU students who participated in the study (3) for higher education teaching and learning (4) for the wider societal benefits. The new theoretical framework is represented in the following diagram:



**Figure 12 Benefits of Intergenerational learning as pedagogy in third level learning**

### **5.3 Benefits of Intergenerational Learning for Older People**

Four sub themes were defined which demonstrated the benefits of intergenerational learning for the older learners who participated in the study. These themes emerged from the data analysis as follows:

**Theme 1.** Participation in intergenerational learning as a means to engage older people in third level learning

**Theme 2.** Participation in intergenerational learning as a means that breaks down the digital and generational divide.

**Theme 3.** Participation in intergenerational learning as a means that develops mental stimulation as a contribution to well-being for older people.

**Theme 4.** Participation in intergenerational learning as a means that develops the self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy of the older people who participated in the study.

### **5.3.1 Benefits for Third Level Students**

Four sub themes were defined which demonstrated the benefits of intergenerational learning for the DCU students who participated in the study. These themes emerged from the data analysis as follows:

- **Theme 1.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to the enhancement of high quality learning for the third level students who participated in the study.
- **Theme 2.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to the personal and professional development of the third level students who participated in the study.
- **Theme 3.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to knowledge-sharing for the third level students who participated in the study.
- **Theme 4.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to the development of self-confidence and self-efficacy for the DCU students who participated in the study.

### **5.3.2 Benefits for Higher Education Learning**

The benefits for higher education learning which emerged from the data analysis were identified under the following sub themes:

- **Theme 1:** Intergenerational learning which facilitates sharing high quality knowledge, enterprise and innovative thinking between generations.
- **Theme 2:** Intergenerational learning which facilitates the university to be socially engaged.
- **Theme 3:** Intergenerational learning which supports a culture of lifelong learning at third level.

- **Theme 4:** Intergenerational learning which values the tacit knowledge, the experience and wisdom of older people as a contribution to high quality learning at third level.

### **5.3.3 Benefits for Society**

The benefits for the wider society as part of this study and which emerged from the data analysis were identified under the following sub themes:

**Theme 1:** Intergenerational learning as a means to facilitate relationship building between generations.

**Theme 2:** Intergenerational learning as a means to foster cultural understanding between generations.

**Theme 3:** Intergenerational learning as a means to breaking down stereotyping associated with ageing.

The benefits of intergenerational learning for both the older people and the DCU students are analysed in this chapter, while the benefits of intergenerational learning for higher education and for the wider societal benefits are greater are analysed in chapter 6.

### **5.4 Benefits for Older People**

The sub themes, which emerged from the data analysis findings for the older people, were the following:

**Theme 1** Participation in Intergenerational Learning as a means to engage older people in third level learning

**Theme 2** Participation in Intergenerational Learning as a means that breaks down the digital and generational divide.

**Theme 3** Participation in Intergenerational Learning as a means that develops mental stimulation as a contribution to well-being for older people.

**Theme 4** Participation in Intergenerational Learning as a means that develops the self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy of older people.

#### **5.4.1 Participation of Older People in Third Level Learning**

The importance to them of the opportunity to participate in third level learning through the DCU ILP has been constantly acknowledged by the older learners.

One older student reflected on this when he said:

*I am seventy years of age and I have seen this university grow. Because of my own lack of education, I always dreamed that I would enter DCU. I have always had that dream so now when I walk through the gates of DCU; I feel I am a young student. I do not even regard myself as an older student. I often have to pinch myself that I am still learning. Patrick*

Patrick highlights the notion that university education has been denied to many older people in Ireland in the past. The opportunity to avail of new learning opportunities at third level today is an aspiration that for many older people remains a dream.

Maureen reflects on the benefits of her participation in learning on a third level campus

*I have more of an insight into university life through talking to the DCU volunteer (student) about his student experience. It was a "bit of a buzz" to be on campus as it was an opportunity I did not have years ago. Maureen*

Nora's reflections also concur with this theme of engagement at third level for the older students:

*I never came into the university except to go the Helix. Therefore, the university (through this project) has opened its doors to the wider community. I noticed many courses available on the notice boards while I was here for the project. I would have never known about these courses. I would like to say thank God for projects as this one. It has given me the confidence not to fear computers and with little help, I can do just about anything I want on it. Nora*

Joe's narrative relates to missed opportunities for formal further educational development for him. He relates the story of his aspirations to progress to secondary school in Ireland in 1954. From a historical perspective, this was pre-free secondary education in Ireland and during this time, due to socio-economic factors, educational prospects and progression were very limited in Ireland.

*My one great regret was I loved school but as my father was a labourer; it was not possible for me to go to secondary school unless I received a scholarship to do so. Now there was a limited number of scholarships for the entire (Names County) The total number of scholarships was six for the county and I came seventh. I was the eldest of seven children so when an exam came up for the (names civil service department), I came first. My one great regret was not having the chance of further education. Now I understand why I could not go further with my education. I know that my father always felt sad that ...as if in some way my having to provide for my siblings prevented me from having my own chance to go onto further learning. He knew I loved learning and many years later he asked me 'Do you regret that I could not let you go to secondary school? I just want you to know that when you went into the civil service, this provided enough food on the table for an extra three days for your mother and I and your brothers and sisters.' Of course, I was disappointed, but I did not have the heart to tell him that. I knew this would upset him as he was a good man and he was trying to do what was best at the time...Later I became very involved in the trade unions so I would like to think that I used my talents in that way.... Whatever education I have is self-taught that is until I came into the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project last February 2009. Joe*

Joe's reflection provides a lived experience that has the potential to be shared with younger third level students. This has the possibility of enabling third level students to appreciate the value of their access to educational opportunities and to reflect on their own destiny for their future. In addition, it enables them to understand the life skills and competences acquired by the older learners in dealing with the difficult and prohibitive situations encountered by them in the past. As Frankl says, 'man is ultimately self

*determining. What he becomes-within the limits of endowment and environment-he has made out of himself.'* (Frankl, 2006:160)

#### **5.4.2 Enlightenment as a Sub-theme**

What emerged for many of the older people was the notion of *enlightenment*. An older student reflected that:

*I found this class very enlightening, encouraging and I will not hesitate in future to do any course I am interested in. I talk a lot, about what I am learning and do not feel I am being left so far behind when my family talk about third level education. I loved the visits to the university library and it made me reflect that today, libraries are about knowledge that is available - not just from bookshelves but also through the internet and computers-knowledge just at your fingertips. That is an amazing concept*  
Anita.

Eileen reflected that:

*I have had a life-giving experience during my ten weeks here in DCU. This experience is truly pioneering. Facilitating older people to access learning opportunities at third level has been truly enlightening for me.*

Margaret also reiterates this theme when she says:

*Saturdays can never be the same again; the enthusiasm generated by the class is truly enlightening!* Margaret

The concept of universities as a place to meet with other people of all ages and this older student expressed having an opportunity to be immersed in other cultures:

*Coming to DCU at all has been a learning experience. It is the most wonderful way of meeting different nationalities. I think as older people we are often afraid to try something new or to meet someone new and in DCU, we have a perfect milieu to expand our ideas and assimilate differences.* Brendan

From this study, it is evident that participation in third level learning today is a positive experience for the older people who participated in this study.

This brings a sense of excitement as expressed by Patrick in realizing an opportunity that had been missed in the past. In addition, it promoted a concept of ‘*enlightenment*’ for some of the students who participated in the study.

### **5.4.3 Breaking down the Digital Divide**

A second theme, which emerged very strongly from this study, was that the older people were facilitated in breaking down their fear of technology when they and the younger students were teaching and learning together. This was especially through the sharing of knowledge of information technology and introduction to digital media, in particular through their understanding of the use of emails, the internet, social media and blogging. Moreover, the sharing of information technology skills became an integral part of breaking down the perceptions of generational divides. This is reflected in the following comments of the older students:

*I feel part of society in a completely new way. It is wonderful. I learned new ways of learning through the social web site and so I can keep in touch with classmates on line until we meet up again (in the university). I do not feel any different to the younger generation now that I am using the technology in the same way as they are using it. Josephine*

*The whole exchange between students, older people and tutors was fun and interesting. There was a great social benefit for us older people. Learning to skype and use the internet makes you feel part of a big world out there. Maura*

*It has opened a window for us older learners to the world of the internet, emails, skype and blogging. It is a wonderful feeling. We are not going to stop now. Gretta*

*Learning how to use the keyboard and learning how to use the internet. This is the new way to read and write for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Joe*

Mary, one of the older students, reflected on this concept when she spoke at the DCU ILP Conference in May 2010. Mary uses the metaphorical concept

of being “taken on a magical carpet ride through the world of computing”:

She reflects that:

*In addition, this is where the ICT module of the Intergenerational Learning Project comes in. Our tutors and student volunteers, face the challenge of bringing us along with them; they demonstrate with great flair and imagination, the links that we barely knew existed, between our computers and our mobile phones and cameras; to say nothing of the whole new world of Tweets and Blogs!. They have taken us on a magical carpet ride through the world of computing and what it can do for us. They unlocked the mysteries of new technologies; particularly mindful of the fact that most of us had come lately to the wonders of computing. I have been a part of the project since the beginning and I am proud to be associated with it. I have had the pleasure of studying and working with committed and talented people, of all age groups. Mary*

Patrick also reflects on the benefits for him of being engaged in the technology:

*My daughter (names daughter) upon leaving home and getting married, said to me:” Dad, I am leaving my computer with you, why do not you learn how to use it, do a course on it? “That computer would still be lying in the corner of the sitting room, unused, if the project hadn’t come along. Our first term started 8<sup>th</sup> march, 2008, teaching us the older generation how to catch up on IT skills and not be afraid of it, we learned about Microsoft word, emails and the Internet, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> term, at this stage we have learned how to book holidays, theatre and cinema tickets online, do our banking, digital camera, download music, we have learned about physics and creative writing; we are now just finishing our fourth term, and we have, like the President of the United States, learned how to Twitter and blog. Like so many of the older generation, we do dare to dream, and fulfill our great desire for further education. The IT class has helped me to fulfill this dream. I have gained a confidence that is not going to stop. Patrick*

The sense that inclusion in the digital age brings with it a greater connection with family and friends in general is reflected in the words of an older student Helen:

*To gain knowledge of the computer/internet and sending emails to family and friends has been the best thing for me. As an older person having left school at fourteen, this is a big step for me. It has given me a sense of achievement. Early days yet! Helen*

Jean a mature student who is a tutor on the programme reflects on how the thoughts of the older participants on the project mirror her introduction to ICT as a progression to third level learning. She reflects on how this was significant in her own progression to complete a Degree in Education and Training in DCU. Her experience enables her to recognize the courage and challenges undertaken by the older students in acquiring the ICT skills:

*At the age of forty-seven, I decided the time had come to throw myself headlong into the world of Information Communication Technology. The reason for this was that I could see my husband and two teenage sons embrace this technology with gusto and with an ease that I envied. I felt as if I was being left behind and somehow out of the loop with regard to this 'new' technology. This experience was the catalyst to being propelled into an exciting and wonderful world, that of education. Following a career guidance chat, again in a College of Further Education, I nervously undertook a degree in Education Studies. As I had never had the opportunity to go to University, and harbouring a secret desire to teach, I embarked on my study for four years. This resulted in my proud graduation from Dublin City University with my peers and friends in 2009. What I have learnt from my experience is that it is a courageous thing to embark on an educational journey as a mature student. However, as with everything in life, the sacrifice has a huge payback element to it. One also brings a wisdom and application to one's study; however, on the other side there are the many commitments to be juggled and the limited energy levels. I have also learnt that it takes motivation to both begin a new learning experience and to continue with it. A good guide in the form of a teacher, tutor or facilitator in the role of motivator, is crucial. Jean*

Joe an older student reflected on previous historical innovations that shaped Ireland and used these to explain how he believed that integration into the skills and competences of technology was now a new way for older people to become more fully integrated into society.

*Previously in Ireland there have been great sociological watersheds, which have brought us into the new world. The early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw us as a nation been immersed into electrification. This was very progressive for us but back then, many people feared the new ways of life that electricity would bring. Now when we look back, we see the immense advantage that electricity brought for all of us. In the same way, having ICT skills is the new way to read and write for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The focus on social technologies is this courses strength. At the start of the year, I was homeless and illiterate. I was homeless because I did not have an email address and I was illiterate because I did not know how to use the internet. That is how important it is. It never occurred to me before this year to learn to use computers. Now that I am, I wonder why I did not start sooner. All people including older people should have these skills to help break down social isolation and a feeling that they are being left behind. Joe*

#### **5.4.4. Learning Develops Mental Stimulation**

A third significant theme, which emerged for the older students, was the benefits of intergenerational learning as a significant contribution to mental stimulation people. This was at one level about the acquisition of knowledge as a significant contribution to their cognitive development and continued use of mental activities. What emerged in particular were the benefits of mental-stimulation as a contribution to overall well being and self-esteem and self-efficacy. As one older student reflected that:

*Great patience from the student is every week until some little knowledge of keyboard and screen penetrated this older brain. I feel great. Now I get to use my brain to study what interests me. ...I really do appreciate the friendship and mental stimulation. The classes do for my mind what regular exercise does for my body. What a long way Ireland has come in the last eighty-one years. Frances*

Another student reflected that:

*I honestly do not think I would have learned so well without the help of the one to one teaching by the students. My brain can only remember a small amount of information at a time, as I get very confused with so much being taught at one time. My tutor explains things and makes it so easy to understand. They are so*

*patient. It keeps the mind active and provides a very useful and important skill. Cora*

The following four older people reflect on the close link between the benefits of a stimulated mind associated with the use or acquisition of internet skills.

*Healthy minds makes for healthy bodies! Computing is particularly suitable as an educational and informational tool for the housebound older person also the social aspect of exchanging ideas (and problems) is invaluable. Rita*

*Some of us our minds become “stale” or dormant if we do not get to use them on a regular basis. Here in DCU we get to use your mind to think through what the student has explained to us that day. It is not always as easy to remember this information when you are in your own home. Cora*

*The interaction between the young and old and the mental stimulation that the older people get are the benefits of this project .The young students are endlessly patient and don't show any condescension to the older people. Now I realize I still have a brain! Phil*

*In an ageing society, the use of computers, mobile phones, digital camera's helps keep the brain active in older people. With the help of Skype, they can stay in contact with friends and family especially if they are housebound for short or longer periods. This project is an excellent way for two opposite age groups to interact with one another. Joan*

These latter reflections concur with the literature and current scientific research, which emphasizes that a healthy mind and mental stimulation in ageing has the potential to lead to a greater quality of life for older people. This is further developed in Chapter 7.

#### **5.4.5 Developing Self-Esteem and Confidence of Older People**

The fourth significant theme, which emerged for the older students through their participation in this study, was the development of their self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-confidence. An older student reflected that:

*I definitely feel more confident-I am not feeling “left out” in a way that I did before. I feel I can keep up with the rest of the world eg when on the TV email addresses are the norm now .Before this I felt a bit lost, but now a whole new world has opened up. It is wonderful. Breda*

Molly, another older student reflected that:

*This intergenerational project has now become part of my life. I have made friends. It has inspired me and given me the confidence to take up writing again. I would like to have an opportunity to share the information and knowledge I have gained in my working in Community Development and Complimentary medicine. Molly*

John and Mary have also reiterated the theme of development of confidence and self-esteem when they said:

*This has really helped my self-confidence. I never thought I would be able to go on the computer and find it so interesting. I want to learn more and more. John*

*The project has definitely developed my confidence. The students were so open and friendly that they created an atmosphere, which enabled me to do a presentation. The encouragement and feedback I got from the students built on my self-esteem. Mary*

## **5.5 Benefits for Third Level Students**

**The four themes which emerged for the DCU students who participated in the study are as follows:**

- **Theme 1.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to the enhancement of high quality learning for third level students.
- **Theme 2.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to the personal and professional development of the third level students who participated in the study.
- **Theme 3.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to knowledge-sharing for the third level students who participated in the study.

- **Theme 4.** Intergenerational learning as a contribution to the development of self-confidence and self-efficacy for the DCU students who participated in the study.

Some of the themes, which emerged for the younger students, were in contrast to those of the older students. For example, the DCU students who participated in the project had already acquired the relevant ICT skills; therefore, this was not an issue for them. Instead, the transfer of ICT skills facilitated by them emerged as a very significant teaching and learning tool that facilitated deep critical thinking and reflection for the DCU students. As a result, some of the DCU students analyzed how they first acquired their own ACT skills. This became a significant learning outcome for them helping them to transfer this knowledge to enable the older students to acquire the same information technology skills

This enabled them to acquire new teaching competences and knowledge from their new role as tutor/mentor.

### **5.5.1 Contribution to High Quality Learning for Third Level Students**

Participation in the project has been identified as a theme, which has enhanced the learning of the third level students who participated. The transfer of ACT skills and the way in which the older students acquire these skills has in itself become a medium through which the DCU students critically reflected on their own learning. The following is an example of the critical thinking and reflection of the DCU students.

*I have found myself re-learning all these new technologies along with the older learners. I have had to stop and evaluate everything I know and ask myself how I know it and how did I react the first time I was presented with this technology? It has made me much more aware of usability and accessibility issues, which are very important for my studies. Mark*

*If you were to perhaps sum up the basic principle upon which this program was founded, a quotation from Gilbert K. Chesterton, an English writer, would not be a million miles*

*away from the truth,” Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” I do not think it is too far-fetched to equate the experiences of the DCU students and the older learners to this quotation. Jenny*

*By simply interacting with older people, DCU students, as mentors, experience a broader education. Education empowers people. It fuels mental and physical well-being. It encourages active participation in society. A basic human need is to communicate. Communication is ageless. Older people have a voice. The course affords the opportunity to share, exchange, and learn new skills in a relaxed atmosphere. Greg*

Ian a post-graduate master’s student also reflects on the rewarding aspect of the project.

*I am a master’s student myself and have to take complex computer classes such as JAVA. I find such classes challenging and initially daunting. I can therefore empathise with the learners on how complicated learning new computer skills can seem at first. I find myself that persistence, practice and determination are the key to acquiring new computer competencies. Watching the learners growing in confidence and in skill level was rewarding to watch and be a part of. Computer competencies are invaluable and can open up a whole new world for this group. Ian*

Anna an undergraduate DCU student reflects that:

*Yes, my confidence has improved a lot. I have realised that I have information, which is beneficial to others and helpful. I also feel better and more at ease with people my own age in my class. I feel better about answering questions. Anna*

Xinran or Sunny an international student who participated in the project provides her insights and reflections on how the project has enhanced her learning during her time studying in DCU for the academic year 2009-2010.

*My name is Xinran. I like people to call me by my English name-- Sunny, because it seems hard for them to pronounce my Chinese name :-). I am an international student studying in DCU Business School. I am a final year student but this is the first year I come in Dublin. Actually, I am curious about everything here, especially the Irish lifestyle. Thus, while receiving Trudy’s email about the Intergenerational Learning Project, I was attracted and planned to*

*participate to be a volunteer of it. It provides a platform for me to get familiar with Irish culture and lifestyle. At the beginning, I was worried that the language barriers and culture differences between the learners and I might be a big problem, but it turned out that my fears were all for naught. They were like my grandparents, how can I feel nervous while facing them? Their sincerity and kindness closed our distances, their serious desire of lifelong learning deeply impressed me, and their sense of humour often delighted me. I really enjoy the time during the class. It is full of joy. No pressure or burden for the older learners and me. Personally, I have learnt a lot from the project. By listening to what the tutor said, I have learnt computer words, and practised how to express my computer and internet knowledge through English to let the learner understand easily. In addition, it is a kind of challenge for me. By communicating with older learners, I have learnt the way they live, their family, the old and new Dublin etc. What I have learnt is not only the knowledge but also the Irish culture. It is significant for a foreigner to get adapted to a new environment. The experience is a treasure for me. I really appreciate the chance that this project provides me. I feel a great sense of achievement when the learner can send email, when they can type their stories in Microsoft Word, when they can play online games, when they can watch videos online, when they can draw pictures etc. Step by step, they gradually can use computers as we students do daily. I am proud of them. They deserve to be respected.*

I totally support what Joan said, *'This project is not just about teaching older learners ICT skills - it is about establishing a learning community. In this environment, learning and knowledge is valued and appreciated, and each one of us involved is both a transmitter and receiver of this knowledge'*.

Martha an international student also comments on the benefits for her:

*What I learned ranges from computer stuff I didn't know (or have done differently in the past,) over websites etc, I didn't know or haven't used (e.g. IGoogle, the personalized Google site) to cultural things such as what it was like to grow up in Ireland not only as a current young adult but during the 1940's and 50's, how active older people are, how they see life etc. I also learned to better communicate. While students like (names older student) needed much less help, other students need more detailed explanations or things explained and shown much more often in different ways. Martha*

James a postgraduate student reflects that:

*The project put in context the true power of the internet as a means of communication, in that it bridges the gap that stretch between family, continents, language, age and culture....While I appreciate that this project was not built with my learning in mind, I have to confess that I learnt quite a bit during the few weeks. During the course of this project, I discovered benefits that being part of a team can have on the performance and experience of everyone present. The knowledge base is significantly larger than any one person might hope to have, ensuring every issue that a learner may have can be addressed successfully. James*

### **5.5.2. Contribution to Personal and Professional Development of Third Level Students**

This was manifested for the DCU students in terms of developing their professional skills but also in terms of developing their personal learning: Deborah a DCU student reflects on this theme when she said:

*I think the sharing of knowledge aspect of the course is hugely important. .... Often I find that the exchange of knowledge is not tangible but instead comes in the form of self-development for myself personally. I have found this very valuable both in my academic and workplace environments. Personally, the project has helped me grow in confidence and greatly enhanced my knowledge of what it means to both learn and teach. I have stood in front of a class for the first time and taught a subject I am passionate about. I have spoken at a conference in front of a scarily large audience. I have grown to become comfortable with situations, which I would have gone to the ends of the earth to avoid before I joined the Project just over a year ago. Mark*

Anna, another international student also reflects on the benefits for her:

*I do not consider myself a computer expert, but teaching has definitely developed my self-confidence in relation to using computers and especially in teaching people. A wonderful experience. I would love to do it again. I would highly recommend the project. I think the benefits for both the learners and mentors are numerous. As a mentor, I have improved greatly my communication skills and received great satisfaction from helping others to learn new skills. Giving people a voice in society is a wonderful feeling.*

Emma also reflects on the personal and professional learning for him, which is evaluating his contribution to empowering older people through the transfer of information communication technology skills:

*It has given me more confidence in my teaching and communication skills. Seeing a learner use email, access You tube, google etc is very rewarding. They are using what you have taught them over the past few weeks. It is a great feeling and confidence booster to give people a voice and the skills to communicate. I believe the DCU Intergenerational programme has allowed me to give the 50 plus generation a voice in our community Emma*

Alison reflects on her participation in the project as a way of enabling her to choose her career path in the future:

*My name is Alison, I'm 21 and I am a second year business student in DCU and I've been a DCU student volunteer on the Intergenerational Learning Project since September 2009. I decided to join the Project, as I love helping people out and meeting new people. I also wanted to get some experience in IT, to see if it was an option to pursue as a career.*

*This Project has provided me many opportunities such as*

- *Having fun outside the normal college hours*
- *Making a difference in someone's life*
- *It is good for your CV!*
- *Become part of a team (all working together with the same goals in mind)*
- *Meeting new people from a variety of age groups and cultures*
- *Giving you a position within the community*
- *Giving you a sense of pride; feeling needed and valued*

*Personally, the Project has helped my chances of gaining employment and has influenced my career choice as I am now considering a career in IT. It has improved my communication and social skills, promoted my self-esteem and increased my confidence.*

Mark also reflects on how the project helped him with his own academic presentations and workplace situations:

*It really helps me with academic presentations and workplace situations. The opportunities the DCU Intergenerational Project has given me are invaluable. Of course, self-esteem can easily be boosted with the satisfaction gained from teaching a new topic and seeing “the penny drop.” Mark*

Martha an international student commented on the personal benefits for her:

*Personally, I found the Saturday mornings to bring a bit of balance to the stress of college life. While I was stressed with assignments before, I found I was switching off during the classes on Saturdays and was in a much better mood afterwards. I believe this was due to the fun we usually had with the tutors and the older learners. I found it very rewarding to offer help and just sit beside them, as well as exchanging ‘private’ stuff about their daily life and worries and mine Martha*

*The experience proved very enjoyable for me and I would highly recommend anyone who is interested to get involved. I also want to commend the older students for their proactive approach in embracing the technology and making the experience so enjoyable and rewarding. Ruaidhri*

### **5.5.3 Contribution to Shared Knowledge for Third Level Students**

The facilitation of transfer of knowledge in an upward/downward mode of learning is achieved through informal as well as formal teaching and learning opportunities for the DCU students. This was mainly evidenced in the evaluation of the informal learning opportunities shared in the dialogue between the older and younger students during the tea/coffee break each Saturday morning. This formal and informal learning is illustrated in the following reflections of the DCU students who participated in the study:

*There is of course a large social aspect to the Saturday morning classes. I have met some amazing people, people with incredible determinism and patience. People with towering ambition and admirable modesty. The project has gone from strength to strength in recent times and I feel honoured to be a part of it as it gains momentum and strives for the attention and development it needs and deserves. Mark*

*To say that all the knowledge is passed from student to learner is not true at all, in fact, since taking part in the programme I*

*have added to my social-networking repertoire. I can now count twitter, blogging and iGoogle as the new 'skills' I have taken on. And I hope the skills acquired by the older learners are the same with additional confidence boost and a general I-am-going-to-try-it-and-see-what-happens, a recipe for success in most situations In fact, although IT is a big part of the course, it is the cup of tea and the banter of the lunch break or between typing that makes the program what it is. Jenny*

Emma, a DCU undergraduate student also highlights the social benefits of the project for her. This is demonstrated in the forming of a friendship with the older student:

*I really enjoyed developing a learning relationship as well as a friendship with my student (older person). Sharing what I had done and planned during the week or the weekend. It also put college worries into perspective. I felt a real sense of achievement and pride when seeing the progress my student made throughout the week. Emma*

*My student also used google to show me one of his dream destinations (Montana) and told me all he knew about it. This simple amazement at doing something new, which may seem simple to us (DCU students), is magical! Jane*

*After this I feel more comfortable and at ease around older people. Talking about what we would watch on the TV on a Saturday night or talking to the older people about my experiences in foreign countries helped. Also hearing some of their life stories were very interesting and informative. Mike*

*I do not know if I have learned anything in a concrete or definitive way, but I have experienced the camaraderie of the older learners in our weekly interactions and learning to build new friendships. Cian*

Ruaidhri reflects that:

*The (older) students in my opinion are expert communicators. The descriptive nature and style of language used in both the stories and some emails allowed me to create clear images in my head of the situations they were describing. By writing in this fashion, the messages carried much more meaning and I was amazed about how engrossed I became in them and how much attention they commanded. The expressive style of*

*language is in stark contrast to the much more concise style I have become accustomed to in online communication. I feel that the emphasis on description and meaning which I have learned from the (older) students is something I will definitely bear in mind for my future online communications.*

#### **5.5.4 Contribution to Development of Self-Confidence for DCU Students**

The benefits of the transfer of knowledge, in the development of self esteem and self confidence as a theme s has also emerged as a significant theme for the DCU students

Jane reflects on this when she says:

*This class has definitely helped me to develop my self-confidence. I have always been afraid of talking to people that I do not know but now it comes naturally. I cannot wait each Saturday to meet the older learner because every Saturdays is different. It is so nice to realize that you can help someone share your knowledge and see how happy that person you are working with after learning something new.*

*I have never helped older learners before with IT related topics. I thoroughly enjoyed volunteering with this programme, and it has shown me that I have developed my communication skills and my self-confidence with presenting and interacting with a new group of students. Brian*

*The Internet and ICT in general has so much to give to the older generation. I love the breakthrough moments we see in class every week when the learners discover something new. Whether it is Twitter, Facebook or even a simple email to a son or daughter in Australia, there is a whole world of technology out there to be taken advantage of. I have listened to the learners speak about how all this new technology is empowering and how online communities alleviate feelings of isolation. This is why the Intergenerational Project is so valuable; it fosters a learning environment, which is informal, fun and very effective. It has provided me with a self-confidence that I believe I have gained through participation in a project such as the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project. Mark*

Melissa and Helena, two DCU students also reflect on the notion of participation in the project as a way to develop the self-esteem or sense of empowerment.

*In a way, my self-esteem has been helped in that every Saturday morning; I am reminded that I have worthwhile knowledge to pass on. It has been a great experience for me. I enjoy coming in on the Saturday to banter with the older learners and pick up a few skills myself as I pass on my own skills. It would be a shame if (the project) did not continue. Melissa*

*I am impressed with the older learner's desire and interest to learn about technology, and to improve their skills. They have really shown me that it is never too late to start something new or to build on skills. Learning new skills empowers us students, and allows the older learners to achieve many things on an individual basis. Helena*

## **5.6 Summary**

What can be clearly seen from the data analysis findings is that the **transfer** of ICT skills or indeed other skills fosters mutual understanding between generations. Computer competency fosters the development of additional skills and facilitates self-efficacy or self-confidence for older and younger students. The use of ICT for older people is symbolic of the fact that their life is based on future as well as past contexts

## **Chapter 6: Data Analysis Part 2**

### **6.0 Benefits for Higher Education Learning**

What emerged from the DCU ILP data analysis were three themes, which imply benefits of higher education by engaging older people in learning opportunities with younger students at third level. These were:

#### **Theme 1. Intergenerational Learning at third level generates intellectual insight and innovative thinking**

The expertise and insight shared between retired older people and third level students has the potential to contribute to intellectual insight and innovative thinking at third level. This is through engaging students and older people in discipline- specific and interdisciplinary concepts, methods and theories to influence developments and thinking at third level.

#### **Theme 2. Intergenerational Learning facilitates the university to be socially engaged**

By forging links that foster community enrichment and networks between higher-level institutions and organizations working for the betterment of older people in society. This enables students to be actively involved in local, national and international communities and to foster a commitment to civic engagement and development

#### **Theme 3. Intergenerational learning fosters a culture of lifelong learning at third level**

The sharing of tacit learning, prior learning and experiential learning is a significant contribution to third level learning for both older and younger students. This fosters and develops problem-solving skills, entrepreneurial thinking, flexibility and adaptability. This enables third level students and older people to focus on the translation and application of knowledge which as stated by DCU is *'to apply disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge*

*and understanding to develop practicable applications to real-life situations in the workplace and in society.*' (DCU Strategic Plan 2010-2012). In Chapter 6, each of the themes is evaluated by highlighting key reflections shared by both the older and younger students. These reflections demonstrate the insight, the tacit knowledge and the lived experience engaged in the dialogue, which was chosen to illuminate the potential of this rich narrative for third level learning.

## **6.1. Generates Intellectual Insight and Innovative Thinking**

6.1.1 An example of intergenerational learning as an innovative change - agent in generating intellectual insight and innovative thinking emerged through a series of interviews conducted with the older students. One of these interviews occurred with Molly. During the course of this interview, five key themes emerged which determined her understanding of the philosophical constructs of what defines university learning today: These were.

- (1) The need to review university learning.
- (2) The reappraisal of the original meaning of education and learning.
- (3) Current thinking associated with the definition of university learning.
- (4) Her appraisal of the benefits of her lack of access to university learning in her youth.
- (5) An evaluation of the role of the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project Molly's reflections define key themes which illuminate the wider global debate of what defines university learning today.

In this interview, Molly reflects that:

*I think we have come to a place where we need to review what education is and I think it has been taken over by business people and that is not the original meaning of education.*

Molly defines the original meaning of education:

*Education is to draw out and help people to think for themselves.*

She provides a critique of what she deems to be the difficulty with university learning today.

*I think this is where we have gone wrong in this country. Why we have this whole, recession is because people were taught to think in a certain way and that is what I think about universities. There is a way that you answer questions that will get you full marks. In addition, my idea of education is where like .... You see I think that university learning creates a certain mindset.*

She reflects on her not having received an opportunity to go to university when she was younger and she perceives university learning to be set within a narrow limited mind- frame of learning.

*I was reading Huxley's essays, and I mean when I read all of these things, they really confirm what I have always believed, and that is that I am glad that I did not go to university when I was young. I am really; glad because my mind was not molded in that way.*

Molly provides a reflection on her ideas of intergenerational learning at third level:

*I actually think that the notion of intergenerational learning is education. This is where people learn about themselves and learn from each other and from the material that is available to them. I think it is important for different people of different generations and different class to be part of university learning –before it was mostly people from the middle class who were almost trained to think in that way, and to think of university education as their birthright, almost.*

If Molly is negative about some of the current trends in university learning she also appraises what is good about university learning today:

*I tell you what I think is good about university. I think university thinking has-what I do not have-, which is a discipline. For example, the way of writing things up, a system of research-all of that-but then...(pause) how will I put it...you see I think we are in this mess that we are in (reference to the economic*

*recession) because. I think that education and intelligence are two different things. I think this experiment here (Intergenerational Learning)- is a great start.*

*Education is to draw out and help people to think for themselves. I think this is where we have gone wrong in this country.*

This reflection from Molly opens up a very wide debate on the complex issue of what defines education and in more specific terms, what defines third level learning today. It is enlightening that Molly uses the initial definition of education, which derives from the Greek word to draw out 'educare'. She engages in a debate and a critical reflection on making sense of the concept of education, a debate that is both universal and timeless. Her thinking reflects the thinking of Professor Simon Marginsen who in a recent conference in DCU (February 2011), spoke of 'the malaise of current university learning.' This he believes can be attributed to the universities being very closely aligned to corporate capital and neo-liberalism, which 'fails to value the collective imagination as an end in itself.' (DCU, February 2011).

Jeanie another older DCU student explains what the course meant to her because of her participation:

*I first heard about the courses (DCU ILP) when I belonged to a group called OWN which is the Older Women's Network. The first course I did was in communications and I would have done anything to come and be together with a group that I know were so alive and were helping one another and working together. And you see the younger people have so much to give and they have all kinds of new ideas and that's wonderful but they need to be challenged as absolutely older people need to be challenged and they need to be channeled into the areas where they can share their experience and that's what I really loved about the Saturday mornings... Well it certainly increases your confidence in yourself and helps you to believe in what you can do because as you get older you pick up this atmosphere that you're an older person and that we don't need you any more, you haven't got anything valuable to contribute but that's not what this course is all about..*

Jack one of the older students reflected on the 'socio-academic aspect' of the project.

*You have the kind of social academic thing which is what happens in universities where there are people studying together and when they come together for recreational time and you are talking about the things you learn and that seems to reach your mind, that kind of thing that you can find in universities and schools, I'm not sure what you'd call it, but like a socio-academic situation....it's like the learning is a nuance or a mystery that you didn't know about. In addition, you can talk to the DCU students that are a different learning than at home or studying by mail and things like that. Therefore, it is great to get together and be together because when you go to class you are walking and rushing but when you settle down you notices how the learning increases your brainpower and knowledge power. Even for elderly people, learning at this stage is good and the communal aspect of it as well it increases your ability to learn.*

Albert Einstein defined education as that 'which remains after one has forgotten, what one has learned in school.' Martin Luther King jnr defines education, as 'The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education.' As these older students reveal their life stories through narrative [See Appendix F] there is a strong sense that their lives, their learning and education represents the definition of education alluded to in the words of Einstein and Martin Luther King.

## **6.2 Inclusion of Older People in Higher Education**

Martin an older person also provides a critique on the benefits of participation in third level learning with the inclusion of older people. He draws on the metaphor of *gates opening in the wall* to demonstrate the need to open up university learning to older people. In the first conference, which was held in 2008 in DCU to introduce the DCU ILP to the campus and to provide certificates of participation to both the older and younger students, this was Martin's reflections:

*I want you, just for a moment, to imagine you are walking along a road. To one side is a high wall, made of stone and concrete. There are gates in the wall but they are closed and locked. You can hear voices from behind the wall but not the words being spoken. Then you hear someone call your name. You look and watch, as the wall becomes translucent - and then - transparent. A person inside points and you see a gate has opened in the wall. You step inside to find a new world; a place where people want to learn and want to teach, and want to share their world.*

*The wall does not really exist; we build it in our lives and in our heads. However, it takes generous and thoughtful people to show us that it is not a real, tangible obstacle. The Gateway Pilot study (DCU ILP) is an imaginative and bold initiative and it is one that I feel will have positive consequences in the future. Great rivers flow from tiny springs...Age does not dull your appetite for knowledge; it merely refines the palate.*

Martin's reflections demonstrate the need to engage older people in third level learning since many older people bring with them an innate intuitive understanding of reflection, critique, tacit knowledge and experiential learning. Many of them bring a richness of narrative and philosophical understanding of meaningful life experiences that has the potential to be shared with younger third level students. This was evident in the reflections of Jeanie an older student who alludes to the 'wealth of information' of older people. She says:

*I did this launching of a book the other day about how to write memoirs and one of the things I feel is so important for older people. There is a wealth of information that they have and it can be lost, and experiences they had written when they were younger and if they can just get down and write the stuff out then those things can last for people coming on, younger people too and it is important that we share these experiences. How often is it that you look at histories and they are full of facts and stuff but if you get the person that has lived through it, they understand their experiences and they can share that. That is a wonderful way to learn from what has happened in the past and how things have been for different people. I really believe it is a wonderful thing to do and I really believe that what you're starting to do with these intergenerational groups is very valuable and important for now, and not to lose all the people that have lived through the last 60-70 years. So much has*

*happened in the last even 10, 20 years that it is important that it is not lost. We can see where we have come from and where we are now.*

Philosophical reflections are also evidenced in the data from the DCU students.

### **6.2.1 Impact on narrative of younger students**

An example of the impact of the older people's participation in the DCU ILP is reflected in the narrative of **Eimear** a student volunteer and currently now a tutor on the programme. She reflects on the benefits of her engagement with the older students.

*I am a volunteer on the Intergenerational Learning Project in DCU. I had previously worked in the community with people of all ages returning to education, a job that I really enjoyed but had to leave due to a health condition – Chronic Naturopathic Pain. When I lost my job, I felt like I had lost my worth to society, which, in turn led to the loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. Because of my condition, I had to keep deferring modules and it has taken me longer to get to my final year in DCU. Each year I would watch my classmates move on and graduate, this made me feel inadequate and I would sometimes get down about it as I felt I would never get to that point of achieving my qualification. Sometimes I would ignore the warning signs that my body was sending me and try to push myself just so I could “keep up” with everyone else, this however would only result in me suffering another health setback and I would need to take longer to recover. One of the most important things that I have learnt from my older friends on the Project is to ‘learn for the love of learning’. The enthusiasm and eagerness they show for learning is remarkable. They have taught me to change my attitude to learning. I no longer feel the need to finish my degree as quickly as I can or worry about the fact that it will have taken me longer than my fellow students to graduate. My qualification is only the destination, I now realize that the important point is to enjoy the journey and make the most of every learning opportunity along the way. Volunteering on the Intergenerational Learning Project has done so much for me. It has given me the opportunity to facilitate the older learners and teach them some IT skills. This has greatly improved my confidence and self-esteem. The older learners are my teachers*

*too. They tell me stories of their life experiences, they give good advice, and they teach what we cannot learn from books - life skills.*

Eimear's narrative is reminiscent of the concepts of learning as transformational which is a theory that is predominant in the work of Boyd (1989) and Mezirow (1981, 1994, and 1997).

6.2.2 Another example of intellectual insight is expressed here in the narrative of P J an older student. PJ demonstrates the benefits of the inclusion of the tacit knowledge of the older people in third level learning. This was his reflections at the DCU Intergenerational Learning Conference held in May 2010.

*A Chinese Proverb says: Every journey begins with a single step. Today we have arrived at a defining moment on that journey. Back in February 2008 I was one of about fifty people who assembled at the Helix to be brought across to the Business School. This was to be the start of a unique educational journey here in the DCU. This was a new challenge to most of us. I think back on 2008 and the intervening journey since. Over the two years, the modules have been expanded. To the initial, ones (Information Technology and Media) were added creative writing and science. This Intergenerational Learning Project is a shared experience between the DCU students and older learners. What impressed me from the start was the idea of the older learner bringing the experiences of life and all that it entails into a third level education centre. The DCU students brought youth energy, enthusiasm and an eagerness to facilitate which has proved very positive and successful. There was also a breaking down of any barriers that may have existed on any level. A cultural exchange of views, which have enriched everyone.*

PJ also reflects on how his participation in the project has enabled him to write creatively and to participate in further learning especially in opening up learning opportunities in radio broadcasting:

*The first semester saw me doing the media module; I found it opened my views and perception of the media in general and its position in society. A thing I remember very well is the main news headlines; also, its many sub headings. As I worked with*

*Age Action Ireland, and had the experience of being in a radio studio, the radio module appealed to me. We were asked to submit a short piece for radio. I came across a speech that Mother Teresa of Calcutta gave to the UN in New York shortly before her death. It was dealing with world poverty. My favourite line was and I quote, "The greatest poverty in the world is the poverty of spirit." In addition, we know how true that statement is. I presented a portion of that speech and received great feedback. This encouraged me to pursue radio further and recently I did an eight-week course in Near 90 FM. I shadowed a magazine programme on the station two weeks ago and there is more radio work to follow.*

PJ summarises what the project has meant for him because of his participation:

*A great atmosphere of learning and laughter, friendship and camaraderie has made this project a very successful journey. There is scope to expand the module menu even more. A great start has been made; today is the icing on the cake. I must say it was a great personal experience. Education is a wonderful gift to be enjoyed and cherished at any age. Let the journey continue- Share it, It works both ways.*

Eileen another older student also mirrors P.J's experience when she said:

*Really enjoyed the experience. The amount of material covered was amazing. As usual, I wanted to have a go at everything. One of the most valuable lessons I learned was the astonishing abilities of ordinary people and the lesson that learning truly is for life and for everybody.*

### **6.3 Facilitates University to be socially engaged**

A second theme, which emerged, was the benefits to the University of Being Socially engaged through intergenerational learning. This occurs through forging links that foster community enrichment and networks between higher-level institutions and organizations working for the betterment of older people in society. This enables DCU students to be actively involved in local, national and international communities and so foster a commitment to civic engagement and development. This is commonly known as service learning. An example of this significant link is

expressed in the words of Nicola Donnelly the Communications officer for CARDI (Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland). These were her reflections when she wrote on the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project Blog:

*We are living in what the World Health Organisation have called the “age of ageing” where longer life spans and low birth rates mean that most developed countries are experiencing significant population shifts so that the proportion of older people is growing. The role of the internet in society is also growing and increasingly there are concerns about how the generations communicate across age boundaries and the importance of understanding how older people access and use new communications is ever more relevant.*

*Considering how the Internet is becoming a fundamental tool in everyday life for shopping, banking, booking travel and holidays, finding information and accessing government services, and a forum for creative self expression it is important that older people are not excluded or disadvantaged.*

*Projects such as DCU’s Intergenerational Learning Project tackle this issue in an innovative and creative way. By bringing together younger students with older learners, the project is not only building up basic online skills, showing how useful the internet can be and encouraging ongoing online participation but it is also facilitating a dual exchange of knowledge and skills between generations. There is no doubt that skills training has a vital role in tackling the issue of digital exclusion but by also bridging the generational gap this project opens up many other avenues of opportunity beneficial to younger and older participants.*

Nicola Donnelly, Communications officer (CARDI) Centre for Ageing and Research Development in Ireland. (See appendix J)

Maura an older student reflects on this benefit:

*Community involvement-reaching out. This brings people out of their own narrow environment and moves them into a “no problem” environment.*

*In bringing the university to the community, it makes the university a more accessible and vibrant place. I have lived close to the college here for many years but never saw myself as*

*part of it. That is not until this project came along. James older student*

Martha an undergraduate student refers to the benefit of the project as a means to provide social engagement or volunteering opportunities for the DCU students.

*...I think the university benefits from it (the DCU ILP) in terms of giving students the opportunity to participate in volunteering. The careers services preaches that volunteering is substantial in terms of acquiring needed skills etc, but not enough is offered to make volunteering for students more accessible. Offering such a project that is so flexible to current DCU students is great to get more students to participate in volunteering because it is on campus.....on the other hand it is good for the university to have older people on campus who are a source of learning for younger students and who promote the university with their friends or grand-children who may consider DCU when applying to third level education Martha*

This would concur with the reflections of the older people, the DCU students and academic staff in DCU that the provision of a space where both older and younger people can meet and learn together provides a very significant learning opportunity that transcends artificial divides such as age, geographic and cultural divisions. In short, it provides a medium to bring the university to the community outside.

#### **6.4 Supports Culture of Lifelong Learning in Higher Education**

The presence of older learners on campus who are actively involved in teaching, learning and research activities presents a conceptual understanding that life-long learning is not just an abstract concept but does in fact engage people in the later stages of life. It demonstrates the higher education commitment to the philosophy that learning is in fact life-long. Julie a tutor on the programme and a former student who completed her degree in Education and Training in DCU reflected that:

*Within my degree, I took a module on Lifelong Learning. Each Saturday, within our classroom this comes to life in a real sense.*  
Julie DCU alumni

Karen an undergraduate student reflects on her engagement with the older students and how their interest in learning has inspired her:

*The project has shown me that if you are interested in learning, nothing is impossible. It has also shown that there should be more investment in projects such as this and not only focus on younger initiatives. The older generation is an integral part of society and they should be acknowledged as such...because of my involvement in this project, I have been thinking recently that I would really love to teach. In particular, I would love to teach older adults. The art of a good teacher is to share that passion for learning. I have learned that learning is for life.* Karen DCU student

Margaret an older student reflected on the benefits of the presence and interaction between both older and younger people learning together on a third level campus;

*It makes them look at life through the older student and changes their outlook on life as they can see the problems and challenges they themselves may face in the future and know that if we have come through these problems and challenges so they also can come through them.* Margaret older student

Martha a DCU international student also reflects that:

*....It is proven that lifelong learning supports a better quality of life. If the project can be expanded to a larger audience across Dublin and across Ireland, making learning in general and between generations more accessible, I am sure that the project will benefit Irish society by happier and healthier older people. If in the long term, the older generations become more involved through the project they will cause less costs and may even be able to stay longer in the workforce.*

## 6.5. Significant Contribution to Life Long Learning

An example of this richness of learning through shared experiential learning is reiterated in the words of Molly, an older student when in an interview with the researcher, she reflects on her choice of reading:

*I read a lot of Buddhist. I is interested in meditation and Buddhism and meditation. I think that is another thing that is very interesting Buddhism. There was a fellow who was called Krishnamurti -I suppose he is a philosopher not recognised and I love to read his work. Of all the great writers and I have read so many of them, I suppose you can read for fun and enjoyment which I like and then I can read because I want to learn something. Now I am reading Aldos Huxley's essays and they enthrall me. Oh my god, he totally delights because he puts into words all that I have ever thought myself. For example, one of the things that make perfect sense that he writes about is, the way writers like to influence and he said –and this is true-that the only influence or mostly influence happens because the circumstances are right for people to be able to listen and bring about change.*

*I will give you an example, you know Obama, well the circumstances arrived in America for him to be elected and now, his ideas and his writings are everybody is reading. Huxley also says that sometimes and I find this to be true-people writes to influence and bring about change but their writing achieves the exact opposite.*

Her biographic narrative in many ways is as Illich (1970) described “an educational web” that threads the beginning of her early life embedded in a love of learning and simultaneously a life of emotional pain to transformation of her life today. This has chiefly occurred through her love of learning. It provides a critique of her own philosophy on education and in particular on her understanding of the values and belief systems of third level learning. It is interesting that she favours the work of Krishnamurti since it was he that said *‘There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination and finish with education. The whole of life from the moment you are born to the moment you die is a process of learning’* (Krishnamurti, 1969:48).

## 6.6. Shared Wisdom through Narrative

The concept of wisdom shared through narrative as a process of lifelong learning, as a significant contribution to third level learning is also evident in the narrative of Maria a postgraduate mature international DCU student. She shares her reflections based on her experience of working in a retirement nursing home in France:

*When I became part of the project, it was a joy for me because I had been thinking all along that there are many things lacking as far as the older people are concerned because I feel that there are many things that we (DCU students) can do for them. During my involvement with the care of older people in France, I tried to bring in certain initiatives that would bring them (the older people) up to develop their confidence. I will give you an example: While I was in France that home (retired home) was usually a place where they (the older people) came when they were sick and old so that they could look forward to a time when the Good Lord will call them. Then I went to the house. I felt that is not what they should be looking forward to. They should look to life and they should see that life is still there and the fact that they had retired due to illness and unable to function very well but they still have a place in the world and they have a place in our hearts so we should welcome them and let them feel that they belong....With the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project, I really don't think that we (the DCU students) are doing anything for them (the older students). I have come to realize that they are the one giving their time to us. You see I can recall several occasions I had to meet with them usually over the cup of tea and we had great chats. As we talked together, people (the older students) would tell you who they are, who we are and we actually discovered a lot from them .You know. When you come to spend the time, you learn a lot from them.*

Based on her experience of working with older people and managing a retirement home in France, Maria had this to reflect:

*I would say to these older learners, live this life to the fullest. They can do that by thinking that they are not too old to do anything or to accomplish anything whatsoever. So long as the life is there, let them continue to live it and continue to be that great woman or man they have always been.*

Maria's reflections and experience equates with the words of Freedman cited in Brabazon and Disch (1997; 259) that '*The awareness in age that death is closer than birth, that one most likely has more years behind than ahead, drives questions about the meaning and purpose of one's life*'. Erikson situates this impulse more broadly in any caring activity that contributes to the nurturance and spirit of future generations. Snarey, (1993) describes this as the process of enabling younger people to evaluate this concept as an '*ethically inclusive cycle of generations*.' This for Erikson is the concept of being generative.

In '*Identity, Youth and Crisis*' he explains that the qualities that go into generativity are essential for the ongoing development of society. '*Without them*' Erikson says that '*institutions wilt*' (Erikson, 1968b). In 1988, when he was eighty-six years old, Erikson told Goleman that:

*The only thing that can save us as a species is seeing how we are not thinking about future generations in the way that we live. What's lacking is generativity, a generativity that will promote positive values in the lives of the next generation.* (Goleman, 1988).

## **6.7 Reflections of Academic Staff not participating in DCU ILP**

Following her attendance at our conference '*Share IT*' works both ways which was held in May 2010, Dr Francoise Blin, the Dean of Teaching and Learning in DCU in the faculty of Humanities and Social Science reflected on her blog of the benefits of learning from the experiential learning of the older students who participated in the project.

*Today, I had the great privilege to take part in the Share IT 2010 Intergenerational Learning Conference organised by my colleague Trudy Corrigan and her team in DCU. It was wonderful. Listening to the young and older learners share their enthusiasm and passion for learning together and from each other just brought home to me once more, that this is what learning and education are about, that teaching is first and foremost about learning with and from your students.*

*The ICT and Social Media workshop..., in the afternoon was probably the best workshop I have ever attended on this topic. The stories told by the older learners on their journey through twittering and blogging were simply inspirational. I wish I could blog like them, I wish I could tell life stories the way they do. I have learned so much today.*

Sylvie Thouesny a DCU PHD student who also attended the conference also reflected on the participation of the older students in third level learning when she wrote this as part of her reflections on her blog:

*One of the older learners, sharing her experience in learning computing skills at third level, said that it was 'fun in classes. After hearing this, the first thing that came to me was the university's campaign of advertisement for recruiting new students last year, or was it two years ago? The main idea was to show the future candidates how fun the life would be with DCU. I remember the posters on the bus stops showing students having so much fun at a pool table or in a lounge that no one could resist the temptation to study at DCU. Hello! The woman was talking about having fun within the classroom, not outside it. Could the university not advertise the fun of learning within the classroom? What I can see from this conference and my own experience is that integrating mature students with young students does not seem to have the same effect as integrating young students with older learners. The latter seems to be more enjoyable for everybody*

#### **6.7.1 Progression of both the project and the older student's reflections:**

Two older students Maura and Jeanie noted in their interviews that:

*The ILP should set the standards for all the universities in Ireland as this project has many benefits for all participants and this project should go nationwide. Maura*

*I love this project. I think it is wonderful for you even to have thought of it and to bring it to fruition and that it is there now. I would like to see this stay as a centre where people could come, do a course, and do it with younger students together to know what the experience of university is like for the older person. I*

*thing it would be good to add more things in, as I said before there is a good atmosphere; it's not the same as other universities where the lecturers lecture and if you catch what they said well and good but if you don't well. However, it is a different kind of system and it should be at our leisure and ease. However, you could go deeper into the academic side, but that would depend on the person's ability...The sky can be the limit and you should not have to change it too much that way. It was a good idea to have the student's there to bring a fresh mind to it.*

One of the older students has now progressed to start a full time degree following his time with the DCU ILP. In his first writing assignment to outline his interest in his new degree course this is what he wrote:

*After retirement, I developed an interest in cookery, photography and golf and attended classes to improve my proficiency. While these were good in themselves. I really wanted something more tangible. Two years ago, I signed on as a mature student at DCU on the Intergenerational Learning Course (ILP). This was designed with the older person in mind and persons over 55 could apply...DCU students acted as mentors to the older learners and this added fun to the atmosphere on campus. It was soon afterwards that I discovered the – course at---college.*

*In approaching the (names course) I will take with me a wealth of experience gained from a lifetime involvement at work, on School Boards, on Credit Union Boards, within the Trade Union Movement and finally as a family man. Without realizing it, at the time, one learned the art of dealing with everyday issues, which presented themselves. The common denominator at all times was interaction with people. Skills were acquired naturally over a long period. To survive in the business world it was necessary to employ savvy. Applying common sense and remaining calm during conflict situations always reaped dividends...Older mature students bring a wealth of talent gained from life long experience. Enthusiasm, dedication, hard working and desire to succeed tend to be their hallmark....contributing to class discussion is not a problem, but talking too much is!! Learning how to curb and measure input might make for a more meaningful debate.... The intergenerational population on campus creates a healthier atmosphere where young and old can support and encourage each other on the journey through college....For me this is the best time to return to real learning, without fear or pressure*

*from superiors, or family. I will study because of a desire to learn. (See Appendix K).*

Their views would concur with the European Universities Charter on Life Long Learning (2008: 4) which states that ‘*Currently European societies are missing out on a huge pool of readily available human talent....widening access to higher education is not about introducing less qualified students but rather supporting all learners with the potential to benefit both themselves and society through participation in higher education.*’ Intergenerational learning has much to contribute to third level learning in terms of teaching, learning and research shared between older and younger people who participate together. The presence of older people makes concrete the philosophical concept of universities as places of learning where learning is lifelong.

## **6.8 Benefits of Intergenerational Learning to Broader Society**

The themes, which emerged from the data analysis, which relate to the benefits of intergenerational learning in society have been identified under the following headings:

Theme 1: Global Engagement through Intergenerational Learning at third level.

Theme 2: Bridging and bonding relationships between generations.

Theme 3: Breaking down stereotyping associated with ageing.

### **Theme 6.8.1: Global Engagement through Intergenerational Learning at third level**

DCU as a university has a great potential to enhance cultural integration with ease. This is because it promotes the exchange of international students studying within the university on a yearly basis and because it provides academic programmes related to interculturalism in a national and global context. When the researcher invited all DCU students to volunteer and participate in the project, many international students came forward to help.

This brought with it an innovative intercultural dimension in that for the first time in DCU, older people were now presented with an opportunity to meet and learn with students from all nationalities. The benefits were also unique for the DCU students in that this was the first time that they were invited to participate in a teaching and learning experience that was inclusive of the culture and traditions of older Irish people. The following reflections demonstrate the benefits of this engagement between older and younger overseas students who participated in this study.

Yicheng Zhou (Ethan) an international student reflected on the benefits of her participation on the DCU Intergenerational Learning Blog:

*As an international student, I am happy to be a part of this project. Talking to these lovely women always makes me feel comfortable. They are just so polite and thoughtful. They remind me of my parents all the time, when they are so worried about touching the keyboard at the beginning. I still remember the time I taught my parents how to use Skype, and there is nothing different. However, there are some differences between the societies, which make these people seem so alive. When I am with my learner, she cannot stop talking about her hobbies and friends. This so different compared to my grandparents. Her life is interesting; she has always something to keep herself busy. On the other side, many older people in my country can only stay at home, who are lonely and having nothing to do. I think this is exactly the purpose that these types of project. I am glad that I could be a part of this project and provide my help. As a student from a foreign country, it is always good for me to talk with these nice women. They always make me feel warm. I am so glad to see they are happy and making progress during the course. Yicheng Zhou.*

For Yicheng Zhou, the use of the word “warm” is an analogy of friendship shared between her and the older students. Sheena another international student also reflects on the shared intercultural experience generated because of her participation in the project:

*Dia dhuit! My name is Sheena, I am from Beijing and I am a DCU student study marketing in Business School. Last Saturday, I was very happy to see the ceremony for all the*

*learners, tutors and teachers. Here I use teachers because they are really respected and without them, I would have no chance of having such a good experience. Although I was working as a tutor giving help to the older learners, I also learnt a lot from others during the classes. Now I would like to show partly what I have learnt from the Project: creative writing of mine.*

### **Brainstorming**

*Start: IT learning Project*

*2<sup>nd</sup> step: My worries, cultural differences, gap between generations*

*3<sup>rd</sup> step: Beginning life in Dublin, experience on Saturday, influences on me*

*Final stop: Happiness, excellent experience, important memory*

*I remember the first day when I arrived here, all kinds of feelings came into my heart, excited, curious and panic, etc. Because of the far distance from home, because of loneliness of being alone, because of the differences between western and eastern cultures...However, most were expectations about the life in the future.*

*When I received the invitation to join the Project from Trudy, I was both excited and scared. I was excited because I had no idea about traditional Irish people. In addition, I expected to know more about the Irish culture. I was scared because of my spoken English and the gap between the generations. I knew that only having IT skills and patience was not enough. As a tutor, I should be qualified with good communication skills so I worried about misunderstanding of my explanations about the computer stuff. On the other hand, I did learn more than I could have learnt from my lectures, from people in the Project, and I will treasure them as my best present I have from Ireland!*  
Sheena

Sheena's experience and her fear of the perceived difficulties generated by the difference between eastern and western cultures is again examined in the words of Amit whose reflections are similarity of cultures generated by a greater understanding and use of new emerging technologies:

*Ben Sweetland once said, 'We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own'. This cannot be*

*truer for me because of my experience in volunteering on the Intergenerational Learning Project. I came to Ireland last year to do an M.E. in Telecom. For the previous five years, I had been working as a sales manager and spend 70% of my time traveling. Life was fast and I never had a chance to look around. After coming here, everything was new (places, people, culture, weather, time schedule ...) and it was fun, however with time things were slowing down.*

Amit reflects on the benefits of his participation and in particular, he speaks about the benefits of integration in ICT for older people. His is a comparative perspective related this to his own country:

*The next thing I know - I keep on coming every Saturday. At first, it was like 'OK just one time! -then: not bad let us do it a second time, -then: oh - that is good let us do it again'. After every session - it was as if I had achieved something and I was making a little difference to the learners' lives. For me these sessions were not only limited to pure teaching but were more of a learning experience. My classmates have a lot more experience to share with us and what I was offering was so small in comparison. In the last session, I was mesmerised when they read out their stories one-by-one in front of the class. I think this is an excellent platform where two generations can come together -to know, to share and to help each other. I hope to encourage such ideas in India also, as the social, family structure is changing there, and there is a need for similar thinking. Most of the young family members are working and living in different cities and countries, and the traditional joint family (grandpa, grandma, uncle, aunt, cousins, mother, father, siblings all living together) is not so practical any more. However, they still love each other and still want to stay in touch with each other. It is not good that I should teach an older person only if he is my grandpa or she is my mother. I believe, here, the best attitude is: I will volunteer for anyone's father or grandma and I hope that someone will volunteer for mine. Because in the end we all need, each other and we all can benefit each other. Amit DCU International Student.*

Johann also reflected on the benefits of coming to understand the culture or the experience of older students:

*This project has definitely helped me to understand more about older cultures. Helping older learners is different to younger students, and I have gained an insight into how older learners*

*learn and use the knowledge. I really enjoy the project because you learn a lot from the older learners, about their family life, their professions, their hobbies that give you a better understanding of the older culture.*

Ini reflects on her understanding of culture through learning about cultural festivals:

*The project helped me to learn more about some festivals and what people usually do during these periods such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. Since I am an international student and do not celebrate these festivals in my own country, it is really a good chance to hear older learners tell me what they have experienced on these festivals.*

This demonstrates the benefits of the project in its ability to bring different cultures together, cultures that transcend geographic, ethnic and age divides and provides greater understanding between generations.

#### **Theme 6.8.2: Bridging and bonding relationships between generations**

Bonding between generations was a theme that also emerged from the data. This was evident in the reflections of both the older and younger students. The following extracts demonstrate this sense of shared friendship between both generations:

Ava a DCU student reflects on the understanding of historical culture shared between her and the older student:

*I formed a great relationship with my student (older student) who shared experiences about her life with me. She told me of the times of the floods when in the 1950's, Dublin was flooded. I really enjoyed this as it gave me an insight into the old days in Ireland and how although times have changed there is still the same principle. Ava*

Jean a tutor on the programme reflects on the friendships formed between the DCU students and the older learners:

*It became apparent to me that they (the DCU students) valued their experiences while working so closely with the older*

*learners. They built close working relationships with each other over the eight weeks of the course. It was also a pleasure to experience so much laughter in the classroom each week. For me, the element of fun is an important ingredient to any teaching and learning environment.*

This friendship is communicated in the words of Yizeng a DCU international student:

*The learner I mentored is no different to these older people, so lovely, having the same curiosity as kids when using the Internet. She is nice, and always talks about her children and grandchildren. She is funny and makes me laugh all the time about these interesting things between her and her grandchildren. I have to admit that it felt so good when I got the first email from her. She might not be the student who learns the fastest, and I am definitely not a good teacher. Nevertheless, who cares, it was always good when I saw her start to familiarise herself with the keyboard and touchpad, to check email, and most important, not be terrified when sitting in front of a laptop. It is not only about learning, or going to a school, but we are trying to provide a new insight for these people, letting them see the whole world, even though they might never be able to be there physically. I cannot say there is any difference between these older women and the ones back home. These older people are always being so kind and warm*

Anda a DCU international student reflects on the two-way benefit of learning from each other:

*In the process of teaching the advanced learners, I have equally learned from the older generation what the latest technology is yet to come up with worthwhile-shared experience on how older generations managed before the existence of computers. I really liked the sense of fun and enjoyment, which they shared with me. They remind me of when I am with my friends. They are no different in what they like to do together ie going to the cinema, having a laugh together. I spoke about studying abroad as I studied in Germany last year. I learned a great deal about living in Dublin in the 50's 60's 70's 80's and how the 50 plus generation feels about how society has changed. I believe that I have a greater understanding of older learners and how difficult it can be or how bad it can be to make someone feel to be outside a community because they cannot use computers. I grew*

*up using computers and now I feel I am more appreciative of the opportunities I had growing up.*

The bonding of relationships is evident in these DCU students' reflections:

*I am now much more accommodating when it comes to ICT use. For example, one of the older learners was extremely frustrated at the end of one specific class almost to the point of tears. This bothered me much more than I thought it would and I spent the whole week planning out in my head how I could better the older learners experience the following Saturday. It worked!*  
Mark

### **Theme 6.8.3: Breaks down stereotyping associated with ageing**

Another theme, which emerged, was that through the DCU ILP, it brings together diverse groups and networks and helps to negate inaccurate stereotypes. This was evidenced in the following reflections:

*I learned that old and young people alike are all the same when it comes to wanting to learn and see new things. When we looked at you tube we often had the same interests. It (the project) helps to break down barriers between people of different generations and backgrounds.* Sean

*I learned what is important in the lives of older people and found that they are as busy as younger students are.* Elaine  
DCU student

*I would think the interaction between the students and the older person would help them to understand us better and help us all to bridge the generation gap. Fills the gap for all ages and gives them the opportunity to have access to computers and technology .I am relating more to older people. With the exception of my grandparents, I am really only exposed to people of my own age so this enables me to meet new people of all ages.* Daniel DCU student

*The interaction of youthful energy with the experience of the older generation, the interaction between young and old and the mental stimulation older people get from taking part in this project are the benefits.* Ronnie

*This project has made me more aware of the similarities between generations rather than the differences. We are all-*

*curious and want to investigate and communicate with each other. John*

*Before I had never really been very interested in the life of my grandparents but now I cannot wait to go back home and interview them all about how they experience life. I thought my grandparents were not interested in learning how to use computers but actually, I am just after realizing that they might be very interested but nobody offered them the opportunity to go on the internet or use word. Next time I see them I am going to bring my laptop with me! Anda DCU student*

*As I have already said repeatedly. It is a pure joy to come to DCU. I am a much more confident person for having taken part in this project. I have made many new friends and we email each other on a weekly basis. Maureen*

*Sometimes we are very quick to point out the faults of our young people, but this project would not have worked as well as it did without the help of the young DCU students; they are so helpful, and patient, and give so generously of their precious time to us, it is just a great pleasure to come here every Saturday to DCU. Peter*

*I feel privileged to have been a part of something this special. To conclude, I suppose I would like to impart some wise words to provide some assurance for the (older) learners in participating in this project: Never be afraid of doing something new. Remember that an amateur built the Ark and a group of professionals built the Titanic.’ James DCU Student*

## **6.9 Summary**

In chapter six intergenerational learning as pedagogy is viewed in terms of its contribution to higher education learning and its contribution to society as a whole. This is set within the context of the dialogue, relationship building and bridging and bonding formed between both cohorts of students. Chapter seven provides the recommendations, which have emerged from the research findings.

## **Chapter 7: Findings**

### **7.0 Introduction**

What emerged from the data analysis was an understanding of the benefits of intergenerational learning in third level learning in terms of: 1) the benefits for the older people who participated in the study. 2) The benefits for the DCU students who participated in the study. In addition, what also emerged from the data was the potential of intergenerational learning as a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, and ultimately it is potential in terms of its contribution to its benefits for society. Through the study, a theoretical framework emerged which defines intergenerational learning as a community of practice by combining Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice (1991) with Social Capital Theory and a theory of Lifelong Learning. This is to define intergenerational learning as a community of practice which is unique in that it creates a community of learning which shares the dialogue and knowledge of a diversity of students of all cultures, of historical and geographical socio-economic contexts but in particular it is inclusive of students of all ages.

What is particularly interesting is the commonality of understanding, which emerged between the generations. Of particular interest is their recognition of the reciprocal contribution to each other, in both a formal and informal context of teaching and learning. This also facilitated research opportunity for some of the DCU students who participated in the study through the data analysis a significant theme, which emerged, was the potential for intergenerational learning to be transformational in terms of attitudes and behaviour. For example, what was acknowledged was then when older and younger people meet together in a third level learning context this provides for an opportunity to transcend preconceived traditional barriers expressed between both cohorts of students such as generational divide and digital exclusion.

This was facilitated through the exchange of tacit knowledge, wisdom, insight, competences, skills and dialogue shared between both cohorts of students. The transfer of information communication technology skills became a teaching and learning tool that helped to facilitate the removal of previously perceived barriers in terms of relationship building between older and younger people and in terms of access to new teaching and learning opportunities for both cohorts of students in higher education. What have emerged from the data analysis for this study are the following recommendations.

### **7.1 New Paradigm Change in Educational Policy and Practice**

Intergenerational programmes need to be more fully integrated into third level pedagogy to reflect the need for a new paradigm of change in educational policy and practice. This growing movement has yet to take route in third level learning despite some initiatives in the context of civic engagement or service learning, which have already begun in Irish universities and in universities at international level. A closer identification of people in the later years with those in the earlier years facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills between generations in an upward and downward mode of learning. The shared learning between older people in developing competences and skills; in coping with economic recessions of the past and in sharing their understanding of acquiring life skills and knowledge is shared in return for them acquiring new knowledge in third level learning. Ease of access for them to new knowledge is facilitated through developing competences and skills relevant to their access to information communication technology skills and access to digital inclusion such as social networking and social media. This can be facilitated through intergenerational programmes at third level which support this exchange of knowledge, which actively engage third level students in teaching and mentoring older people in digital skills and knowledge transfer.

## **7.2 Valuing the Lived Experience of Older People in Higher Education**

The philosophical assumption guiding this research argues that, implicit to the development of a theoretical framework or paradigm for intergenerational learning is the awareness of the value of integrating the lived experience of older people in third level learning. This is to understand that their personal and professional experience has the capacity to be used in multidisciplinary dimensions across all faculties in higher education. To place this knowledge within one faculty or within one field of knowledge is to deny its benefit to a variety of faculties. To embrace and value the narrative of older people is to develop intergenerational learning as a pedagogy that has the potential to contribute to rich and deep learning across all disciplines in third level education.

## **7.3 Narrative of Older People - A Paradigm for Critical Thinking**

What was evident from the data analysis from this study was the level of critical thinking engaged in between both the older students through their interviews and through the reflections of the DCU students in their blog reflections. This demonstrates that there is now the need to further explore the notion that the narrative and experiential learning of older people as a teaching and learning tool has the potential to add value to the critical thinking and reflective processes of younger third level students. This is to use their tacit knowledge, their expertise as a teaching and learning methodology which facilitates critical reflection, critical thought that has the potential to contribute to knowledge not only of historical contexts but of new emerging contexts namely in the field of computing technology, science, health, medicine and a myriad of cultural, philosophical, psychological and sociological disciplines now and in the future. This is also to acknowledge the benefits of intergenerational learning as a pedagogy that facilitates the benefits of both social and experiential learning in a higher education context.

Murphy in his paper which explores the capacity for independent thinking, refers to the work of Barnett (1999) and contends that we live in an era of super complexity which is characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, challenge ability and contestability and that *'this capacity for independent thinking provides resources for navigating through complexity'* (Murphy:2009:2). He notes that Barnett defines this as *'pedagogies for an age of uncertainty.'* Murphy believes that such pedagogies *'affirm the humanity of each individual student; allow each student his or her authenticity-in—the-making- and- offer space to each student to forge his or her own becoming'* (Barnett, 2007:137 in Murphy (2009:2). Murphy draws on the Taskforce on Active Citizenship Report to affirm the relevance of schools and colleges in facilitating independent thinking:

*Schools and colleges are places where people learn about behaviour, dialogue, decision-making as well as a range of skills, knowledge and attributes that enable people to act as thinking, critical, responsible and caring citizens in a democratic society.* Taskforce on Active Citizenship Report (2007:21)

He also notes that in reference to the Irish schooling system this does not always provide the culture that promotes independent thinking skills. This he attributes to the education system as very much dependent on *'an overarching economic agenda.'* (Murphy, 2009:2) It might now be possible to imagine a society in which the shared communal values of people of all ages, cultures, creeds and socio-economic traditions becomes more beneficial through the provision of a teaching and learning space at third level that facilitates dialogue between older and younger generations. This traditional perception of the identity of peoples according to their age, status, cultural beliefs, values, socio-economic level has the potential to make way for new understanding of people defined by recognition of their intellectual contribution and their lived experience to benefit all disciplines in third level learning. Through this study, the data analysis highlights that

many older people have the capacity for independent thinking, critical thinking and reflection. This is based on a lifetime of learning from mistakes, tacit knowledge, wisdom and understanding drawn from lived experiences and in many instances, they have developed expertise in both professional and personal dimensions of their life. This should now be used in pedagogical practice in third level learning where it is deemed relevant.

#### **7.4 Inclusion of Older People; a Conceptual Understanding of Lifelong Learning**

In today's current economic climate in Ireland and in a European context, it can be argued that the need is greater than ever to seek out an opportunity for the whole community to collectively participate in the education of the young and the old. This is to facilitate a greater awareness of the benefits of communal belonging practiced within the fullness of lifelong learning.

From a political and policy perspective, the time has come to provide a more integrated understanding of life-long learning in higher education. What emerged from the data analysis was the notion that the visibility of older people learning on a third level campus contributed to new knowledge for the DCU students. This was a greater understanding in recognizing that learning is life long and that learning for its own sake can in it be a very positive outcome for participation in intergenerational learning initiatives in higher education. More increased public awareness of the contribution, which older people have to make in third level learning, and ultimately in society, should be the driving force that guides this policy.

The research findings concur with that of Manheimer that *'intergenerational learning is not only an attractive educational idea, it is a socially positive one as well.'* (1997:90) This is evidenced in the notion that the participation of older people in higher education has a very significant contribution in the recognition for both older and younger people that learning is in fact lifelong.

## **7.5 Contribution of Intergenerational Learning to Social Capital Theory**

Another theme, which emerged from the data, was that the DCU ILP was in itself a social network, which facilitated reciprocal benefits in teaching and learning for both cohorts of students who participated in the study. Both cohorts of students evaluated this as a means to enable them to achieve mutual goals. The older students acquired relevant information technology skills and competences and in return, the DCU students developed their tutoring and mentoring skills. Intergenerational learning has a significant contribution to higher education in terms of the potential of social networks that can be developed in which social learning, experiential learning and transformational learning is engaged between both older learners and third level students. This was particularly evidenced through the relationship building shared between both the older and younger people. The dialogue sharing and narrative was evaluated as both meaningful reciprocal experiences. This has the potential to be replicated in a wider context both nationally and internationally as a significant contribution to social capital theory

Dewey (1938) one of the first exponents of social capital theory believed that knowledge emerges only from situations in which learners has to draw them out from meaningful experiences. Bourdieu (1984) believed that society could not be analyzed simply in terms of economic classes and ideologies. Bourdieu uses the concept of field as a social dimension in which people pursue desirable resources.

The relationship building between both older and younger people through intergenerational learning initiatives provides the potential to develop social economic and cultural capital between both cohorts of students. This has the potential to contribute to higher education teaching, learning and research through the integration of a wider base of social, economic and cultural

capital facilitated through meaningful experiences shared between both older and younger people in higher education.

## **7.6 Macro Issues Addressed in Intergenerational Learning initiatives in Higher Education**

From the implementation of the DCU ILP, pilot study what also emerged is the need to review macro issues that need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of intergenerational learning at third level for the future. What is critical is the infrastructure that makes intergenerational programmes possible. What continuing funding sources will enable the sustainable development and continuity of intergenerational programmes? What third level institutions will claim lasting ownership of intergenerational initiatives? Will they constantly be instigated only by individuals who have an interest in youth and/or ageing (intergenerational programmes usually evolve from the latter).

Can intergenerational learning be driven by a national policy, which recognizes the benefits of the integration of older and younger people together in educational and training opportunities, in particular in the potential benefits of such programmes at third level? There is a need to ensure that educational programmes which are inclusive of intergenerational concepts of learning need are supported by a top-down policy at all levels, where spaces on a third level campus are made available to support the learning and where finance and academic personnel and students are actively encouraged to be part of the teaching, learning and research and to be involved in the design of the curriculum content.

Colleges and universities must evaluate and overcome a diversity of barriers to promote and support intergenerational learning programmes. These barriers include costs, credits, grades, space, scheduling, and identification of tangible educational benefits. Manheimer reflects on these issues in the American context of intergenerational programmes in the 1990's. He

describes what he defines as '*the intergenerational impulse and imperative*' (1997:87)

He draws on the work of geropsychologist Gutmann who has argued that across numerous and diverse cultures there are a phenomenon of '*instinctual grand parenting (1987:87) which he believes is not only related through kinship but which evolves 'beyond family ties.'*' This instinctual phenomenon of kinship between older and younger people was also evidenced through the data findings as part of the DCU ILP. For Gutmann, this he believes is generations of young and old who are separated by '*gaps*' that have been generated from cultural, economic, social, historical, technological and even biological divides. The role of education is crucial in addressing these '*gaps*' and the onus is on education and training initiatives to play its role and promote and facilitate the development of alternative mindsets that overcomes these gaps.

This can be achieved by facilitating intergenerational learning as a pedagogy involving people of all cultures, of all ages and of all identities learning together and learning from each other. Ageing brings with it an understanding of our humanity, which transcends many socio-economic, cultural and political divides. This was evidenced in the findings from the DCU ILP project and in particular in the reflections of the DCU international students who reflected on their sense of belonging because of their involvement in the project.

## **7.7 Benefits of a Stimulated Mind in Ageing**

A very significant finding, which emerged from the data analysis, was the reflection by some of the older learners that their participation in the project had facilitated them keeping their mind active. This they believed was very significant as a contribution to their overall health and well-being. Further research needs to be developed to explore and recognize the emerging research that advocates the knowledge that a stimulated mind in ageing can in fact contribute to the well-being of older people and thereby Through the DCU ILP new interdisciplinary relationships were formed within DCU to further evaluate this concept through other disciplines namely through the field of health and science. The project provided an opportunity to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to evaluate this emerging concept both from a health and education perspective. Dr Kate Irving from the School of Nursing DCU has conducted research in the area of ageing and in particular in evaluating preventative measures against dementia. Through this doctoral study and through her work, what has emerged as a very significant finding is the importance of the stimulated mind in ageing, and in particular the correlation between learning opportunities in ageing and cognitive stimulation.

Fratiglioni & Qiu, (2011), Gorman (2010), Larson (2010) and Singh-Manoux, A & Kivimaki, M (2010), note that there are clear associations between lower education level, poor social networks and under cognitive stimulation and cognitive decline. In contrast, Andrieu et al (2011) confirm that it would be a very significant benefit to society if we could prevent some cases of dementia or delay its onset for several years. Andrieu notes that what is clear from these studies is that when it comes to cognitive stimulation, some cognitive stimulation is better than none. These findings demonstrate that it is evident from the scientific and medical literature that there could be a strong correlation between the provision of greater educational opportunities for older people and of the need to do this to promote the benefits of a stimulated mind in ageing. Further research needs

to be conducted to explore this particular aspect of cognitive stimulation in ageing as part of intergenerational learning.

These studies have been supported through the findings of the DCU ILP, when some of the older students reflected on the benefits of the project as a way to keep their mind active and stimulated. One older student reflected

*'Now I get to use my brain, to study what interests me....I really do appreciate the friendship and the mental stimulation. The classes do for my mind what regular exercise does for my body. What a long way Ireland has come in the last eighty one years.'*

## **7.8 Intergenerational Learning: A new Pedagogy for Teaching and Learning at Third Level**

A major positive outcome of engaging older people in providing a significant contribution to third level learning emerged from this project. When the older students had an opportunity to impart their knowledge and reflections, they demonstrated that their thinking-based on experiential learning, which for them has evolved from formal and informal learning throughout their lives, had much to contribute to the development of younger students but also to broader conceptualizations of education. In particular, the older people came up with important insights in the following areas:

**Thinking on Education:** In particular reflection on higher education, critical thinking, creative thinking, deep understanding and thoughtfulness.

**Thinking for Healthy Living:** This was in relation to the older people's ability to reflect on this new role as a way to stimulate their thinking and contribute knowledge for both the development of healthy minds and healthy bodies.

**Thinking in Business:** Some of the older students who themselves have spent their lives working in business or industry reflected on creativity and innovation in business, entrepreneurial-type thinking and risk-taking.

**Thinking and the Arts:** Many of these older students reflected on their experience of design and creativity, composition and performance. This was especially evident in their paintings, their love of creative writing and personal stories and more recently with blogs to develop a medium to disseminate their creativity and reflections.

### **7.9 Deep Learning through Intergenerational Learning at Third Level**

The essence of intergenerational learning is that it brings with it a new paradigm for teaching learning and research at third level. In the philosophical understanding of phenomenology and naturalistic inquiry, valuing the otherness of the researched becomes an integral part of the findings. Valuing the narrative of others, which potentially contributes to meaning, and understanding of social, cultural and historical constructs becomes a pre-requisite, which is the essence of qualitative research. This is an inherent characteristic found in eldership, the wisdom, insight, and reflections of many older people. This was valued in the thoughts and reflections of the DCU younger students who participated in this study.

What knowledge is to be lost or not utilized by leaving older people outside the walls of third level institutes? In the ontological understanding of qualitative research, perspectives become a key issue in interpretation, in delving into the language that ultimately conveys experiential learning, lived experiences and from this comes deep learning. The narrative of older people can in many ways open a window to a world that from a myriad of perspectives is that social, cultural, philosophical and psychological facilitates an understanding of knowledge that has the potential to enable younger students to develop skills, knowledge and competences for the future.

In addition, older people –in particular through the acquisition of new information technology and social media skills- have the opportunity to

contemplate a future with new learning opportunities. One of the older participants in the DCU ILP affirmed, *“These new skills have opened up a whole new world to me –a new world of learning-my mind is now more stimulated-the feeling is great.”* To enable them to participate in third level learning brings new understanding of knowledge.

What happens to the wealth of expertise developed by older people in a lifetime? What happens to the knowledge of retired professionals and academics? Does this wealth of knowledge acquired over a lifetime become redundant once they have retired from the workplace? Some of this knowledge might still be used in many disciplines across third level faculties. Where some of that knowledge is now redundant or is no longer required, what can leave a lasting impression for younger students are the transferable skills, the competences acquired by older people in their life. Understanding the contribution of older people now and in the future provides the need to progress and develop intergenerational learning opportunities at third level.

### **7.10 Benefits of Intergenerational learning for third level Students**

The greatest difficulty for younger students studying at third level can frequently be the goal-bound approach to learning. The problems that this brings in terms of time-management, financial constraints and ultimately stress levels are raised especially at examination time or assessment completion time. This can create very high anxiety and stress levels for third level students. Intergenerational programmes enable younger people to take a broader view and to see a world beyond their current perceived barriers and restraints. As one DCU student reflected:

*‘Personally I found the Saturday mornings to bring a bit of balance to the stress of college life. .While I was stressed with assignments before, I found I was switching off during the classes on Saturdays and was in a much better mood afterwards.’*

This provides an opportunity for younger students to develop the concept of social learning defined by Bandura (1977) as modeling. This is where younger students are provided with an opportunity to mirror and adopt the skills and competences of older people, which are sometimes extremely beneficial in dealing with these issues. Further research needs to be conducted to explore this particular aspect of well-being as part of intergenerational learning.

### **7.11 Application of Bloom's Taxonomy Through Intergenerational Learning**

The Taxonomy of Educational objectives outlined by Bloom (1956) and composed of six levels of cognitive behaviours is commonly used to define a theory of education. The six levels are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. This Taxonomy is facilitated through intergenerational learning in the shared learning between the older and younger students. The Taxonomy is implemented through the dialogue and narrative engaged in between both the younger and older students together. This is an essential element in transferring the skills of critical thinking to younger third level students.

It has been acknowledged in the narrative of some of the third level students who participated in the DCU ILP that the learning gained by them was fully integrated into their formal third level learning. This was evidenced in some of the research projects undertaken by the students. For example, two students from the School of Computer Applications researched accessibility issues related to the use of ICT by older people. In addition, two multi-media students sought to explore issues related to the perception of ageing as part of their post-graduate theses.

Three students from the School of Education Studies used the project as part of their final year undergraduate thesis work. Two students from the School of Communications –who were not student volunteers on the DCU ILP-

drew on the project for their work in examining the concept of ageing in broadcasting and media today. What many of the younger students reflected on was the fun and the enjoyment of learning gained because of their participation in the study.

Intergenerational learning needs to be embedded in a very contemporary concept of learning, namely learning as an up and down process. The transfer of knowledge from younger generations to older people in an upward mode takes place through the acquisition of information communication skills. The lived experience of older people, and the value of their role now as a vibrant group who still have much to contribute to society, represents a downward sharing of knowledge and skills.

### **7.12 Re-imagining Third Level Learning Through Intergenerational Learning as a Pedagogy**

The most influential contribution of intergenerational learning is the potential for us as educators to re-imagine the concept of third level learning. This has already been alluded to in Chapter 6 and in particular in the reflections of one of the older students Molly. In Chapter 6 she provides a critique of her understanding of university learning today. This is reminiscent of the words of Freire (1970). This extract from Molly's biographic narrative provides an educational critique, a kind of educational web that is at one level complex and insightful and at another draws on metaphors that unfold a whole universal debate on the concept of teaching and learning at third level. It is particularly important to the debate to define the meaning of university education today.

Freire believes that a 'banking' concept of education is:

*'The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits in the last*

*analysis it is the people themselves who are filed away through their lack of creativity, transformation and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human' (Freire, 1970: 53)*

The renowned academic Marginson refers to this wider debate on knowledge at third level as knowledge for the public good. He warns that public goods do not emerge in a vacuum. Conditions must be right to foster this thinking. He advocates that universities should not abandon the notion of public good but should instead advocate positioning it into something stronger. This he suggests requires a mind set change across all universities in a global context. He states:

*'In political philosophy, public/private can take on wider meanings than economics suggests. For example, the term 'public' can cover such factors as how the good is produced and by whom, who controls it. We become all too easily trapped in understanding higher education in terms of a dualistic public/private ideology, and a policy horizon still bounded by the nation-state despite the obvious fecundity of globalization. A revised approach is needed. Democratization is achieved by making public goods explicit, encouraging policy discussion, and involving the range of nonstate agencies and actors.'* (Marginson, 2007: 313-332)

This thesis contends that intergenerational Learning at third level inspires the imagination to create a new mindset in which the expertise, the tacit knowledge, the prior learning and experience of older people provides universities with a place-bound identity which is embedded in local communities at one level but which has a far-reaching context in place-bound identity at a global level. The global contribution of older people has a significant contribution to make in terms of knowledge for the common good at local and international level.

### **7.13 Scholarship of Eldership**

This thesis contends that it is now time to embrace the '*Scholarship of Eldership*' (Corrigan: 2011). Intergenerational learning as a pedagogy promotes this scholarship by engaging older people in many teaching and

learning opportunities at third level. The kind of intergenerational practices that are put in place need to be evaluated in terms of quality of learning for the older students who participate and the quality of learning for the younger students involved. Fox and Giles point out in their review of a multitude of intergenerational projects of many types and with different generational mixes, that *'simply bringing different groups into contact with one another does not guarantee positive results. Some projects have led to a preponderance of negative outcomes-stereotypes or biases were confirmed rather than overcome'* (Fox & Giles, 1993:88). They concede that where *'mutual educational benefits were involved, results were generally favorable as reflected by both age-groups.'* (Fox & Giles, 1993:88). A structured approach to the use of teaching and learning models suitable to the needs of older and younger students is required. This emerging concept, one of the older participants of the DCU ILP alludes to the scholarship of eldership when she said:

*"We are older and isn't it great to celebrate being older, and I like the term elder because in tribes, elders were treated with great respect and listened to. I think that is one of the things that we older people might contribute to a learning centre here in DCU."*

#### **7.14 Intergenerational Learning Emerging From Gerontology to Pedagogy**

In a recent Irish Times article on a new collection "Human Chain" by Seamus Heaney, the Irish Times journalist, Eamon Grennan comments on the richness of Heaney's narrative. (Irish Times: 28<sup>th</sup>/10/2010). Heaney's talent as a poet has contributed much to the Irish cultural psyche, yet although ageing, he is not defined by this alone. Instead, it his genius, his creation and embracing of narrative through poetry that makes his work acknowledged as great. It is interesting to note that in his reflections on his earlier school days, one of the participants of the DCU ILP related how he had been to the same primary school at the same time as Seamus Heaney.

He related stories of Heaney's school days and how some of the events there shaped some of his earlier work. Grennan writes of Heaney

*'He galvanizes the language, so old phrases (it dawns on me) are freshly polished. His renewing way with language leads his readers to a refreshed sense of the world, letting us see it more feelingly. For him, the common tongue is endlessly fertile, storing in itself the riches of a world freshly realized. It's his ability to look at once into language and out at the world-not forgetting to probe and question the self that's doing all this looking-that gives his work the perpetually kinetic energy informing it.'* (Grennan, Irish Times 28<sup>th</sup>/08/2010:11)

In the richness of narrative employed by Heaney, the self-reflective stance of both the poet and reader are fused together to create a worldview that is inclusive. While it would be untrue to contend that all people of all ages have the genius of Heaney, he does represent an example of a person not defined by his age, but by his ability to continue to evoke an understanding of lived experience. This is the essential understanding of the role of older people in third level learning. The narrative used by them represents another dimension of learning that has the potential to contribute to deep learning. The very essence of this narrative fuses both qualitative research and high quality teaching and learning together.

This concept has for many years lain dormant in the very worthwhile field of gerontology. However, this has become an issue and in many ways a stumbling block for intergenerational learning. It brings with it the potential risk for such learning programmes to be perceived as providing a degree of tokenism for older people. If however intergenerational learning emerges as pedagogy, then the potential benefits for both the old and the young might be utilized to their fullest potential. It is now time to re-imagine intergenerational learning as a very substantial pedagogy that could potentially lead towards the promotion of a stimulated mind in ageing. This has major implications for the quality of life for older people now and in the future, the quality of learning for third level students, the quality of learning in higher education and in turn to greater benefits for society.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I offer three recommendations and conclusions. These are as follows:

### **8.2 Recommendation 1**

Intergenerational Learning should be facilitated as a pedagogical approach in third level because of the benefits to older learners, younger students, higher education and society.

Because of this study, it is clear that there are substantial benefits for older people participating in teaching, learning and research opportunities in higher education. Older people are an untapped resource that has the potential to bring a life times experience and knowledge to teaching at third level. As learners, participants in this study were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of new learning opportunities both for skills based (information communication technology) and theoretical modules. The scholarship of eldership posited by this thesis, suggests an exciting new paradigm for research into ageing moving from the field of gerontology to pedagogy.

The data gathered from younger students pointed to many unexpected benefits accruing to them from their engagement in the intergenerational project. From an academic and personal developmental perspective, this reciprocal learning experience is clearly worthy of further development by third level institutions.

The study points to many potential benefits for learning and research within higher education, not least the wider conceptualization of education on the part of older learners with their perspectives gained from many years on this earth and their interest in learning that goes beyond the vocational.

For society, this offered an opportunity to foster relationships between generations and in the process to bring down perceived cultural and generational barriers. This requires further research for the benefits of society.

### **8.3 Recommendation 2**

Very real barriers to the development of intergenerational learning must be identified and eliminated.

- (1) Ease of access to new knowledge through developing competences and skills relevant to access to information communication technology skills and digital inclusion such as social networking and social media needs further investigation.
- (2) As well as exciting opportunities, intergenerational learning presents challenges for higher education. Intergenerational learning currently does not fit into the existing academic structure of research and learning at third level. It would call for both modest and significant changes to overcome current barriers (organisational, physical, financial, social and psychological).
- (3) Further research needs to be developed to explore and recognize the emerging research that advocates the knowledge that a stimulated mind in ageing can in fact contribute to the well-being of older people.
- (4) From the implementation of the DCU ILP, there is a need to further review macro issues to ensure the sustainability of intergenerational learning at third level for the future and this needs to be enumerated and addressed to achieve the very real benefits offered by this innovation.
- (5) DCU ILP as a social network, which facilitated reciprocal benefits in teaching and learning for both cohorts of students. To be replicated in a wider context both nationally and internationally as a significant contribution to social capital theory.
- (6) The project provided an opportunity to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to evaluate this emerging concept both from a health and

education perspective. For example an interdisciplinary approach between both science and education to further investigate research in the area of ageing and in particular in evaluating preventative measures against dementia should be further developed.

- (7) Further research needs to be conducted to develop this aspect of Intergenerational learning in helping younger students to manage stress levels/time-management issues during their time at college.

### **8.4 Recommendations 3**

The benefits older people having a stimulated mind which has been refreshed and challenged through engagement in third level education has many benefits for the person, family, community and society. The economy will also benefit from improved health through more active citizenship. While this was not central to the current study, the role of mental stimulation in aging emerged as a significant theme for the older people who participated in the study. Currently research in the field demonstrates that there are clear associations between lower educational level, poor social networks, under cognitive stimulation and cognitive decline (Gorman 2010, and Larson 2010).

- (1) Further research is recommended to evaluate the benefits of intergenerational learning to develop cognitive stimulation and address cognitive decline.
- (2) There is a need to further explore the notion that the narrative and experiential learning of older people as a teaching and learning tool has the potential to add value to the critical thinking and reflective processes of younger third level students.
- (3) There is a real need to seek out an opportunity for the whole community to collectively participate in the education of the young and the old. This is especially through lifelong learning initiatives.

- (4) More increased public awareness of the contribution, which older people have to make in third level learning, and ultimately in society, should be the driving force that guides this policy.

## **8.5 Conclusions**

This doctoral study investigated intergenerational learning as an emerging pedagogy. This was achieved through the creation and provision of a teaching and learning space, which promoted the development of a holistic and transformative understanding of education shared between both older and younger people.

If there is to be a new paradigm shift, a new mindset, then a very real starting point is to move a consciousness of intergenerational programmes beyond the field of gerontology and make it a very distinctive part of the field of pedagogy in higher education. This can be achieved through embedding the concept of intergenerational learning in current programmes and developing new ones but also in providing spaces that consciously promote the opportunity for older and younger people to meet and learn together through both online spaces and through physical spaces on a third level campus. This is to provide a space which enables older people to keep mentally stimulated throughout their life span and in addition to provide them with an opportunity to value their tacit knowledge, lived experiences and reflections which are subsequently used as a resource to inspire and educate younger people. The reciprocal benefits can only be imagined if the developments of policy and practice promote intergenerational learning in third level education at both a national and global level.

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Learning, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. The EAGLE (European Approaches to Intergenerational Lifelong Learning ) is co-founded by the EU Commission, DG Education and Culture, under the Socrates Grundtvig Programme.

## **Appendix A**

Contents of CD is accessible at the following web address:

<http://www.dcu.ie/educationstudies/ilp/gallery.shtml>

## **Appendix B**

**Wednesday, May 4, 2011**

**Research Project Update by Mary, Ruaidhri, Joseph and James**

On Saturday the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 37, members of the Intergenerational Learning Project kindly took part in a survey to help gather insights into aspects of their computer studies. Firstly, we would just like to thank everyone for his or her interest and participation, as without it, research of this nature would simply not be possible.

Throughout the next week, we carried out an initial analysis of the results with some very interesting and insightful findings being made. These findings provided a foundation for further research in the form of a focus group, which was conducted on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April. The focus group lasted approximately 20 minutes and was held in a room adjacent to the Business School Canteen. As always, all information collected was kept completely anonymous. We would like to convey our sincerest appreciation to those that took part and to the others that were interested but unable to attend on the day. We are hopeful that this research will help provide us with information which can be used to further improve the course and to establish the key areas in which older people wish to use computers. The results will be made available in the coming week. Once again, if you have any questions at all, please direct them to your class tutors and they will pass them on to us. Thank you all again for your cooperation and support for our project.

**Thursday, May 12, 2011**

**Intergenerational Research Project:  
The Findings by Ruaidhri, James, Mary and Joseph**

We have just finished analysing all of the data found from our research study and have uncovered some very interesting findings. Although our findings cannot be generalised to the wider older population, they do give a good indication of the attitudes and concerns of the participants in the Intergenerational Learning Project. From our initial survey, it was found that 92% of respondents have access to a computer however, 46% of those surveyed had no experience of using computers prior to joining the course. This clearly indicates the benefits in the ILP as it is providing the elderly with a much-needed resource in aiding them to utilise the technological resources which many already have available. Of the respondents, 81% identified the primary reason in attending the course was to become more computer literate with 15% indicating the primary aim was to establish new communication links with family. Our research also found that 35% of the participants did not currently use Facebook but would consider doing so in the future. In terms of online shopping, 46% of the respondents had made a purchase on line with 35% stating that they had not but would consider doing so in the future. This lead us to explore these issues further in the focus group with the results outlined as follows:

- 6 out of 7 respondents have access to a PC in their own homes.
- Those who had home computer access would use it 30 minutes or longer each day
- The main reasons why participants use the internet is to browse, e-mail, and use Facebook with two of the respondents having used the internet for online booking purposes.
- The respondents made some very interesting comments regarding Facebook. There was a common agreement amongst the participants that they did not want others to see what they were writing. Some also felt that they did not know enough about Facebook and found it very difficult to use.
- None of the respondents had used online banking and they do not intend to do so in the future either. One respondent noted that they enjoyed the experience of going to the bank and they would not get this by using internet banking.

We feel that these findings are very interesting and that the whole area of the elderly engaging with computers is one, which should be explored further in the future. We would once again like to sincerely thank you for your participation in this project and wish you all the best for the future.

## Appendix C

### Four sample narrative of the older students on the DCU ILP

#### Narrative 1

**Wednesday, April 21, 2010 I never dared to dream, Peter Brannigan**

I am one of the older students, I had very little formal education when I was young, although that didn't stop me from being employed for 40 years, until I retired in 2004; for most of those years I have always regretted not having a proper education and for years I always had this desire to get back into it, but being married and having a family and work I just hadn't the time, that is until I retired from work.

I lived quite close to DCU, often as I walked pass the college with my dog Patch I watched in amazement how from a few small smatterings of buildings, DCU had become the size of a small town. I joined the local Read and Write scheme and did a couple of communications courses levels 3 and 4 , and also did Junior Cert history; as for attending DCU I never dared to dream, the only time I passed through its gates was to go to a show in the Helix theatre, which is part of DCU. I am also part of the local U3A group based in Ballymun Library, membership is 55 and over, and we meet twice a month to sit and talk and often have guest speakers at our meetings. It was through U3A that we met Trudy Corrigan; she told us about this Intergenerational project about to start in the college, and would we be interested in being part of it, of course my ears picked like an antenna, listening to every word , that is until she mentioned computers, something I hadn't a notion about. My daughter Jennifer, upon leaving home and getting married, said to me: Dad, I am leaving my computer with you, why do not you learn how to use it, do a course on it. That computer would still be lying in the corner of the sitting room, unused, if the project had not come along.

Our first term started 8<sup>th</sup> march, 2008, teaching us the older generation how to catch up on IT skills and not be afraid of it, we learned about Microsoft word, emails and the Internet, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> term, at this stage we have learned how to book holidays, theatre and cinema tickets online, do our banking, digital camera, download music, we have learned about physics and creative writing; we are now just finishing our fourth term, and we have, like the President of the United States, learned how to Twitter and blog. Like so many of the older generation, we do dare to dream, and fulfill our great desire for further education.

Sometimes we are very quick to point out the faults of our young people, but this project would not have worked as well as it did without the help of the young DCU students; they are so helpful, and patient, and give so generously of their precious time to us, it is just a great pleasure to here every Saturday to DCU.

My sincere wish would be for this wonderful project to continue and that I would remain part of it.

## Narrative 2

### Thursday, March 24, 2011 Fukushima Memories Christine O'Flynn

During the past two weeks, I watched with horror the unfolding catastrophe in Japan. I do not think any movie could recreate the scenes as that enormous tsunami swept away all before it. It made me think back several years to when my I visited my daughter in Japan – she was a student in DCU then, studying International Marketing and Japanese – at that time, the students spent third year in the country whose language they were studying. She had a Japanese friend who invited both of us to visit her just outside Fukushima City. The city is inland and, I hope, will have escaped damage from the tsunami though maybe not from the earthquake. On the bullet train from Tokyo, I saw rows of small farms where the farmers were planting rice in the paddy fields, a lovely sight on a sunny spring morning. My memories of those couple of days are a jumble of random recollections. We saw an ancient shrine, over one thousand years old, with representations of the various ages of Buddha, all carved into the rock. We were brought to see a traditional farm complex where the cocoons were being dried before being used in silk making. We saw the groves of mulberry trees where these cocoons are cultivated. We could see a row of mountains in the distance with the remains of extinct volcanoes clearly to be seen. Our friend's house, halfway up a mountain, was typically Japanese, but with all mod. cons including a traditional kotatsu table, which is a table placed over a pit in the floor about 40 centimetres deep. A charcoal heater is placed in the pit but this was in the modern-style with an electric heater. A thin throw rug is placed over the table and the tabletop put on top. It is a cosy way to sit and have dinner! On the way back to Tokyo, we took the local train, which traveled, towards the sea, stopping at small stations along the way. We traveled through hills, covered with lush spring foliage of pale green, yellow, pink and numerous other colours, as colourful as flowers could ever be. We reached the coast and traveled south, going inland sometimes and then coming back to the sea again. These are some pictures in my mind's eye when I think of Fukushima – sad to think of the devastation along that same coast, a lot of which may not even exist anymore and, even sadder, the loss of life that ensued.



**The Dead - John Huston's movie**



15 Ushers Island, derelict. Before it became the Joyce Museum, This is 15 Ushers Island, Dublin before it became the Joyce Museum. Now a splendid building beside the Calatrava Bridge, it is visited by hundreds of Joycean fans every year.

### Narrative 3

#### **15 Ushers Island and Joyce's Story 'The Dead' by Nuala Smith**

This dark gaunt house' is how James Joyce described this building, which was – and still is – at 15 Ushers Island on Dublin's Quays. It is also the house where - in 1919 - my mother, Carmel Fagan, was born.

Here, in the early 1900's, Joyce set his short story 'The Dead' in which the Misses Morkans give a Christmas Party on the upper floors of this house. The characters at the celebration are a backdrop for Gabriel, a young married man who is wracked by the fear that his wife does not love him. To the clomp of horse's hooves on icy streets outside, Gabriel's mind wanders from the party to where his wife's lover is buried. Snow is falling all around. A wonderful story, and worldwide acclaimed as such.

On the other hand, though, to my mother, brought up in church ridden Ireland, the very mention of James Joyce was enough to have her set her mouth in a thin line of disapproval. She strenuously denied that Joyce ('that ould fella' as she called him) had anything *to do* with her old home.

Then John Huston, the film director, turned up and made a film of 'The Dead' and to her disgust, he made his movie in 15 Ushers Island. It was a great success and she finally had to agree that 'there might be something in

it'. Deigning to come to it with me, she promptly fell asleep until it was over, sniffing, as we left the cinema that 'it didn't look a bit like home' and that the story was 'a lot of Tommy Rot about nothing'.

Some years after she died, the house became a museum to Joyce, now called "The Joyce House". To launch the new venture, the owner threw a re-enactment of the Misses Morkan's party and my daughter and I were lucky enough to be invited.

How my mother would have gasped to see the two of us, all dressed up, sitting among Dublin's luminaries, got up in Joycean finery, bowler hats, black lace dresses and piano shawls. In what were once her family's bedrooms, we were now at huge white linen tables, blazing with candles, scoffing hot punch, goose and spiced beef. A tinny piano tinkling, a plaintiff baritone singing 'The Lass of Aughrim', glasses clinking, and the buzz of voices getting louder as cigar smoke begins.

Well, yes she might have said it was a lot of fuss about nothing, but how I wished she could have been with us. In addition, she loved a glass of punch!

(Sorry about the sad photos but I am just getting the hang of this.)



## Narrative 4

### Tuesday, May 4, 2010 a blast from the past, Frances Quinn

When I was young, I lived on a farm in Co Wicklow. Altogether, we were three boys, three dogs, horses, cows, sheep, chickens, my parents and I. My sister who was the second eldest in the family lived with two aunts who were teachers in Co. Laois.

Our house was typical of country dwellings at the time. Creature comforts, by today's standards, were sadly lacking. We had no electricity, running water or outside plumbing! It was part of my routine to go to the well and get water. I used to carry it in a "half gallon."

The concept of a Supermarket was a million miles away from life in those days. I suppose we were new age hippies but we did not realise it. Self-sufficiency was a matter of need rather than preference in those days. In our kitchen, a high beam seemed to be permanently straddled with pieces of bacon and lumps of black pudding. When my father had to kill the pig, we would get as far away as possible up the fields so that the noise would not carry us.

The sounds of the farm were not always as distressing. One of my favourites was the chirping of young chickens in the barn. They were mainly fed on hard-boiled eggs and finely chopped dandelion leaves. Another constituent of the feed was something called "Youvico" which was kept in rough sacking in the barn. What my parents did not know was that I was often to be found munching on this feed, not only in competition with the poultry, but also with half the rats in the neighbourhood!

We had a small dairy and my mother used to skim off the cream and churn it by hand to make butter. It was tradition that if a neighbour or friend called during the churning, they would have to turn the paddle for luck. It was always blissfully cool in the dairy and I remember my mother teaching me my catechism on the steps of the dairy with a lovely scent of "evening scented stock" in the air.

We also had a small garden of vegetables, gooseberries, red and black currants, rhubarb and cabbage. I was told that babies were found under heads of cabbages and regularly checked to see if any arrived. The sun always seemed to be shining except for the days we went to school.

Usually we walked or cycled, unless the weather was particularly bad, when my father would take us in the pony and trap. When we walked part of our route was through fields. A stream that was called the "mill race" ran through one field. This stream always proved to be a source of fascination to me. I loved noting the frogspawn going through its subtle daily changes, but

I never could stomach the thought of eating tapioca once it occurred to me how similar they were.

School days when we were in the junior years were great with a kind, understanding lady teaching us. As we progressed to senior classes, everyone came to hate school. The senior teacher was a brute who slapped children so hard with his big stick that he caused them to bleed, and burst several thumbs when he meted out punishment. When the school inspector arrived, the stick departed, while he was there.

School days were the only ones I dreaded. One of my favourite times of the year was when the corn was for thrashing. After being cut and stacked into reeks for drying, the day finally arrived when the puff puff and whistle heralded the arrival of the big engine thrasher. Neighbours all came to help, the men in the fields and the women in the kitchen preparing enough to feed the hungry men. Money never changed hands and the only reward was a dance in the evening with my mother playing the melodeon and me standing on my father's boots as he waltzed me around in circles.

I never remember being bored. We played football, swung from a home made swing of two ropes and a plank suspended from the branch of a tree, played seesaw with a beam of wood over a tar barrel, hurling, hide and seek and "shooting." I remember seeing men in army uniform creeping through our fields and ditches. We used to collect the spent cartridges when they left, throw them into the fire and hope for the explosion of one that still had powder.

I suppose every kid remembers the characters in their area. One old fellah had a filthy beard, which if you had the misfortune to observe closely would give you the history of his previous few meals. Another friend of my parents would call and as the evening would progress, he would take up my mother's melodeon, proceed to lick his fingers as if he was about to need them cooled, and then proceed to play the melodeon both slowly and badly.

One final memory is of my sister visiting us. She was not used to farm life but decided to come with us to collect the cows. The journey included a steep hill where we used to hold on to a cow's tail and let it drag us up. What my sister learned the hard way was that you should always walk at an angle away from the line of fire of a cow's call of nature!

## Narrative 4

### Friday, April 16, 2010 Questions and reflections on learning, Mary Mason

I am just putting down a few thoughts I have had on the subject of intergenerational learning, but in particular, older learners.

#### **What makes over 60s want to go back to studying?**

I have taken note of my own age group (over 65's ++) and it is quite a common comment –‘I was very good at English at school ... or History ... or Writing - and ‘I loved poetry’.

So, what makes one rather than another take the plunge and enroll for a programme?

#### **What were the educational opportunities for these over 60s?**

Before the advent of free secondary education in Ireland, the minimum school-leaving age was fourteen. The following scenario is from anecdotal evidence and from memory as I recall the situation when I left school, in 1952 at the age of 15, after primary plus a two-year commercial course in the High Scholl of Commerce (VEC), Rathmines.

Large numbers started work when they completed primary education. A smaller number went on to Technical Schools (VECs) (or ‘the Tech’, as they were commonly known) i.e. apprenticeship courses and various other vocational courses which added another one or two years to their total full-time education. A much smaller proportion, those whose parents could afford the fees and other expenses, went to secondary schools; some up to Inter cert. standard, and a smaller number went on to Leaving cert. A smaller number again, went to university; entry by Leaving Cert results or through direct Matriculation (the VEC’s ran Matriculation courses to prepare for this exam).

A graph showing educational attainment (copied below) ( taken from ‘The Story of Ireland’s Failure and Belated Success’, by John Fitzgerald- in 1997) bears out my recollection (and, I believe the comparison shows the effect free secondary education, introduced in 1969, had on educational attainment):

*Educational Attainment: 1997*

(I have taken the age group 55-59 as a match for to-day over 65s

and shown the age group 25-29 as a comparison)

	Age Group 55-59	Age Group 25-29
Primary	45%	5%
Inter	25%	15%
Leaving	15%	65%
3rd level	15%	30%

(There are other variables, besides the introduction of free education, which could have had an effect on the changes, e.g. raising the school leaving age to sixteen). (It would be interesting to see what effect the abolition of tuition fees at third level had, if any). \*

The figures speak for themselves.

### **What stopped me from continuing my education before now?**

I did continue my education; by various means: short courses related to my work (I had resumed a full-time career and continued with it up to retirement, at age 63). A career and other family commitments left time for little else.

### **How do over 65s find out about programmes for them?**

In my own case, it was through my membership of the Older Women's Network. The Intergenerational Learning Project was brought to my notice through the Network's monthly bulletin. I was drawn to the opening module on 'Understanding the Media', through my interest in creative writing. (And I refer to my remarks in my opening paragraph – I was one of the ... 'I always loved English literature and I always wanted to write ...' brigade!). That led me to the current module on ITC (Information, Technology and Communication).

### **What is different about the Intergenerational Learning Project?**

The participation of DCU students reinforces the link that already exists between the older generation and our committed young population. After all, we all come from families of one sort or another and its gratifying to see how the younger generation comport themselves among the older students with such ease and patience. It comes very naturally to us to turn to our younger family members, with queries and requests to explain some new fad or foible that is in vogue. I believe we all did it for the generations that went before us – the time comes to us all, in some measure, when the parent becomes the child, and we are glad of it!

### **What have I learned from the ILP?**

I have learned a measure of self-reliance. The 'see what I can do' element of the programme has been inspiring and my use of the computer is my link with the outside world: my writing contacts, my 'official' world of bank, bills, tax, etc., my friends and family through e-mail, skype, photos; the 'rest of the world' through Twitter ad Blogs (which need a bit more work from me, - so get going girl!).

### **Conclusion**

I hope that in addressing the above, the answer to the first question will have been revealed. The answers to the questions may pose other questions, for instance, it is self-evident that information must be readily available to potential takers – i.e. that implies the value of membership of clubs or organisations; and the generosity of student volunteers must be acknowledged as a vital ingredient for the mix of learning and self-confidence.

# Appendix D

## Ethical Guidelines followed as required by DCU

### Sample 1: Sample Template – Informed Consent Form (approx. 300 words)

An Informed Consent Form should generally contain the following information. Section 3 onwards should be written in the first person, e.g. “I will be asked to attend...I may withdraw from the research study at any point....I am aware that the data...etc.” The headings are there for guidance and do not need to be included in your form.

#### I. Research Study Title

*Also identify the school/centre involved, the principal investigator and any other investigators*

#### II. Clarification of the purpose of the research

#### III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

*Requirements may include involvement in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-taping of events. Getting the participant to acknowledge requirements is preferable, e.g.*

*Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)*

*I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)*  
Yes/No

*I understand the information provided*  
Yes/No

*I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study*  
Yes/No

*I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions*  
Yes/No

*I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped*  
Yes/No

**IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary**

*I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point.*

**V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

**VI. Any other relevant information**

*For example:*

- *if the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for privacy/anonymity*
- *if participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers, a clear statement that their involvement/non-involvement in the project will not affect their ongoing assessment/grades/management*

**VII. Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

**Participants Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## Sample 2 Plain Language Statements

### DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

#### Sample Template – Plain Language Statement (approx. 400 words)

A Plain Language Statement should use language that reflects the participant age group and corresponding comprehension level. It should generally contain the following information. The headings are there for guidance and do not need to be included in your form.

#### **I. Introduction to the Research Study**

*Identify the Research Study Title, the university department involved, the principal investigator (including his/her contact details) and any other investigators*

#### **II. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require**

*E.g., involvement in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-taping of events, estimated time commitment*

#### **III. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)**

#### **IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study**

#### **V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

#### **VI. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period**

#### **VII. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary**

*State those participants may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.*

### **VIII. Any other relevant information**

*For example:*

- *if the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for privacy/anonymity*
- *if participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers, a clear statement that their involvement/non-involvement in the project will not affect their ongoing assessment/grades/management*

A Plain Language Statement should end with the following statement:

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o  
Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9.  
Tel 01-7008000

## **Appendix E**

### **Fourteen sample narratives of DCU students on the DCU ILP**

#### **Narrative 1: Sunday, May 1, 2011 My Experience of ILP Michelle**

**França**

ILP has brought me an amazing experience. It gives you the opportunity to meet lovely students, to find out about their lives, their stories, and to make a better difference to their lives. It is an honour to me that I can have the opportunity to bring nice changes into lives of people with such experience already, and so much knowledge and wisdom. I also find it beautiful how it is never too late to learn, as occurs with those students, and how it is never too little to help, as we can make a difference to them. The project is run by well-disposed people with great moods and a very friendly and carrying assistance. They bring a sense of togetherness and cooperation to our group. Working with ILP has brought me only joyful experiences, which I intend to keep having.

## **Narrative 2:**

### **Friday, March 25, 2011 My experience on the project, James Bourke**

My name is James Bourke, and I served as a DCU student assistant in the Intergenerational Project learning during the autumn months of 2010. Having recently completed an undergraduate degree in engineering here at DCU and having a deep-rooted interest in Information Technology (IT), I was very interested in participating in this exercise.

Over the years, I have spent hours with friends and family providing a similar service but only ever in the context of one-to-one learning, although this did often spiral out of control resulting in one-to-many, all gathered around one computer.

The project put into context the true power of the internet as a means of communication, in that it bridges gaps that stretch between family, continents, language, age and culture.

While I appreciate that this project was not built with my learning in mind, I have to confess that I learnt quite a bit during the few weeks. During the course of this project, I discovered benefits that being a part of a team can have on the performance and experience of everyone present. The knowledge base is significantly larger than any one person might hope to have, ensuring every issue that a learner may have can be addressed successfully. I also discovered that there is a very big difference between doing such an exercise individually for family or friends and doing it as part of a group for strangers (having said that, it did not take long for us all to become very well acquainted).

I feel privileged to have been a part of something this special. To conclude, I suppose I would like to impart some wise words to provide some assurance for the learners in participating in this project:

“Never be afraid of doing something new. Remember that an amateur built the Ark and a group of professionals built the Titanic.”

## **Narrative 3**

### **My Experience by Ruaidhri**

My name is Ruaidhri and last semester I acted as a volunteer with the project. This was my first time to participate in an activity of this sort and as such was a great learning experience for both myself and the older students. For the classes I was based with the beginners group. In this class, the students learned how to set up and use their own Gmail account for email and also created short stories, which they presented to the class at the end of the year.

Upon entering the course, I had initially thought that the motivating factor for the students was simply to grasp the technology and become more aware of the IT world. I suppose this assumption was based on my own experiences with IT. However, I quickly learned that although learning to utilise the various IT tools was of importance, the key goal of the students I worked with was to establish additional communication links with family, friends and loved ones.

The students in my opinion are expert communicators. The descriptive nature and style of language used in both the stories and some emails allowed me to create clear images in my head of the situations they were describing. By writing in this fashion, the messages carried much more meaning and I was amazed about how engrossed I became in them and how much attention they commanded. This expressive style of language is in stark contrast to the much more concise language style I have become accustomed to in online communication. I feel that this emphasis on description and meaning which I have learned from the students is something I will definitely bear in mind for my future online communications.

The experience proved very enjoyable for me and I would highly recommend anyone who is interested to get involved. I also want to commend the older students for their proactive approach in embracing the technology and making the experience so enjoyable and rewarding.

## **Narrative 4**

### **Hello Everybody! James O'Brien**

Hello Everyone!

I just wanted to write a little something to introduce myself to you all. My name is James O'Brien and I will be taking over the running of this Blog for the next 2 weeks! :)

Some of you may remember me from the Intergenerational Project last semester when I was a student volunteer. As some of you may already know, I am currently finishing off a very stressful but rewarding masters in Business Management here in DCU. As part of this course, I got the chance to get involved in the Intergenerational project. My experience with the Intergenerational Learning Project has been a very positive one. I really enjoyed my time helping at it and I actually learned a lot from the experience. I think I am not alone in this regard; there is many who would agree that it really is an enriching experience to be involved with such a project. It is also a way of meeting some genuinely nice people and I was lucky enough to have met many of them while volunteering last semester. As you might have guessed, I took part in the blogging class with Cathy, although I did hop between other classes too. Therefore, I feel in a way that I have to know a bit from each of the classes and experienced different aspects of the project.

Following on from my experience at the ILP, I decided to try to get involved in other projects too. I am currently teaching another computer class in the liberties area in Dublin. I try to incorporate many of the things that I learned from doing ILP into my classes, so blogging, and social media and then the more basic skills are all taught at my class.

I probably would have never been able to teach this class had it not been for the intergenerational project. It is what spurred me on to take on this new endeavour and I am truly grateful to the ILP and to everyone who takes part in it because it helped me to gain the skills, the knowledge and particularly the confidence I needed to teach. Anyhow that is a little about me!

I hope to do a good job looking after this blog and I really look forward to receiving your posts!

James

## **Narrative 5**

**Monday, April 19, 2010 DCU Intergenerational Learning, By Jennifer Flynn**

I have been involved in the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project for over a year now and it has come under many different names since I became involved, such as Gateway Intergenerational Learning Pilot Project, Young at Heart and now Intergenerational Learning Project (ILP) but the basic message has always stayed the same.

IF you were to perhaps sum up the basic principle upon which this program was founded, a quotation from Gilbert K. Chesterton, an English writer, would not be a million miles away from the truth,

“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.”

I do not think it is too far-fetched to equate the experiences of the DCU students and the older learners to this quotation. In fact, although IT is a big part of the course, it is the cup of tea and the banter of the lunch break or between typing that makes the program what it is.

I heard about the Young at Heart program when I was in first year I and, as a computing student, I was drawn to it purely down to the fact that I wasn't sure what to expect from it, but I figured that I could probably offer some knowledge. As it turns out recursion and sorting algorithms in various programming languages were not required, cue high sigh of relief. It was a more accessible, populist type of learning that is on offer, and as useful as searching a linked-list is, it is probably not the most important skill an older person needs to acquire. This programme offers them a look at what the students get up to and the best procrastination tools for the 21st century.

To say that all the knowledge is passed from student to learner is not true at all, in fact, since taking part in the programme I have added to my social-networking repertoire. I can now count twitter, blogging and iGoogle as the new 'skills' I have taken on. In addition, I hope the skills acquired by the older learners are the same with additional confidence boost and a general I-am-going-to-try-it-and-see-what-happens, a recipe for success in most situations.

## **Narrative 6**

### **Thursday, April 15, 2010 My unforgettable experience with the Intergenerational Learning Project, by Xinran (Sunny)**

My name is Xinran. I like people to call me by my English name--Sunny, because it seems hard for them to pronounce my Chinese name :-). I am an international student studying in DCU Business School. I am a final year student but this is the first year I come in Dublin. Actually, I am curious about everything here, especially the Irish lifestyle. Thus, while receiving Trudy's email about the Intergenerational Learning Project, I was attracted and planned to participate to be a volunteer of it. It provides a platform for me to get familiar with Irish culture and lifestyle.

At the beginning, I was worried that the language barriers and culture differences between the learners and I might be a big problem, but it turned out that my fears were all for naught. They were like my grandparents, how can I feel nervous while facing them? Their sincerity and kindness closed our distances, their serious desire of lifelong learning deeply impressed me, and their sense of humour often delighted me. I really enjoy the time during the class. It is full of joy. No pressure or burden for the older learners and me.

Personally, I have learnt a lot from the project. By listening to what the tutor said, I have learnt computer words, and practised how to express my computer and internet knowledge through English to let the learner understand easily. In addition, it is a kind of challenge for me. By communicating with older learners, I have learnt the way they live, their family, the old and new Dublin etc. What I have learnt is not only the knowledge but also the Irish culture. It is significant for a foreigner to get adapted to a new environment. The experience is a treasure for me. I really appreciate the chance that this project provides me.

I feel a great sense of achievement when the learner can send email, when they can type their stories in Microsoft Word, when they can play online games, when they can watch videos online, when they can draw pictures etc. Step by step, they gradually can use computers as we students do daily. I am proud of them. They deserve to be respected.

I totally support what Joan said "This project is not just about teaching older learners ICT skills - it is about establishing a learning community. In this environment, learning and knowledge is valued and appreciated, and each one of us involved is both a transmitter and receiver of this knowledge."

## Narrative 7

**Thursday, April 22, 2010 my experience with the project, by Sheena**

Dia dhuit! My name is Sheena, I am from Beijing and I am a DCU student study Marketing in Business School. Last Saturday, I was very happy to see the ceremony for all the learners, tutors and teachers. Here I use teachers because they are really respected and without them, I would have no chance of having such a good experience. Although I was working as a tutor giving help to the older learners, I also learnt a lot from others during the classes. Now I would like to show partly what I have learnt from the Project: creative writing of mine.

### Brainstorming

- Start: IT learning Project
- 2<sup>nd</sup> step: My previous worries, cultural differences, gap between generations
- 3<sup>rd</sup> step: Beginning of my life in Dublin, experience on each Saturday, influences on me
- Final stop Happiness, excellent experience, important memory...

Like Sunny, this is my first time coming to Dublin. And I remember the first day when I arrived here, all kinds of feelings came into my heart, excited, curious and panic, etc. Because of the far distance from home, because of loneliness of being alone, because of the differences between western and eastern cultures...However, most were expectations about the life in the future.

When I received the invitation to join the Project from Trudy, I was both excited and scared. I was excited because I had no idea about traditional Irish people. And I expected to know more about the Irish culture. I was scared because of my spoken English and the gap between the generations. I knew that only having IT skills and patience was not enough. As a tutor, I should be qualified with good communication skills so I worried about misunderstanding of my explanations about the computer stuff.

As time flies, I found that the language barrier was not a problem at all since the friendship could be understood in many different ways. And learning from friends is easier as there was no pressure at all. On the other hand, I did learn more than I could have learnt from my lectures, from people in the Project, and I will treasure them as my best present I have from Ireland!

When I heard that the project had helped Alison make a decision about her career, I asked myself, ‘what was the influence on you?’ a sound calling, ‘making life meaningful, having unforgettable memories, friends...’

As we all know, the project comes to the end this semester, so does my life in Dublin, I would like to give all the participants my best wishes and hope everybody enjoys the summer holiday! By the way, if anybody plans to travel to China, I would like to be your guide if my service is required!

## Narrative 8

Sunday, April 11, 2010 [Mark - My Experiences with the Project](#)

My name is Mark, I am 24 and I have been a DCU student volunteer on the Intergenerational Learning Project since March 2009. I decided to join the Project whilst approaching the end of my undergrad Multimedia degree. I wanted to get some experience with teaching ICT skills, and the flexible nature of the Project fitted around my studies nicely. I have since started up my postgrad studies and I am still volunteering as much as I can.

Personally, the project has helped me grow in confidence and greatly enhanced my knowledge of what it means to both learn and teach. I have stood in front of a class for the first time and taught a subject I am passionate about. I have spoken at a conference in front of a scarily large audience. I have grown to become comfortable with situations, which I would have gone to the ends of the earth to avoid before I joined the Project just over a year ago.

I have found myself re-learning all these new technologies along with the older learners. I have had to stop and evaluate everything I know and ask myself *how* I know it and *how did I react* the first time I was presented with this technology? It has made me much more aware of usability and accessibility issues, which are very important for my studies.

The Internet and ICT in general has so much to give to the older generation. I love the breakthrough moments we see in class every week when the learners discover something new. Whether it be Twitter, Facebook or even a simple email to a son or daughter in Australia, there is a whole world of technology out there to be taken advantage of. I have listened to the learners speak about how all this new technology is empowering and how online communities alleviate feelings of isolation. This is why the Intergenerational Project is so valuable, it fosters a learning environment, which is informal, fun and very effective.

There is of course a large social aspect to the Saturday morning classes. I have met some amazing people, people with incredible determinism and patience. People with towering ambition and admirable modesty. The project has gone from strength to strength in recent times and I feel honoured to be a part of it as it gains momentum and strives for the attention and development it needs and deserves.

## **Narrative 9**

### **Thursday, April 29, 2010 Alison's experiences with the project**

My name is Alison, I am 21, I am a second year business student in DCU, and I have been a DCU student volunteer on the Intergenerational Learning Project since September 2009. I decided to join the Project, as I love helping people out and meeting new people. I also wanted to get some experience in IT, to see if it was an option to pursue as a career.

This Project has provided me many opportunities such as

- Having fun outside the normal college hours
- Making a difference in someone's life
- It is good for your CV!
- Become part of a team (all working together with the same goals in mind)
- Meeting new people from a variety of age groups and cultures
- Giving you a position within the community
- Giving you a sense of pride; feeling needed and valued

Personally, the Project has helped my chances of gaining employment and has influenced my career choice as I am now considering a career in IT. It has improved my communication and social skills, promoted my self-esteem and increased my confidence.

This Project brings together diverse groups and networks and helps to get rid of inaccurate stereotypes. Older adults and youth are less alienated from society. This Project in my opinion has many opportunities to expand the level of services it offers and to meet more needs of the older adults. It helps not only the DCU students but also the older adults to improve on communication skills, self-esteem and confidence and it fosters friendships across generations. Therefore, older adults can remain productive, useful and contributing members of society, which decreases loneliness, boredom and depression while promoting their self-esteem and confidence through the use of ICT.

## Narrative 10

### Thursday, May 6, 2010 Amit's story

Ben Sweetland once said, "We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own". This cannot be truer for me because of my experience in volunteering on the Intergenerational Learning Project.

I came to Ireland last year to do an M.E. in Telecom. For the previous five years, I had been working as a sales manager and spend 70% of my time traveling. Life was fast and I never had a chance to look around. After coming here, everything was new (places, people, culture, weather, time schedule ...) and it was fun, however with time things were slowing down. Being a little shy and introvert, I was using most of my time on my laptop (working on software codes, watching Youtube, reading IEEE journals on telecom ...)

Then I got an email from Trudy – ‘volunteers invited to come on Saturdays to help older people to learn IT Communication skills’. This reminded me of a situation where I wanted to send a picture of my sister's prospective husband to my mother, via email. I could not as she did not know how to use the Internet (certainly, it was not her fault because she never needed these things before). I told myself - "let's give it a try this Saturday".

The next thing I know - I keep on coming every Saturday. At first, it was like "OK just one time! -then: not bad let's do it a second time, -then: oh - that's good let's do it again". After every session - it was as if I had achieved something and I was making a little difference to the learners' lives.

I remember when I met one man - he said his daughter was living in the US and the reason he joined this learning class was to be able to chat and email her. I remember another woman (a woman who like to execute every task perfectly) and who was keen on formatting a proper Word document. In addition, it was such a pleasure to see them do what they wanted, now, by themselves. For me these sessions were not only limited to pure teaching but were more of a learning experience. My classmates have a lot more experience to share with us and what I was offering was so small in comparison. In the last session, I was mesmerized when they read out their stories one-by-one in front of the class.

I think this is an excellent platform where two generations can come together -to know, to share and to help each other. I hope to encourage such ideas in India also, as the social and family structure is changing there and there is a need for similar thinking. Most of the young family members are working and living in different cities and countries, and the traditional joint family (grandpa, grandma, uncle, aunt, cousins, mother, father, siblings all living together) is not so practical any more. However, they still love each

other and still want to stay in touch with each other. It is not good that I should teach an older person only if he is my grandpa or she is my mother. I believe, here, the best attitude is: I will volunteer for anyone's father or grandma and I hope that someone will volunteer for mine. Because in the end we all need, each other and we all can benefit each other.

## Narrative 11

### Some thoughts on the Project by Yicheng Zhou (Ethan)

As an international student, I am happy to be a part of this project. Talking to these lovely women always makes me feel comfortable. They are just so polite and thoughtful. They remind me of my parents all the time, when they are so worried about touching the keyboard at the beginning. I still remember the time I taught my parents how to use Skype, and there is nothing different.

The learner I mentored is no different to these older people, so lovely, having the same curiosity as kids when using the Internet. She is nice, and always talks about her children and grandchildren. She is funny and makes me laugh all the time about these interesting things between her and her grandchildren. I have to admit that it felt so good when I got the first email from her. She might not be the student who learns the fastest, and I am definitely not a good teacher. However, who cares, it was always good when I saw her start to familiarise herself with the keyboard and touchpad, to check email, and most important, not be terrified when sitting in front of a laptop. It is not only about learning, or going to a school, but we are trying to provide a new insight for these people, letting them see the whole world, even though they might never be able to be there physically.

I cannot say there is any difference between these older ladies and the ones back home. These older people are always being so kind and warm. However, there are some differences between the societies, which make these people seem so alive. When I am with my learner, she cannot stop talking about her hobbies and friends. This is so different compared to my grandparents. Her life is interesting; she has always something to keep herself busy. On the other side, many older people in my country can only stay at home, who are lonely and having nothing to do. I think this is exactly the purpose that these types of project.

I am glad that I could be a part of this project and provide my help. As a student from a foreign country, it is always good for me to talk with these nice ladies. They always make me feel warm. I am so glad to see they are happy and making progress during the course.

## Narrative 12

**Wednesday, December 22, 2010 the Intergenerational Learning Project  
– Conor.**

*What were feelings, attitudes, and beliefs before starting the project?*  
Looking back at the first week of the Intergenerational Learning Project I see now that I was actually quite naïve as to what ‘beginner’ meant when I signed up to be part of the class. I had originally chose beginner as although I felt I had good computer skills, I did not wish to get ahead of myself and attempt to teach an older learner about blogs and RSS feeds!

However, what I quickly learned was that beginner meant someone who had possibly never opened a laptop before in their life, or at least someone who felt like they knew absolutely nothing about computers

This was both a blessing and a curse, as in one way I was getting to see how older people view things such as email or even simple concepts such as icons or scroll bars when I would view them as second nature. On the other hand, however, I had to try to remember what way I had learned about them from scratch back in primary school and try to explain these concepts to someone who had never heard of them before.

Overall, these interactions with beginner users really helped me to understand how new and even frightening computers can be to older or beginner users and I feel the Intergenerational Learning Project was is an excellent way for older learners to get to grips with the lights speed change at which the world around them is evolving. The ILP is definitely the first step in helping them achieve this.

*How has the ILP changed my perceptions and views?* First, it has completely changed my perception of how difficult computers must seem to those who have never used them before. Even just viewing how some of the older learners struggled with the track pad or to understand the new meanings for words in the computer age such as copy, past, click, word and paint to name just a few.

Also, one additional key area that I felt I learned was in the interaction with the older learners and in hearing their reasons as to why they wanted to learn computer and internet skills. For the most part, it was to stay in contact with children or relatives, which I felt, showed great courage and determination on their part to embrace these new technologies and to make the effort to learn about them and how to use them to keep in touch with those close to them.

## **Narrative 13**

**Tuesday, December 21, 2010 Intergenerational Learning Project Ian**

### **Intergenerational Learning Project Ian**

I found this course to be of great benefit for students and older learners alike. The project gives older learners the opportunity to learn in a relaxed environment. For students it gives us the opportunity to share our technological expertise with older learners. The most rewarding part of this course for me was seeing the learners gaining confidence in using computers. It gives them an invaluable skill, which they can take away from this course. I hope that this means that they can keep in touch with family members via e-mail and become confident in using the internet.

I am a master's student myself and have to take complex computer classes such as JAVA. I find such classes challenging and initially daunting. I can therefore empathise with the learners on how complicated learning new computer skills can seem at first. I find myself that persistence, practice and determination are the key to acquiring new computer competencies. Watching the learners growing in confidence and in skill level was rewarding to watch and be a part of. Computer competencies are invaluable and can open up a whole new world for this group. Learning new computer skills is an ongoing process for people of all ages and ability. Even the most computer literate person must keep up with the latest technological innovations. What we must realise in this country is that although we are perceived as a technologically advanced nation, much of our population are lacking in even the most basic skills. If innovative courses become more widespread that can surely only be a good thing. It is important that people are not left behind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where computer technology is changing as quickly as the weather!

I genuinely hope that the learners have enjoyed their Saturday mornings spent with us in DCU. I hope that they can take away their newfound skills and have the confidence to use them in their own homes.

## Narrative 14

Thursday, April 21, 2011 Can You Feel My Pain by Eimear Ní

### Chearnaigh

Almost ten years ago, I was badly burnt in a house fire. I sustained full thickness third degree burns to 26% of my body. Because of the burns and about 60 operations the muscles, tissue and nerves in my body had become badly damaged. The burns slowly began to heal and I should have been rebuilding my life but instead of feeling better, I was experiencing more intense pain. This pain began to radiate throughout parts of my body that had not even been burnt. Doctors could find no physical reason for the pains that felt like stabbing, burning and stinging electric shocks shooting from my neck down my back and into my legs. It took six years before I was diagnosed with Chronic Neuropathic Pain.

Chronic Neuropathic Pain is a hidden condition. The central nervous system stops functioning properly, causing the nerve-endings to constantly send signals of pain to the brain, even after wounds or tissue has healed.

Living with Chronic Neuropathic Pain can be a sad and isolating existence. It has the potential to steal away from you what you feel are rightfully yours. Your body does not belong to you anymore. It will not function in the way it should or used to, it fatigues quickly and sometimes feels like it will shutdown completely. Your choices do not belong to you anymore. Everything you do and everywhere you go is dictated by the level of Pain you have at that particular time. Your thoughts do not belong to you anymore. How you think becomes invaded with negativity, your judgement becomes so clouded by the Pain that you cannot think rationally. This overbearing Pain becomes the focus of your thoughts. Your feelings and emotions do not belong to you anymore. Neuropathic Pain has a huge impact on your emotional wellbeing, causing you to feel completely overwhelmed by it. Feelings of depression and anxiety become part of the daily struggle for survival.

As Neuropathic Pain runs its path of destruction, wreaking havoc on your mind and body, your life as you knew it begins to slip away, causing distressing and detrimental effects. The fact that nobody around you appears to understand what is happening to you makes this a very cruel condition to live with.

There is no cure for chronic pain. Multi disciplinary pain management and advanced, highly specialised medical intervention is the only hope (at the moment) for temporary relief and for any chance of some quality of life. **However, Chronic Pain is not formally recognised in Ireland (or Europe) as a disease in its own right. This serious condition continues to be misunderstood, misdiagnosed and inappropriately managed. You**

can help to change this by supporting the 'Can you feel my Pain' campaign and [signing the bill of rights](#).

Chronic Pain Ireland, in conjunction with Pfizer and a number of other leading patient and citizen organisations across Europe have joined forces to call for real change through the campaign "Can You Feel My Pain?" Later this year, we hope to have collected significant support for the Rights, which will be presented alongside the launch of a European wide report (Pain Proposal) that aims to drive recognition of the personal, social and economic impact of chronic pain on the European population - promoting change to ensure the **right patient** receives the **right management** and treatment at the **right time**.

There are **five** key rights that we believe will help improve the life of people affected by chronic pain.

1. Right to be understood
2. Right of Access to Information
3. Right to Professional Support
4. Right to Early Intervention and Optimal Pain Management
5. Right of Pain Relief as a Fundamental Human Right

## Appendix F

### Extract from interview with Jeannie and Jack

**Jeannie :**Where do I start? Well I am an older person at the present time but I worked in a prison for almost twenty four years teaching, before that I was a nun in a convent in the South of England. I originally came from Chicago and I have two Masters Degrees. What else can I tell you about me?

**Interviewer :**What was your experience of teaching ?

**Jeannie:** I taught in the vocational schools before I went into the prison, and evidently I taught some of the same people. I taught the lads mostly, they were between the ages of 16 and 21, a little bit older than the ones I would have been dealing with in the vocational school, and some of them were the same students. And what I liked in that teaching was that I could organise my own curriculum, what I thought they might need more. I was really employed as a religion teacher but it was not possible to teach religion like you would do in the ordinary schools so they got their religion through the other courses that I organised and I organised social education subjects for them about relationships, sex education, mainly about how important family is and relationships in your family. I taught them drama, we did artwork as well, and I brought music into the prison as well. I brought my guitar. Then they started writing their own plays which was really good and I liked that, because I was the catalyst that brought them to that kind of thing and they loved doing things like that. I used to do meditation with them and yoga, which was also very useful. I loved teaching in the prison because I had the freedom to organise my own classes, what I thought was important for them. They used to do six week courses with me, because they moved in and out of the prison so quickly, you wouldn't have the whole group for a year. So I used to do six week courses and at the end of that if they had continued with the course, they would get a certificate. Now some of these lads had never ever received a certificate and I remember one lad he gave it to his mother to frame and put it up on the wall because he was so pleased with himself.

**Interviewer:** And what was your Masters in Jeannie ?

**Jeannie:** My first Masters was in Religious Education. I got that from Loyola University in Chicago and my second Masters was in Women's studies over at UCD. And I loved that because I was always interested in the potential of women in the world today and how they affect all of society. And I used to be the chairperson for the Christian Feminist Movement way way back in those days. We were a network of women's groups, North, South, East and West in the country and they gave women an area where

they could come and air their feelings about things, about religion, about themselves, and share it with other women. And it was a wonderful experience for so many women because some of them felt that they really couldn't do anything. You know they were at home and they weren't useful for anything except doing things at home. But we were able to raise their awareness a little bit so that then they went on to other things. And I must say that Mary McAleese was wonderful. She gave us a conference actually when we were in Mayo once. We had a conference every year and once Nell McCafferty came to it as well, so we had a lot of people who were very interested. We would do liturgical dance, liturgical art and we actually raised people's awareness that they can do something. And that's why I like the course that we're doing as well. Because I always feel that life doesn't stop at 65. And I always think that you can go on and you're still useful to the world and to yourself and to your family and to society. There are a lot of things we could really do but past years have not been so easy. And something like you have been offering us here in the University is fabulous. To have older people studying again, keeping their minds active, and their interests still alive. And they you meet all the younger people who are also there and you can see how you can share so much between the different age groups. You don't have to be so separated and isolated from one another. But they learn from us and we learn from them. That's fantastic, I think that's a great thing.

**Interviewer:** Jack tell me a little bit about yourself and your life to date.

**Jack:** Well I was born in Northern Ireland, County Derry. The war was on when I was at school. I remember one of the schools I was in, maybe at ten or twelve. It was close to the airfield, and all the activities going on. There was nothing remarkable about that except that one of the students, my little pal, was Seamus Heaney. He started there. And then later on I went to secondary school and from there I became a barber for a few years. I went down to Tipperary, my first venture out of Northern Ireland. People tried to persuade me not to go down – it was called the Free State at that time – that you wouldn't get anything down there.

**Interviewer:** This was in the forties Jack?

**Jack:** It would have been the fifties actually. And then I joined a religious order as well up in Tyrone, Benburb and went out to Zululand, South Africa on the missions. Spent about four years there. When I left apartheid was just finishing, 1976. I remember seeing all the smoke as I was taking off in the plane, a lot of activity going on then.

And now back to the present day. I'm enjoying the classes actually, although I'm not there every Saturday as you know, I've other occupations. I'm enjoying them and sometimes when I am not doing anything very much, just looking at all the people there and you see the enthusiasm and the

information they get from the students. It's almost like a whole new lease of life for them and they're enjoying it. And that's about a summary of as much as I can recall. Apartheid was on then and we couldn't go into a black area. There were little fences around and the missions would be a white area..... I was in Zululand, yes. You were actually out in the sticks. You'd think you'd be forgotten about, that nobody would remember where you were. You'd have to get permission to go allow you go in; there was a very strict level of apartheid there. And especially with missionaries. Of course missionaries were very much with the Africans, with the Zulus, teaching them They didn't like that too much; you wouldn't get on their popular list. And then it all broke up. You know the way you would sometimes take kids out here in the sun and you'd be talking to them about the things around, nature study things – you couldn't do that there, because that would have been considered as an organised group, so you'd be against the rules. Any organised group would be seen as dangerous. But that all changed. I haven't been there now since. Although I think it is a little bit rougher there now. Lots of crimes and shooting going on there. But when I was there, most of us had a great time. Had wonderful times, go anywhere they wanted, had people working for them. It was very primitive all right, but you got used to that, and at that time we were coming from an Ireland that wasn't that – this was the sixties and seventies – we were almost in a depression like we are now. And when you came back again it was a whole different thing – a culture shock. You'd stay there for five years, then go on holiday home, then back again for another five years.

**Interviewer** : Could you tell me a little bit about your involvement in the Intergenerational Project here in DCU?

**Jeannie** : Ok, I first heard about the courses when I belonged to a group called OWN which is Older Women's Network and they were offering different things and they said they were going to start a project over in DCU and I was interested in some kind of education, like courses and stuff, but this was for older people. And because it had 'older people' and I'm an older person I said I want to do this. It was also explained that we were going to have younger students in with us and I always loved the younger people because there is so much that they have. If you can grab them when they are enthusiastic, young and vibrant you can do a lot of things with them and they can do a lot of things too. They are dreamers and they have dreams that can come true, if you know what I mean. And so I thought that the younger people joining in with us was a very important part of this course. And one of the interesting things also was that this attracted me to the course. The first course I did was in communications and I would have done anything to come and be together with a group that I know were so alive and were helping one another and working together. And you see the younger people have so much to give and they have all kinds of new ideas and that's wonderful but they need to be challenged as absolutely older people need to be challenged and they need to be channelled into the areas

where they can share their experience and that's what I really loved about the Saturday mornings. I would like to see more happening and I would love to see more modules with more topics because you know communications and computers are important and we have to learn that but the young people all know that and the older people have to learn that and it's nice how the younger people can show us how to do these things.

But then when you have got the computer course we need to do other kinds of things beyond that. And I'm particularly interested in creative writing particularly I would like to continue with it. I did write when I was back in my convent after I had been off on leave of absence, I did write little stories that were published in magazines but the others sisters weren't allowed to read them so they didn't know but my Reverend Mother did. She always was the one who edited everything I wrote and of course she was the one who made me sign the cheques when they came in which was fine. I know I can write and I would like to increase that ability and I would also like to really do something more and I have written a little bit. I have written 600 pages on my experience in the cloister and it is like a memo. I did this launching of a book the other day about how to write memoirs and one of the things I feel is it so important is for older people. There is a wealth of information that they have and it can be lost, and experiences they had when they were younger and if they can just get down and write the stuff out then those things can last for people coming on, younger people too and, it is important that we share these experiences. How often is it that you look at histories and they are all full of facts and stuff but if you get the person that has lived through it they understand and their experiences and they can share that. That is a wonderful way to learn from what has happened in the past and how things have been for different people. I really think it's a wonderful thing to do and I really believe that what you're starting to do with these Intergenerational groups is very valuable and important for now, and not to lose all the people that have been living through the last 60 – 70 years. So much has happened in the last even 10, 20 years that is important that it is not lost. We can see where we've come from and where we are now.

**Interviewer:** Jack you just came to the course this year. ... I'm interested in what you're views.

**Jack :** I don't think I would change it much because the foundation is already there. The people who are at a more advanced stage of their lives if you rush them too much it might put the brakes on the people and they can't learn as they might have been able to. They are able for different degrees of learning but they all need to mesh in together, nobody can go ahead of the others, so you are not left behind. There could be a danger of doing that if you start changing too much. If you are going to change, the people should know and there was the idea that they know what's going on and they know how to change. You won't get two people going at the same pace. We'll be

talking about it now next week. And another thing about the class that you won't be able to do it on your own. You have the kind of social academic thing which is what happens in Universities where there are people studying together and when they come together for recreational time and you are talking about the things you learn and that seems to reach your mind, that kind of thing that you can find in universities and schools, I'm not sure what you'd call it, but like a socio-academic situation. Even when you are having your cup of tea you are talking about that morning or whenever and you can share with others and they share with you and it's like the learning is a nuance or a mystery that you didn't know about. And you can talk with the DCU students which is a different learning than at home or studying by mail and things like that. So it's great to get together and be together because the things start to rub off on each other. Because when you go to class you are walking and rushing to get to the next class but when you settle down you notice how the learning increases your brain power and knowledge power. Even for elderly people, learning at this stage is good and the communal aspect of it as well it increases your ability to learn

**Interviewer:** Jeannie does the course have benefits for you in anyway?

**Jeannie:** Well it certainly increases your confidence in yourself and helps you to believe in what you can do because as you get older you pick up this atmosphere that you're an older person and that we don't need you any more, you haven't got anything valuable to contribute but that's not what this course is all about. You feel that you have something valuable, that your little bit of life isn't lost. We have the time to share it with these young people as well, it's really fabulous. I feel that it would be a shame for this not to go forward, you need to go forward with it because it is still at the forming stage. I think people are going to be living longer which seems to be happening and because they'll have a lot more years after retiring and it would be great to have something useful to be doing at that time and one of the wonderful things is that this is hands on if you know what I mean, it's not just all totally intellectual, it's not all just reading books and stuff, it's actually being together with these other young people and being able to communicate on a level that both of you can understand one another. I think it's fabulous, I really think it's a great thing for us. Can I say one thing that my husband never mentioned but he should, he is a hand radio operator and he has been doing that for years and years since he was a young man and he belongs to a special radio club and years back when the Berlin Wall came down he knew about it before most people because of the contacts he had through the hand radio. That is another thing that the computer is part of that as well.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the course should continue?

**Jeannie:** Oh I do think it should continue. If it didn't continue then I would think it a terrible loss to all in society, I really do. If it continues I would like

it to have more modules though, different subjects that might only last for 6-8 weeks or something like that but different subjects and find out what the older people and the younger students would be able to share together. I do believe that writing or creative writing should be one of the subjects or learning a bit more about the sciences would be good....

**Jack:** Oh yea I would most definitely like the project to continue. In 2012 TV will be gone completely digital so if you can't handle a computer at this stage you won't be able to. It's a whole different thing. So it's something you'd have to be fairly well used to or at least have some knowledge of. For other subjects that would depend on the number of people you have, like if you only have three people than it would be no use to you. The people who come now might like to have a different subject. Maybe you have a special day where you can talk to older people who have been there to get their views

**Interviewer:** I'm really interested to know about two things – one thing is your reading, what has influenced you and what hasn't influenced you over your life-time and also maybe words of advice that you would give to the younger students here on campus

**Jeannie:** Even in our classes we have various people from various experiences. I believe everyone has a book in them, I really do, and you see most of the time you don't share it and if you don't share it then it's lost and that's a tragedy to lose something precious and the time that has passed is precious to us and it can teach us things for the future as well. I'm supposed to have words of wisdom at this stage but what I would say to the young people is to continue what you are doing and be open to the older people and what they have experienced in their lives. Also I think it is important because sometimes we hesitate when we want to do something. We hesitate and then we lose it and I think we need to take risks once in a while with one another. Be adventurous and be really open for whatever is happening.

**Jack:** The thing with the younger generation, you see they have certain preconceived ideas. When you are growing up there are certain influences that come to you and they stick with you forever almost so if you get some new blood coming in without clashing you can learn something different, you can even merge in with another person's thinking. And it is more or less getting out of your preconceived ideas from your early days or things that you were taught or told. And I know that when we looked back at our older generation we used to think that they were 'fuddy-duddyish' whereas when we were approached here by the kids they have been great. They are not judgemental in any way and they are quite patient and they tolerate you as you go on, even if you mightn't understand and they go out of the way to explain it to you. There is no 'don't be so stupid kind of thing'. Yes they are very very tolerant of you and very eager.

**Jeannie** :Yes that is very important because we need to be tolerant of one another. If we are not then we will never be able to understand one another or be able to really share and that's so valuable. In order to learn from one another we have to be open to one another. No one is stupid and you said something that made me think too that even if we have conflicting ideas it's not bad to have a good discussion over it, maybe out of a discussion like that something better will come. A little bit of conflict isn't bad if it is constructive

**Jack**: In the older days when we were small kids we used to I remember an old man that I knew and he was very well-read and you would be listening to the stories he would tell you. So this is the kind of thing that you have the young absorbing the old and the old getting interested in the young – it's like a continuation of life going on

**Jeannie**: It's so good to have the young people there; it keeps you young to be there with them

**Interviewer**: Jim, going back to you for the moment, you mentioned Seamus Heaney. What do you remember about him as a boy?

**Jack**:Well we used to play together, I think I was twelve and he was ten. As a boy he didn't really play too much around although he was great fun. You see my grandmother lived next door to them. His mother was bridesmaid at my mother's wedding. I have met him a few times since but I remember in school once there was Master Murphy who he mentioned in one of his poems and Big Jim Evans. But Master Murphy, John Murphy, he was teaching us how to write poetry and this iambic pentameter and we had to write a poem about the carnival that was there every year. I can't remember now what he wrote but I don't think he took poetry seriously until he went to University. I was reading some of his poetry, I don't think it was published yet, in the Belfast Telegraph and one of the lines was 'the only collar he tolerated was the white collar of his shirt'.

**Interviewer**: And do you remember that character?

**Jack**: No. He was living in Belfast but he wrote several other ones that weren't published. I was in school with him and then he went off to college in Derry and then he went to Belfast University, Queen's University. I remember when he was in Queens and his brother Joseph was killed crossing the road, it was a very dangerous road.

**Interviewer**: Was that the little boy he wrote about in 'Mid-term Break'?

**Jack**: It was yeah. He was only four years of age

**Interviewer:** I always will remember that poem because it was so poignant when Seamus wrote the poem.

**Jack:** Yes and he was the older brother. And I remember his father was a farmer and a cattle breeder in my time, if I remember correctly, and they lived in a place not very far from (Lebroch?) and there used to be a hall there and there were plays every Sunday. I played around the farm. Yeah we used to play around quite a lot.

**Jeannie:** Recalls how she entered an enclosed order at twenty years of age) So when I got to the convent, I had never seen anything like a cloistered convent before, and it's not there anymore because as I said it was dissolved. But, you see, there was a summer cherry outside and there was a lodge and at the side of the lodge there was a laneway and through the laneway and then turn to the right and there was a door, a big door, and you go into it and there was nothing there except a barrel there waiting for you and a square window where a nun would come and ask you who you are and that was called the 'turn' and any suit case you had would have to go into the turn. I had never seen anything like that, it really was a big barrel that turned. She said to me 'you have to go around to the chapel' so then I went all the way around to outside the cemetery to the little chapel and it was very very rustic. When I got into the chapel I asked 'where's the altar?' but I was facing the wrong way. There were great big gates, they looked like garage gates I'd never seen anything like that before, so when it was time for the Reverend Mother to get me she came up to the altar rails and opened the gates and I went through into the sanctuary and then she brought me down into the choir chapel of the nuns and I had never seen anything like it before and we knelt in front of the gates that separate the chapel from the altar to the choir, the nuns choir, and we said prayers and then they brought me around into the actual main cloister and they greeted me with the kiss of peace and I looked at this woman who was going to be my novice mistress and she reminded me of an Italian Mamma Mia, she was a very big English woman. Anyway they took me up these stone stairs to bow to a statue of Our Lady in the middle of the landing and then away into the cloister. The place where they had the novices was separate place from where the nuns were and then she brought me into what was to be my cell and she said tomorrow morning you can wash and I said 'what?' There was a wash basin there; I had never seen anything like it. It looked to me like a bird bath and that was what we were going to wash with. I looked out the window of my cell and it was just opposite to the chapel across the little courtyard and I could see the light on in the sanctuary and I was home. That was my entrance and I'll tell you a little bit more about the cloisters. We were very enclosed, we wore sandals which we made ourselves and when you went out to work in the gardens you had special shoes of someone who died probably and had left to the convent and you had to wear these boots as well. I also had wellington boots because we were out working in the garden even when it rained. And a little bit about the life was; I was very young and

it was all an adventure for me and it was all special and that didn't last forever. I entered in 1957. It was really very old-fashioned in the old way but I didn't care; I could have been in Timbuktu. I felt I was called to be a member and it was a life of real prayer and it was beautiful. But there were lots of problems there as well because when you get a whole group of women together of all kinds of different personalities and they have to keep silence as well there is always going to be some kind of tension there as well. But I enjoyed those first years as a novice. We used to put on plays too on big celebrations and feast days. For Christmas we celebrated from Christmas Eve up until eight days after Epiphany so we would decorate the whole chapel and the whole convent and we had certain days free where we could walk or read or garden or whatever you like or just do ordinary house work or that. But normally we would each have our own, as we called them, obediences, the thing we were responsible for; whether it was cleaning or cooking or working in the garden. Each person had their own responsibility which they had to do and each year they either changed or you got renewed in it. It was known as the 'Chapter of Obediences'. We got up in the middle of the night for matins, we would go to bed around eight o'clock and we would get up at around eleven o'clock and stay up to two o'clock praying in the chapel. And then we went back to bed and go to sleep until five o'clock and then you'd get up again and you'd have meditation and preparation for mass and after mass you'd have a small collation. When they talk about a small collation they mean a glass of hot water, a cup of tea and a piece of bread of two ounces. And that was for breakfast. And then you'd go out; most of the novices would be working in the garden, digging or planting or weeding or whatever and we had nine acres. And we had our own little cemetery inside and a part of the grounds which were a plantation, there were a lot of trees and they used to be fruit trees but they didn't produce much fruit when we were there but anyway. And through the trees we had what we called the woods; there were wild flowers and things like that there, and beyond just opposite the windows of the main convent would be down the main path we had four big fields and that was where we grew all the vegetables that we ever ate. And at one time we had a flock of our own chickens and we had eggs from them, but then they got fowl-pest and then they had to be burned and we never had the chickens again. And we also had goat houses at the side of the wall and before I came they used to have cows so they could have their own dairy but they didn't have them when I was there. But one thing that happened when I was a novice was we were right on the seafront in Sussex and we could hear when the Father would say mass in the chapel as well as in the big church and hear the announcements and he would announce that in the summer time they would have donkey rides along the water side on the beach. And one time there was another young novice; there were three of us at the same level. We had entered a month or two months after each other so there were the three of us together. There was one other one from Chicago and myself and the other one was from New Zealand and she used to get in all kinds of trouble. And it was really funny; the other one from Chicago was the really holy one, I

was in between I was neither one nor the other and Sr. Mary-Anthony was always into trouble. So in confession didn't she say to Father once she had never ridden on a donkey before in her life and she would love the chance to do that. And he took it that she had permission to have the donkey for the year, for the summer. After the summer the donkeys go for a holiday somewhere else. He thought we were going to have the donkey for the rest of the winter. When the donkey arrived, Reverend Mother didn't know what to do with it or what to do with Sr. Mary-Anthony. The donkeys name was June and it was clever but we knew it could get up to mischief. We were told to bring the donkey down to the old goat houses for somewhere for it to stay. So it walked down the little path and Mary-Anthony climbed on her back because now she was going to have her ride on a donkey. And the donkey wanted to get her off his back and when they came into the goat house, the goat house only came so high and as the donkey walked in it would wipe whoever was on its back right off. So they just had to get off really, really quick before they got banged into the wall. So June was choosy, she would go and eat all our weeds but then she'd deposit her little deposits everyplace as well and then more weeds would come up. And she would terrorise the nuns actually, she was let too free and when we were off digging in the fields you'd have to be very careful June wasn't around because she would go at you and kick up her heels so I tore so many habits crawling out of the way when June was there. But one time we were having Benediction, that would be on Friday, and the other sister from Chicago, Mary-Alexis, she was nowhere to be seen and we were getting worried about her because she had fainted a couple of times in the convent we thought maybe she was out in the garden somewhere. So we when though with the Benediction we were sent out to find her, where she was. We were all over the place. And then we were going in the garden when I heard 'Help!' in a weak little voice and she was in the old chicken house and she behind the door and there was a little opening where the chickens go in and out of, she had a big, huge stick which was holding. And June was standing right in front of the door and wasn't going to let her out and she avoided the stick but wouldn't let her out of that shed. So we eventually had to rescue her but she missed Benediction because of June, she terrified her. So there were different things like that that happened. We had a good life and an interesting life. It was quiet; we had a life of prayer certainly because we had the Divine Office at certain times during the day. We had to get up in the middle of the night for matins, I found that always very difficult. Every year something special would be happening though. It wasn't as though we were totally lost to the world outside. We had no television, no radio, we had a telephone, no newspapers, and if we got a newspaper Reverend Mother would read it first and cut out the pieces that we shouldn't read and we had a few magazines which Reverend Mother would also let us see if there was nothing in it that would upset us. But there were certain rules and regulations that were very antiquated; we had penances, there was also a wire thing that you put around your waist which points inward and you wore it during meditation time at certain times and it would hurt your skin. And

for discipline there were these cords like on big Venetian blind with knots in them and when we were novices we were given it as a gift when you had your first vows and I remember Reverend Mother asked me ‘what do you think of this discipline?’ and I said I didn’t think much of it. It’s like a feather duster. And she said ‘that’s not what it’s supposed to be. So she went and got me another one and I had to tie it together and I never complained about it ever again. And Sister Mary-Anthony was very cute because she when you are taking the discipline you have to hit yourself with these cords on your back and at night-time it was before we went to bed and we had to be doing it as we were reciting the ‘miseraries’ in Latin and there is a line at the end of it which is very much like the beginning so if you were not clever you could be saying the same line over and over without realising that you were coming to the end.

**Interviewer:** Well that was absolutely fascinating and I know there are more stories in that and we are coming to the end of the interview, Is there anything else that you’d like to add, particularly to do with the project on a Saturday morning ?

**Jeannie:** I think I said pretty much most of what I feel about it but I love this project. I think it is wonderful for you even to have thought of it and to bring it to fruition and that it’s there now. I’d like to see this stay as a centre where people could come and do a course and do it with younger students together to know what the experience of university is like for the an older person. I’d just like to see that happen and it would be a great reality to have a place where we could study if you had no time earlier in your life to do so.

**Jack:** I think it would be good to add more things in, as I said before but there is a good atmosphere; it’s not the same as other universities where the lecturers lecture and if catch what they say, well and good but if you don’t well. But it’s a different kind of system and it should be at our leisure and ease. But you could go deeper into the academic side, but that would depend on the person’s ability. Well, anything can be encouraged and you can go as far as you want; the sky can be the limit and you shouldn’t have to change it too much that way. It was a good idea to have the students there to bring a fresh mind to it and whatever happens from there

**Interviewer:** Do you want to say something Jeannie?

**Jeannie:** No it’s just that once you get me started I can’t stop!

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much for coming here today

## **Molly's Biographical Narrative:**

### **Introduction:**

This narrative has been chosen to reflect the insight, the wisdom of one of the older students' who has participated for the last two years as part of the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project. Her narrative represents the overall philosophy guiding the project, which is to create a teaching, learning and research space at third level to value the insight of older people, to embrace their wisdom and to provide a voice for their reflections and understanding of their lived experiences. This is to provide a rich learning environment whereby younger third level students can learn from their experience.

Ivan Illich in his seminal work *Deschooling Society* (1971) provides a radical and critical discourse on education as practised in "modern" economies that are still relevant today. Giving examples of the ineffectual nature of institutionalized education, Illich sought for self-directed education, supported by intentional social relations, in fluid informal arrangements. Illich (1971) provided a critique whereby he believed that "educational webs" which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring. He hoped that his critique of contemporary institutionalised education would "seek alternatives". He believed that the current search for new educational funnels must be reversed into the search for their institutional inverse: educational webs, which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring.

Molly's biographic narrative in many ways is as Illich (1970) described "an educational web" that threads the beginning of her early life embedded in a love of learning and simultaneously a life of emotional pain to transformation of her life today through her love of learning. It provides a critique of Molly's own philosophy on education and in particular on her understanding of the values and belief systems of third level learning. Through her critique, she provides a glimpse into her understanding of the concept of the need for free thinking in our current economic climate today and of her vision for contemporary university learning.

This is a narrative inculcated by a love of learning, chiefly handed down through her father's role in her life, which she viewed as a kind of a philosopher; through her love of reading that covers vast expanses of literary terrain such as George Bernard Shaw, James Baldwin, Aldos Huxley and Arthur Millar. This narrative covers an even wider expanse of emotional and physical pain experienced in Molly's life through sexual abuse from an early age that remained with her as almost a "contaminated"

worldview perception of herself and her siblings. An awful secret that could not be shared by her or her siblings with the wider community.

This imposed secretive mode remains with her through the painful decision to have her first child adopted because she wanted her to have “what I had always longed for a good education”. The transformation of her life is clearly evidenced through her journey to seek meaning of her life through reading and through meditation, through her passion for alternative medicine and through her becoming a counsellor. This biographic narrative gives a voice to Molly’s lived experience and more significantly, it provides an insight into her insight, her wisdom her making sense of the conflicting and paradoxical experiences in her life. It demonstrates why it is essential to integrate her in contemporary university learning and in particular highlights the wisdom, the insight that Molly could bring to a university to make the learning rich and transformational for others, in particular for younger students..

Freire’s (1972) philosophy that through critical reflection, individuals may become conscious of realities other than those into which they have been socialised. In particular his reflections on education as the “practice of freedom.....the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” Freire cited in CORI, 1999\;2), these reflections are evident in the biographical narrative expressed by Molly when she spoke to me in May 2009. All actual person’s names (including Molly), place names, professions and persons associated with her, have been changed or omitted to ensure anonymity.

Molly was one of the many participants of the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project who volunteered to be interviewed for this doctoral research thesis. The emphasis of the interview was to develop a biographical narrative interpretative method approach (BNIM) developed by Wengraf (2001), Chamberlayne (1999) and Frogett (1996) Wengraf states that “narrative expression” is expressive both of the conscious concerns and of unconscious cultural, societal and individual presuppositions and processes, BNIM supports research into the lived experience of individuals and collectives. Therefore BNIM is best suited according to Wengraf:

To facilitate “understanding both the “inner and the “outer” worlds of “historically-evolving- persons-in historically- evolving situations and particularly the interactivity of inner and outer world dynamics. (Wengraf; 2001)

**Context:**

The interview was conducted in the Helix Café in Dublin City University (DCU). There, both the interviewer (the researcher) and the interviewee met

together in a setting that was comfortable for Molly. She had become accustomed to the university and its environment by participating in the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project on Saturday mornings during semester time. As Molly is hard of hearing, the Helix was deemed a good place to meet at a quiet time that would create the most naturalistic setting and that this would create an ease in which Molly could reflect and relate her story. A tape-recorder was used with Molly's permission to record her reflections. Boud (1985) says that "Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull over it and evaluate it" (Boud: 1985, 19)

A significant aspect of this interview was that both the interviewer and the interviewee had come to know each other as part of the project and so a mutual understanding and respect had already developed between both her as the interviewee and I as the researcher/interviewer. The interviewer was mindful and respectful of the fact that during previous conversations together, Molly appeared to be a very articulate, bright and vibrant woman. This relationship, which had previously been developed between the interviewer and interviewee, enabled Molly to speak with ease, in a non-judgemental way. She was conscious that her thoughts and reflections, her biographical narrative were valued by the interviewer. The overall design of the interview-its content and location was to generate as Silverman (2004) states."a conversation analysis" which was integrated in the overall Focualdian discourse where "studies are not offered as integrated, all encompassing or grand theories of society, but as distinctive standpoints from which concrete, empirical aspects of social life may be seen and analyzed" (Silverman: 2004, 37) The content of the discourse which began to emerge during this interview, had not previously emerged between the interviewer and interviewee during their previous conversations together.

### **Early Life:**

Molly began by reflecting on her early life:

I was born in 1939, which makes me seventy this year. I was born the year the Second World War started. My mother said I started the war but there you go. I think my mother was orphaned when she was ten years old as her mother died at this time. My father was reared in the orphanage in \_\_\_\_\_. I think this had a profound effect on everybody.

The dual emotion of both humour and pathos that feature as a significant aspect of Molly's biographic narrative, are evident from the very first words that she uses to describe herself. These first words in many ways highlight the dual meaning of much of Molly's life determined by both pain and self deprecation and her narrative moves between pathos, sadness, humour and finally self efficacy which has emerged because of her immersion in her understanding of her personal circumstances in her earlier life and in her

understanding of the wider socio-economic and cultural circumstances that influenced her world view and experiences at this time. In her later narrative, this understanding emerges and it has been achieved namely through her love of knowledge and learning and healed through her later in life, qualifying as a counsellor; her intellectual understanding; her love of knowledge and search for meaning in academic, spiritual and physical modes and in relationships throughout her life. Molly also expressed a love of philosophy, through her love of literature and reading and in particular through her healing signified by her passion for alternative therapy and meditation.

Molly's chronological narrative, in particular of her early life, describes a pathos that is embedded in the cultural, social, historical and moral understanding of Ireland in this period between 1939 and the early 1960's. As Geertz (1973) cited in Silverman (2004) states that "It is the discovery of the hermeneutic role of the concept of culture for all individuals in their daily relationships-based not on a representation of lived experience or on their point of view, but on a description of their oral or written production-that allows us to relate a sequence of specific scenes to a culture." (Silverman;2004, 15) Molly provides an understanding of this culture, this historical insight into the socio-economic circumstances that created real physical and emotional pain for her in her early life:

I must get this out of the way. I think my da was sexually abused in that place (the orphanage) and in turn that came down the line and that makes me profoundly sad. I think it is important to say that for some reason which I don't quite know. My dad was quite well educated because he didn't leave school until he was eighteen (ie the age that he left the orphanage) and he was a great philosopher in a way. I suppose he did inculcate a love of learning and he did instil a love of learning in us.

#### **Dual role of Molly's father:**

The dual role of Molly's father in her life is evident in this paragraph. Molly's father as sexual abuser to his children and as a philosopher who "inculcated" a love of learning to these same children, is at one level paradoxical and it is this conflicting paternal role as perpetrator and philosopher which creates a sadness that is expressed in Molly's narrative. What is immediately apparent is Molly's understanding of her father as a victim. If he was the perpetrator of this role to his children, then in Molly's words, he too might have been a victim during his time in the orphanage in that as much as Molly understands, that this was the reason for him to act in the same way towards his children. This notion of Molly's father as victim is similar to Freire's understanding of the oppressed as "a particular problem is the duality of the oppressed; they are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence." (Freire; 1970, p 37)

Both influences of Molly's father as both philosopher and perpetrator, remain throughout her narrative and in many ways shape the chronological life and the biographical detail described by her. It filters through the meta-analysis of her narrative and in many ways contributes to her own quest for knowledge, to seek and to understand meaning in her world at both a macro and micro level. Significantly, both influences have impacted on Molly's psychic and her world view in terms of emotional and psychological pain experienced by her and in many ways by an emotional pain that was addressed and healed through her intellectual love of knowledge and search for meaning in academic, spiritual and physical modes and in relationships throughout her life.

Her sub-conscious narrative in questioning why she felt it was important to tell this story ie of her father as an abuser, and yet "for some reason which I don't quite know" in many ways determines the unconscious influence that this experience has in many ways profoundly shaped her life and her thoughts and makes her profoundly sad. Yet her narrative even in this early stage, is not of anger or hatred towards her father, or of a need on her part to reciprocate this behaviour in some negative way against her father. Freire speaks of this as the liberation of the oppressed "When people are already dehumanized due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanisation....Yet it is paradoxical though it may seem-precisely in the response of the oppressed to the violence of their oppressors that a gesture of love may be found. ." Freire (1970; p49)

Molly moves to this enlightened conscious reality of her father in an acknowledgement and at times a glimmer of appraisal of his uniqueness that he was educated until he was aged eighteen and to Molly he was a philosopher and this is the confusion, the dilemma for Molly The very institution that impacted on her and her siblings in a very painful way, was also the same institution that shaped her father into a "philosopher" figure. This view of her father in this particular paternal role is important for Molly. Because this instilled in her a love of learning which remains with her throughout her life to date.

This is the paradox that is clearly evident in Molly's narrative. This is the contradiction of her father and his relationship with his children. It is a contradiction which itself represents the conflicting social and religious mores at this time. An outward perception of societal values influenced by Catholicism that was in some ways contradictory at best and was hypocritical and painful at its very worst and that in Molly's words used later in her narrative, "contaminated" and created the inward confusion and pain experienced by many children who were sexually abused during this time. Feeley (2009) cited in Lynch, Baker and Lyons (2009) refers to the apology given to these children by the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in 1999 when he said:

On behalf of the State and all its citizens, the government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue.....all children need love and security. Too many of our children were denied this love care and security. Abuse ruined their childhoods and has been an ever present part of their adult lives reminding them of a time when they were helpless. (Lynch, Baker and Lyons:2009, 201)

### **Molly's early working life:**

Molly then moves from this period of her life to relate her story of her early schooling, which typical of many young people of this era, required her to leave at age fourteen to work usually in a factory or/and manual labour work context. This period of her life was profoundly influenced by two health conditions namely her catching a "middle ear infection" and her mother catching tuberculosis (TB) :as they had no antibiotics in those days I was left partially deaf in one ear and I have always been very hard of hearing because of this. I always battled against my hard of hearing. Then I missed a lot of school because my mother was very ill. She had TB (tuberculosis) so that was difficult.

Despite the fact that Molly longed to stay in school she had to leave and go to work in a glove factory at fourteen years of age. A short time later, she "graduated" to the office where she worked. Molly reflected on her success:

Now when I think about it, this (the promotion) happened to me against all the odds really-I mean my lack of hearing did not stop me. I was earning an awful lot more than anybody of my age at that time.

What is clear from Molly's narrative, is that despite the difficulties presented to her at this early stage of her life, she had developed the capacity to draw on her emotional intelligence to enable her to overcome the physical, emotional, educational and societal barriers that were presented to her in this early stage of her life. Gardner (1983) cited in Goldman (1996) describes this interpersonal intelligence as .."the ability to understand other people; what motivates them , how they work, how to work co-operatively with them, this together with intrapersonal intelligence ...is a correlative ability, turned inward. It is a capacity to form an accurate, veridical model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life." (Goldman, 1996, p 39)

Molly's narrative moves to explain how her love of learning and her innate ability to make sense of life was developed in these early days through her love of reading. This together with her seeking "to be" good "through her involvement in a religious organization. also highlights the guilt that Molly felt in relation to her fathers actions in the earlier part of her life. On the one hand joining this organisation was an innate desire to be good to make

up for her earlier life in particular the sexual abuse, and on the other it was to help other women in particular the women who worked on the streets of Dublin in prostitution during this time.

I read everything that I could lay my hands on. I was always trying to make sense of life . My aunt had a book shop in \_\_\_\_\_ and, believe it or not we always had plenty of books to hand and that (reading) in particular was encouraged. Of course I spent a large part of my life trying to be good- maybe that was to do with the sexual abuse

I joined the Legion of Mary (a Catholic organisation founded by an Irishman Frank Duff in Dublin in 1921.) The aim of this organisation was to convert people whom they encountered through the organisation, to Catholicism.) I went to work (ie volunteering working through this organisation) in ----Street (a street renowned for prostitution) – doing street rescue work- that was talking to poor unfortunate women (this work would endeavour to enable these women to move from prostitution and to convert to Catholicism). When I think of the arrogance of this (Molly’s volunteering work at this time), I nearly blush with embarrassment-I think of the arrogance of it..

Molly’s actions at this time is reflective of Freires (1970) description of the humanist and liberating forces for the oppressed. This he views as a pedagogy that has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed reveal “the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation” The second stage Freire sees as the reality of the oppression as transformational which “ceases to belong to the oppressed” Instead this becomes a pedagogy “of all people in the process of permanent liberation” (Freire; 1970; 10)This for him is the two stage approach that brings together and overcomes the culture of domination because it is culturally confronted. For Molly and many children similar to her this cultural confrontation did not begin until the recent Ryan Report in 2009 which acknowledged and accepted blame on behalf of the Catholic Hierarchy.

### **Molly’s baby:**

This narrative approach in ethnography used to engage Molly in relating her biographic narrative has been influenced by psycho-analysis Favret-Saada, 1980 and Contreras 1981 and cited in Silverman (2004) is described as “a process that is profoundly linked to the individual history of the ethnographer “ (Silverman ,2004 : 17) This kind of ethnography seeks to identify certain cases (notably life histories) as examples of more general phenomena but it enables a quite high degree of freedom to move between different levels of generalization. This is viewed as a way not so much of gaining facts as of gaining access to the meaning of situations for the subjects been studied. Molly’s own narrative provides a very rich meaning

of the lived experience which she relates to the next significant part of her life. It is a narrative that invokes great personal pain and for Molly it was a “horrendous time”. Giving birth to her baby daughter and subsequently having her adopted so that her daughter could have a better life, a better education was one of the most difficult things Molly had ever to do in her life. This part of the narrative is also very closely linked to one aspect of the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project which was to enable older people to use email to be more closely connected with family and friends- in particular those living abroad. Molly relates this story and reflects how it is now a great opportunity for her to connect with her daughter (whom she met many years later) through email..

I know the main source of passion for me was boyfriends and I had hundreds of them (laughs)!!! Three engagements I think and then I went off to England and that was a horrendous thing. I had a baby and she was adopted but I found her after years and years. She is now a doctor (real profession has been changed to ensure anonymity). That would have been the worst thing that happened in my entire life. The thing about it was that it had to be secret, nobody was to know. I told my parents, they didn’t want to know. I don’t blame them for that, it was of the time but it was an awful time for people really.

I came home to Ireland. My mother, by this time, was an alcoholic so it was a horrendous household. Now that is not to say that she wasn’t a generous spirit.( Molly becomes upset at which point I ask her if she would like me to turn off the tape recorder.) Molly replies “No I am okay” . Now I think it is probably a story that needs to be told. She (Molly’s mother) was very generous and it was a horrendous household. My brother was mentally ill then and I don’t know whether it (her brother’s illness) was because of (Molly reflects and takes a pause) I don’t think it was nurture, I think it was nature, somewhere in his make-up that it (the mental illness) was there.

So when I came home I was going to bring Catherine (Molly’s baby) home. I decided I cannot keep bringing her back here (to Molly’s family home in Ireland) and then I went back to ----- (place in England). There was no place for us (Molly and her baby). I mean I kept her and kept her and I just thought that really the best thing that I could do for her was to have her adopted so that she could have a chance. (Molly becomes emotional). I came from a working class background. I think this may be a very middle class idea but I WANTED her to have an education. I wanted her to get probably what I had longed for, so I had her adopted.

### **Molly decision to have her baby adopted so that she could have a better education:**

Molly's desire to have her child adopted so that she she could "get ..what I had longed for" is reminiscent of Bordieu & Passeron (2000) who states that: "it is necessary to take into account the ensemble of the social characteristics which define the initial situation of children from the different classes, in order to understand the different probabilities which the various educational destinies have for them, and the significance for individuals in a given category, of their finding themselves in a situation of greater or lesser probability for their category in the case of a manual workers son, the highly improbable fact of studying Latin...in order to continue higher education" Bordieu & Passeron (2000: 89)

This for Molly was her dilemma at this time. This was her experience and the dilemma facing her and her child. Bordieu & Passeron (2000) also sum up the meaning that Molly was internalising to make sense of this difficult decision for her. "Experiences which analysis is able to distinguish and specify only in terms of the intersection of logically permutable criteria cannot be integrated into the unity of a systematic biography unless they are reconstructed on the basis of the original class situation, the point from which all possible views unfold and on which no view is possible." Bordieu & Passeron (2000; p89)

For Molly her "class situation" was one of great difficulty for her at this time. In particular in her role as a single parent- situated in a difficult familial context, embedded in a religious and cultural mores of its time which was negative towards the concept of single parenthood . This was yet again another major dilemma for Molly. Just as the earlier part of her life was full of paradox that moved between pain, sadness and joy (found chiefly through reading) for Molly, now she was confronted with another complex and paradoxical dilemma. Would she keep the child that she loved situated within a working class context or would she permit for her child to be adopted to move upwards (this is how Molly viewed the notion of gradation of her child from working class to a middle class educational opportunity facilitated through adoption.) Molly did have her daughter adopted out of a desire to do what was best for her daughter.

However this decision caused Molly great emotional pain for a very large part of the remainder of her life. Molly describes the part of her life where she was married and had other children and subsequently when, through advise from a friend, she herself became a counsellor and subsequently met with her daughter many years later.

I later married and that (the adoption) was probably a huge thing in the marriage because I said (to my husband) that I had a child and that made the marriage quite difficult but we managed as best we could and I had four

other children and THEN what happened was when I gave Catherine away- it was totally different to now-and I thought I had no right to any information and I didn't want to interfere with her life, I truly didn't- I wanted to give her a clear run and that she would bond with her parents and that I wouldn't be in the way.

That was absolutely my motive but what happened then was I got married and we had four children and I had my first grandchild and I mean I am skipping a whole big thing ( a large chronological part of Molly's life) but with regard to that line, I got very ill.

One of my friends is a counsellor, I mean I trained to be a counsellor-I did so much with my life-she said to me "Molly, you need to find your daughter and all I did was I put my name , I rang up and I found out there was a list in \_\_\_\_ (city in England where Catherine was adopted) and people who had been given up for adoption (were listed ) -and Catherine's name was on it. She had been actually waiting for six years and she was now expecting her first baby.

Molly's resignation to her suffering on an emotional, psychological and physiological level brings to mind the counselling philosophy of Victor Frankl (1959) a holocaust survivor, physiotherapist and one of the key founders of existential therapy, who, due to his and others' suffering in the concentration camps during world war two, devised his seminal work on counselling as healing which gives meaning to suffering. As president of the Sozialistische Mittelschüler Österreich in 1924, he offered a special programme to counsel university students during the time they were to receive their grades. Influenced by Freud and Adler, he developed a psychotherapeutic method in finding meaning in all forms of existence even the most difficult ones . He came to the conclusion that even in the most absurd, painful and dehumanized situation, life has potential meaning and that therefore even suffering is meaningful.

What particularly is apparent in the narrative communicated by Molly is the ability of her, through her pain, to make sense of the social, historical, philosophical influences and in particular the educational implications for her daughter in the future. This is what enabled her to ultimately make this important decision in what she considered to be a "horrendous" time in her life.. Freire (2001) defines this understanding of thinking beings within critical educational practice as the need to seek cultural identity to "engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons; dreamers of possible utopias, capable of being angry because of a capacity to love. Capable of assuming themselves as "subject" because of the capacity to recognize themselves as "object". (Freire: 2001, p 46)

It is an interesting and an extremely important aspect of Molly's narrative that, despite all of the difficulties which life had presented to her, she does not communicate the language of anger or resentment. The absence of this provides a sense of the insight, the wisdom developed by Molly even at an early stage in her life. Later it is evident that Molly's love of learning and involvement in her immersion in new knowledge such as counselling and holistic therapies has enabled her to create a new vision, a new meaning in which to address this earlier pain presented in her life.

### **Benefits of Intergenerational Learning Project ICT class for Molly**

The direct link with the benefits of Molly's participation in the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project is identified when she makes the link between her sense of healing and contentment because many years later she was reunited with her daughter and that, although her daughter lives in a European country, they keep in contact through telephone conversations and emails.

So I kept in contact with her. Now we are not-we are so alike it is extraordinary

She was thirty two when I met her and she was terrified, she was really frightened.

She herself had worked her way through being a doctor. She was very confident and very bright. She has three children now and lives in \_\_\_\_\_(names a city in Europe). Her husband is \_(originates from the country where Catherine now resides)- he is a -----(names his profession). I go to visit her but not a lot. Let me say that I talk to her very regularly on the phone and NOW that I am doing emails that has really being a help as well so that is good.

Silverman contends that "interview subjects construct not just narratives, but social worlds where the primary issue is to generate data that gives an authentic insight into people's experiences." (Silverman2001;87) Dawson and Prus, 1995: 113) evaluate in particular ,the role of objectivity in constructing lived experience "objectivity exists thus, not as an absolute or inherently meaningful condition to which humans react, but as an absolute aspect of human lived experience" (Dawson and Prus, 1995: 113) This authentic and natural ability to relate very significant incidents in Molly's life is evident in the following extract from her narrative:

What else? This story is taking different legs of its own isn't it??? (Molly laughs) So I suppose I was very fortunate, actually when I was forty, I was really, really, probably at the end of my tether because I would say that all that sexual abuse stuff was really surfacing and I met this woman –my kids went to \_\_\_\_\_(names school) and this woman whom I met, she was

starting a counselling course which I did. This was probably the saving grace because I now understood everything that had happened to me and my family and then I became a counsellor. This was marvellous and being a client-God that was a lifesaver. Then my kids never knew about it (the sexual abuse but in particular Catherine's adoption).

I mean they didn't know until shortly before I got in touch with Catherine that...that I had her and it was one of those terrible family secrets you know, like I had younger brothers and sisters and they couldn't talk (of the sexual abuse) because they would be contaminated by that. So it was all kept under wraps and it wasn't until my parents died that we could speak about it (the sexual abuse).

### **Molly's later life:**

For Molly the middle and later part of her life was transformed through revelation and reflection through her knowledge and skills of counselling and this led to her becoming a counsellor herself. Mezirow (1999, 1991, 2000) describes a learning process of "becoming critically aware of ones own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation (Mezirow, 2000 p 4) Merriam and Caffarella (1999, 321) define Transformative Learning into three phases: these are critical reflection, reflective discourse and action. Mezirow himself states that transformational learning often involves deep, powerful emotions or beliefs and is evidenced in action (Mezirow, 2000 8)

What is interesting about Molly's narrative is the meaningful pattern which provides a flow to her overall biographic narrative. This facilitates the meaning to be a rich interpretation of the content, the stories from different parts of her life, the co-construction of social and historical contexts. Salmon (2001) says that:

A fundamental criterion of narrative is surely contingency. Whatever the content, stories demand the consequential linking of events or idea. Narrative shaping entails a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random or disconnected. (Salmon, 2001: 32)

### **Molly and growing old:**

In the later part of the narrative, this is very much dedicated to Molly's understanding of her life now, in particular her philosophy of growing older, her love of knowledge and her love of learning and her abhorrence of the way older people are medicated today She reflects that: .

I think it (alternative medicine) is one of the ways... maybe...God I have used the internet and older people are medicated up to the eyeballs, polypharmacy and all that, it is really not good. One of the things when we

were on the march (this is the march organised by older people in 2008 to prevent the government from removing their medical cards on a means-tested basis), people on that march were saying “oh they would lose their medical cards, their medication”. I was saying to myself “ It wouldn’t be too bad if you lost a lot of your medication” Homeopathy, exercise, diet, breathing, minimal medication, company the kind of thing that is here in DCU, that is the Intergenerational Learning project, this is an absolute alternative. Because a lot of people, when they get older, they think that it is the end of their lives.

Of course, it is coming near the end of your life, that is absolutely true and I don’t have a difficulty about being called older. I think a great term is called “elders”. Myself and Maura (names another older person from the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project (ILP)) we had a little “set-to” about this. But we are older and isn’t it great to celebrate being older and I like the term elder. Because that is in tribes, elders were treated with great respect and listened to.

I think that is one of the things that we (older people) might contribute to a learning centre because as you know , I always wanted to go to university and believe it or not, I worked in \_\_\_\_\_(names another university in Ireland) and I gave a workshop ...I taught assertiveness and personal development to the cleaners who worked in (names the third level institution) and they (this third level institution) paid for it you know.

The concept of the term elders has been discussed as part of the Intergenerational Learning Project. Molly’s reference to this term to define older people brings with it a meaning or interpretation that requires society to re-evaluate the concept of older people as “the elderly” which usually equates ageing with feebleness and infirmity. The concept of Elders has most recently been used to define a group of eminent global leaders namely among its members are Nelson Mandela, Mary Robinson, Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, Graca Marcel and Aung Sang Suci Kyi who holds an honorary chair as the leader of Burma’s struggle for democracy. This group was founded in 2008 to “ support peace building, helping major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity” (Mission Statement of the Elders 2008.)

The wisdom of this imminent group of leaders is shared through their reflective narrative on the meaning of bringing together a collective group of individuals whose commonality is not only their age, but their knowledge, their experience, their integrity and in the universal affirmation of them as individuals and affirmation in their work namely in the area of justice and human rights. Mary Robinson (2010) defined their role when she stated that :

Part of the wisdom of *The Elders* is to remind the world that we actually have universal values that are accepted by every government in the world and yet they are not been implemented.

Nelson Mendala (2010) also supports this view when he states that “This group can speak freely and boldly working both publicly and behind the scenes. Together they will support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict and inspire hope where there is despair. These words are reiterated by many members of the group of Elders and a resonant note is the words of Aung Sang Suci Kyi (2010) who reflects that “Human beings the world over need freedom and security that they maybe able to realize their full potential. “

Molly’s own affirmation and appraisal of the term elder to define older people in many ways ,reflects her celebration of growing old and in addition gives meaning to the concept of older people as having the capacity to bring wisdom, insight, non-judgemental assumptions and universal values to personal and global contexts so that older people can make a contribution in a very significant way. For Nelson Mandela and his eminent group of retired world states people this group would have a completely different meaning if they were called “The Elderly” instead of “The Elders”. Molly evaluates what it is to be older and discusses the concept of “elder” to re-evaluate or co- construct the current assumption of what it is to be ageing.

She reveals through her narrative, that she is not someone who is invisible but someone who has much to contribute to society. She reflects that as Freire (2001) that:

“I speak of our being as something constructed socially and historically and not there simply a priori. A being born in the womb of history, but in the process of coming to be, bears in itself some fundamental archetypes without which it would be impossible to recognize our human presence in the world as something singular and original. In other words our being in the world is far more than just “being” It is a “presence,” a “presence” that is relational to the world and to others. (Freire; 2001; p25)

### **Molly’s views on Education and Learning at third level:**

Molly in this part of the biographic narrative, reflects on her views of education, learning and in particular she reflects on her views of third level learning I have chosen to include this in its full length as it appears in Mollys narrative. This is because within this excerpt, Molly weaves an interpretation into many key concepts that are part of a wider and universal debate about the complexities of current thinking in relation to the philosophy that guides the concept of universities today. The main thematic analysis as part of Molly’s narrative are the following five key themes. These are: (1): The role of universities today: (2) The Concept of Education

and Learning; (3) The concept of engaging students to think as part of third level learning; (4) the notion of free thinking so as to enable us as a society to move from the recession (5) the role of intergenerational learning at third level Here is the full account of Molly's narrative.

To be honest with you, I think we have come to a place where we need to review what education is and I think it has been taken over by business people and that is not the original meaning of education. Education is to draw out and help people to think for themselves. I think this is where we have gone wrong in this country. Why we have this whole recession is because people were taught to think in a certain way and that is what I think about universities. There is a way that you answer questions that will get you full marks and my idea of education is where like ....(pause).. I actually think that the notion of intergenerational learning is education.

This is where people learn about themselves and learn from each other and from the material that is available to them. I was reading Huxley's essays, and I mean when I read all of these things, they really confirm what I have always believed, and that is that I am glad that I didn't go to university when I was young. I am really, really glad because my mind was not moulded in that way. You see I think that university learning creates a certain mindset, I do. I don't think it creates free thinkers-maybe with the exception of you (the interviewer)-so I think this experiment here (Intergenerational Learning)- is a great start.

I think it is important for different people of different generations and different class (to be part of university learning) -before it was mostly people from the middle class who were almost trained to think in that way, and to think of university education as their birthright, almost. Now I think that DCU maybe a little different in that respect. I tell you what I think is good about university.

I think university thinking has-what I don't have- which is a discipline. For example, the way of writing things up, a system of research-all of that-but then ..(pause) how will I put it...you see I think we are in this mess that we are in (reference to the economic recession) because.....I think that education and intelligence are two different things.

Education is the ability to respond to a situation as you find them and to be in the world and to be aware and conscious; it is holistic where as university education alone is just concerned with teaching you to think but not.....to think in a very narrow focused way....that is what I think....it is probably a mad idea but that is what I think it is...thinking in a very narrow focused way.

Well I think if there were a lot of free-thinkers in this country, we would not be in this mess that we are in and we would find a way out. A free-thinker is

a person who is able to speak; to think for themselves and that's the other thing. To be able to stand up for what seems like truth to you-not to go along with the herd mentality and I think the herd mentality is –probably in some situations- maybe I am wrong but I think it is cultivated in university setting. Maybe that is not right but this is my idea.

The above extract from Molly's biographic narrative provides an educational critique, a kind of educational web that is at one level complex and insightful and at another draws on metaphors that unfold a whole universal debate on the concept of education and learning. It particularly is reflexive of the debate to define the meaning of university education today. Her analogy of a third level university, while humorous at one level leads to the greater complexity and meaning of what defines university learning. Her sense of inquiry is reminiscent of the complexities and criticism referred to by Freire (1970) as "the banking" concept of education. Freire believes that this is a kind of education. In his criticism of this concept he believes that education is "the contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified.... This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits....in the last analysis it is the people themselves who are filed away through their lack of creativity, transformation and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human" (Freire, 1970; p53)

### **(1) The role of universities today:**

What is interesting in Molly's narrative is that she opens up a world of reflection to the wider concept of the sometimes fractured but necessary relationship between universities and the world of commerce, the world of business. This is commonly known as "the corporate university" which is tended to be viewed in unfavourable terms. This debate is evident in the DCU policy document "Leading through challenge 2009-2011" when it states that: "We no longer hear so much about universities as "Ivory Towers" divorced from the real world. Today the complaint is more about the "corporate university" dancing to the tune of pharmaceuticals and corporate players."

This is commonly referred to as "academic capitalism" and it opens up the wide debate of universities as having being perceived to move from a humanistic to an economic rationale. Molly provides an example of her insight, her wisdom into that overall universal debate on the definition of what is a university.

### **The concept of Education and Learning:**

Education is to draw out and help people to think for themselves. I think this is where we have gone wrong in this country. This reflection from Molly again, minimalist in word content but it opens up a very wide debate on the complex issue of what is education? This is reminiscent of W B Yeats who said that 'Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire' It is enlightening that Molly uses the initial definition of education which derives from the Greek word to draw out. She engages in a debate and a critical reflection to make sense of the concept of education , a debate that is both universal and timeless. Albert Einstein defined education as that ' which remains after one has forgotten, what one has learned in school.' Martin Luther King jnr defines education as 'The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education.' As Molly reveals her life story through her biographic narrative, there is a strong sense that her life, her own learning and education represents the definition of education alluded to in the words of Yeats, Einstein and Martin Luther King.

### **Molly and the DCU Intergenerational Learning Project:**

I think there is a need for this.(ILP). I really do think there is a need. You see there is a divide, a gap between the generations, I think this is because, previously, you had extended families and all than kind of network. That is not there now and also, as well as learning, elders have something to contribute to universities. We need to understand each other, and if there was a centre for intergenerational learning, you would have marvellous skills.

I mean when you think of that video that we made together in class a few weeks ago, the way that people got together and worked spontaneously without any big deal. Within an hour, they had the video made. We had Mary who was really good. She had learned to do a story-board at classes in the Art Gallery –would you believe-.Them my skill was interviewing and presenting. There was a bit of tousel in the group about power which was great and which we managed.

There is another thing, when you are older, you are aware of all the little nuances, the little struggles, you can manage them. Not everybody, I am not saying that we are all wise, but we do have life experiences, That is a thing that came across so well in that video. A Centre for Intergenerational Learning where elders can contribute as well. I would think that this is important.

### **Intergenerational Learning and benefits for young third level students:**

Well, I suppose they (the younger students) have a lot to learn from us. Even listening to us (older people) , but even seeing older people for God's sake, like sometimes, older people are invisible, they (the younger students) never see anybody that is older. They have a false notion of what older people are and I mean that of itself, I mean like for me, I have already said, I am very willing to do stress-management, assertiveness, personal development and homeopathy for the younger students. There are loads of people there (as part of the ILP) , ex-teachers, there is so much skill in that group that would be available to the university. And for the technology part, I have struggled with that but I am doing really well. I am delighted that I stuck with it.

I did the Media course last year and then I wanted to do the short story writing and it wasn't on and when I came back I am really glad I did the computer course. The course I would love, I will be outlandish, I would love philosophy, I really love it.

Now the Science Module that was on offer, you see I left school at fourteen ,so even the word science to me....but I enjoyed the science but it was a bit above my head. I think that, and I am just been honest here. I think – (names student tutor) (the Science tutor and DCU student) was a really excellent scientist and so enthusiastic. She definitely enthused me but I think it needed to be much smaller, simpler steps. It would definitely whet your appetite.

But science, you know homeopathy is a science and so I understood what she said and it really fitted in perfectly with my understanding of homeopathy –it is a vibrational level. Like the computer, I think simple, simple steps to start with.

### **Molly's life now :**

During all this time-after I had three children-my husband dropped dead playing golf and two years later I met my present partner and so I moved house. I live in a beautiful place close to the sea –it is an absolutely gorgeous place so close to nature. I suppose if you would say that it is possible in a lifetime-I am still working. I have just finished a group presentation for gays and lesbians and a group presentation for older people. Another thing I think about Intergenerational Learning( at third level) like when you meet with people and listen to them, you see that you get to know them and there is no division. Even age wise, it is like as if you cross a divide and that is just where the country needs to go. You know after working with the gays and lesbian group, I mean you forget what people are –whether black, white, old or young, middle class, working class, they just become one. That's what I think is important in the university, that should be really taught. I have found this with the Intergenerational Learning Project.

Because of my hearing, which is affected by background noise, I don't speak to a lot of people in the canteen (DCU Business School restaurant) but when I do, I really enjoy it. One thing that was wonderful was the young people (DCU student volunteers), they were so helpful. They have another energy which is so important. I was surprised they were so helpful, because sometimes you look at people coming out of universities and they have those faces (Molly smiles) and then you see these young people and they are absolutely willing to do anything. They are so good humoured about it.

### **Molly's advice to young third level students:**

One of the things I remember was that I met this man on a train and he was a town planner, he came from Australia. We had this great conversation about life and about death, and one of the things we both came to the conclusion was that, if there was anything at all possible, and you wanted to do something with your life, follow your passion . You know like all his people (family) were lawyers and he wanted to study environment and his people were saying to him "There is no money in that". But he picked up that to follow your passion-to do what you are passionate about was more important for him. Follow your passion, that is what I think. For Molly, the important aspect of third level learning is for students to choose and find the course that most suits their own passion and interests.

### **Molly's own passion:**

God, there are so many passions for me now-that is the worst part. Well I love alternative medicine, I really, really am passionate about this. If I had the chance to do it (my life) over again, I probably would have gone into Science. I suppose at the moment, homeopathy is not a recognised science and I would love to have the tools, the where with all to be able to prove how it works.

I have treated so many people, I have treated my grandchildren. They have never had an anti-biotic. I have treated my present partner and he has come off steroid inhalers for asthma and you know, I have never had antibiotics.

This is a reflection of Molly's lifelong quest to find alternative methods of healing such as alternative medicine. It is interesting that the lack of antibiotics for a mild ear infection in the earlier part of her life caused her hearing loss and this has left her profoundly deaf in one ear for the remainder of her life. The notion of seeking alternative cures to antibiotics is a significant part of the conversation with Molly that day that she was interviewed in the Helix.

### **Molly's reflections on reading:**

At the moment, I read a lot of Buddhist ..I am interested in meditation and Buddhism and meditation. I think that is another thing that is very interesting Buddhism. There was a fellow who was called Khrishnamurti -I suppose he is a philosopher not recognised and I love to read his work.

Of all the great writers and I have read so many of them, I suppose you can read for fun and enjoyment which I like and then I can read because I want to learn something. At the moment I am reading Aldos Huxley's essays and I am enthralled by them. Oh my god, he totally delights because he puts into words all that I have ever thought myself. For example one of the things that makes perfect sense that he writes about is, the way writers like to influence and he said –and this is true-that the only influence or mostly influence happens because the circumstances are right for people to be able to listen and bring about change.

I will give you an example, you know Obama, well the circumstances arrived in America for him to be elected and now, his ideas and his writings are everybody's reading. You know what I mean and Huxley also says that sometimes –and I also find this to be true-people write to influence and bring about change but their writing achieves the exact opposite (response). For example, George Bernard Shaw-he wrote about society, universities, medicine-oh he liked to take pot-shots at the law, society-but what happened was that the readers and society did nothing.

This happened with some of the American writers like James Baldwin, he has written about the race problem and while people have gone and read his work, went to the theatre to be entertained (by issues related to racism), but never did anything about it (the racism issue). It was like as if they (the readers and the theatre audience) said “ Well we read it, we looked at it but still they never did anything about it, it was as if this was enough to read about racism or to go to the theatre to be entertained by it.

Another person that I really really like is Arthur Millar . His play “All my sons” is on in the Gate and if you get a chance, go to see it. I have seen that about ten times. His plays are superb. I love “Death of a Salesman”, “View from the Bridge.” I mean “All my sons” is as relevant today as it was all those years ago. I suppose that,s w

Is what makes sense. That is something that you see in a play that is universal and timeless, like the work of James Joyce.

Here it is clear that Molly immersed herself in her love of reading, handed down to her from her father for the remainder of her life. This is also evident in her own love of writing, her going to the theatre and her immersion in her love of a diversity of literature and reading.

**Conclusion:**

Finally, Molly stated : It is an absolute pleasure (doing this interview) and I hope this interview goes some way to getting the Centre for (Intergenerational ) Learning up and I will be one of the people to contribute and to learn as well

In the conclusion, Molly comments on how she would like to contribute to a Centre for Intergenerational Learning in the future in DCU through her engaging in this interview .For me as a researcher, Molly's tacit knowledge, lived experiences of both emotional pain and healing and of her love of life and love of learning shared with me that day was a clear example of the benefits of the potential learning engaged in between her and third level students through tacit knowledge,reflection and experiential learning shared in meaningful conversation and learning between older people and third level students.

## **Appendix G**

### **Narrative of DCU ILP Tutors**

#### **Narrative 1: Friday, April 30, 2010 Reflections of a tutor, by Carmel Conroy**

Having completed an Education and Training Degree in DCU as a mature student I can empathize with our learners. The decision to go back to education after twenty odd years in commercial life was not an easy one. In my work life, I was a confident member of society earning a wage and providing for my family, as a potential mature student I was a basket case. 'How would I cope' 'Am I intelligent enough' 'Will they laugh at me'. These questions and more kept popping into my head, however, having missed the opportunity to go to college in my teen years I was determined to try it. It was not easy filling out forms and applying to different colleges but when I was accepted by DCU, I was thrilled. For me my first day in college was very emotional, I just couldn't believe that I had made it, at long last, I was excited, nervous but above all I was delighted with myself for making it happen. Three years on and here, I am working with learners, people like me who took the plunge and returned to education. Listening and talking to the learners only confirms for me that education is a wonderful gift to be enjoyed by all. In addition, what better way to enjoy then through the DCU Intergenerational Programme.

## **Narrative 2:**

### **My Intergenerational Experience, by Joan Flood Mc Cann.**

Having just completed a third semester, working as a tutor, alongside my good friends Joan, Carmel and Cathy on the Intergenerational Project, I can honestly say that I now fully understand the true meaning of 'learning'

Having had the opportunity to be a part of such a futuristic and promising project has indeed been life changing, for so many reasons. Having been a student of the Irish Education system in the 1970's and 1980's, I was unfortunate enough to experience a very different approach to teaching and learning. Having also completed an Action Research project in the final year of my degree at DCU, focusing primarily on the older retired generation of Irish citizens and their experiences of learning, I was aware that for many learning was closely linked with 'fear'.

When the first semester of the Intergenerational Project began, the idea that I might have to stand in up in front of a classroom, full of people caused me many a sleepless night. However, when I thought of the courage it must have taken for some of the older learners to walk voluntarily through the main door of a third level campus, to embark on new learning experiences, my own fears took on some new perspective. I am sure that many of the DCU students felt anxiety also as they embarked on a new way of teaching and learning. However, over the past three semesters I have had the pleasure of working alongside some very kind, patient and helpful young students. It became apparent to me that they valued their experiences while working so closely with the older learners. They built close working relationships with each other over the eight weeks of the course. It was also a pleasure to experience so much laughter in the classroom each week. For me, the element of fun is an important ingredient to any teaching and learning environment.

I hope that in the future, the Intergenerational Project will become a permanent fixture within the DCU campus. I have loved being a part of a project, which encourages learning through empowerment and the freedom for learning to occur naturally and comfortably.

### **Narrative 3:**

#### **Wednesday, April 14, 2010 My experience as Tutor on the Intergenerational Learning Project, by Joan McGrane**

At the age of forty-seven, I decided the time had come to throw myself headlong into the world of Information Communication Technology. The reason for this was that I could see my husband and two teenage sons embrace this technology with gusto and with an ease that I envied. I felt as if I was being left behind and somehow out of the loop with regard to this ‘new’ technology. Therefore, I enrolled (with a friend in tow for moral support) on a Computerised Office Skills course in a College of Further Education.

My peers and I were very fortunate to have had excellent teachers, and I took to ICT like a duck to water. I had not studied anything since my Leaving Certificate (some thirty years previously) so I will not pretend it was all plain sailing. However, with a bit of application, a lot of fun and a little perspiration I gained my certification, which I was very proud of! This experience was the catalyst to being propelled into an exciting and wonderful world, that of education. Following a career guidance chat, again in a College of Further Education, I nervously undertook a degree in Education Studies. As I had never had the opportunity to go to University, and harbouring a secret desire to teach, I embarked on my study for four years. This resulted in my proud graduation from Dublin City University with my peers and friends in 2009.

What I have learnt from my experience is that it is a courageous thing to embark on an educational journey as a mature student. However, as with everything in life, the sacrifice has a huge payback element to it. One also brings a wisdom and application to one’s study; however, on the other side there are the many commitments to be juggled and the limited energy levels. However, being young or old, or whatever one’s situation in life, there are always plus’s and minus’s. I have also learnt that it takes motivation to both begin a new learning experience and to continue with it. A good guide in the form of a teacher, tutor or facilitator in the role of motivator, is crucial. All these realisations have helped me, along with my colleague and fellow tutor Joan, to facilitate the learners in our Beginner’s class. I have seen my own experience with learning ICT for the first time mirrored in the experiences of the learners – the moment when something “clicks” with them, or when I read the marvellous creative pieces, laboriously typed out on the laptops, while negotiations the twin demons of the mouse and track pad! I have been humbled by the generosity of our student volunteers, and their patience with the older learners in guiding them through this “new” technology. These volunteers have included students from other countries and nations across the world, which adds another exciting and interesting dimension to the dynamic within our classroom.

Within my degree, I took a module on Lifelong Learning. Each Saturday, within our classroom this comes to life in a real sense. My experience as a tutor on this Project has given me hope for the future, as I see our marvelous young people give of their time and expertise so willingly. But also, I see how our older learners have had the courage to take that first step into the world of the future, hand-in-hand with our promising youth. It cheers me, that despite the negative stereotypes of both young and older that are sometimes portrayed, we are all human travellers on the road of life. If that forward journey can be made easier by helping or encouraging each other, it is worth the time and effort, believe me!

## **Appendix H**

### **Reflections of groups/organisations who represent older people on the DCU ILP.**

**Nicola Donnelly Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland. Bridging the gap in more ways than one**

We are living in what the World Health Organisation have called the “age of ageing” where longer life spans and low birth rates mean that most developed countries are experiencing significant population shifts so that the proportion of older people is growing. Those born in the post-war baby boom are now entering retirement so the older generation is becoming an increasingly large and important population segment.

The role of the internet in society is also growing and increasingly there are concerns about how the generations communicate across age boundaries and the importance of understanding how older people access and use new communications is ever more relevant.

It is also argued that digital technologies offer a wealth of benefits specifically for older people in terms of combating social isolation, accessing services and information, accessing health and social services and as a means of delivering assisted living services in order to allow people stay in their own homes and communities in later life.

A recent study by the Phoenix Center for Advanced Legal & Economic Public Policy Studies, a non-profit think-tank in Washington, even indicated that spending time online also cuts the incidence of depression among US senior citizens by at least 20 percent: ‘Increased Internet access and use by senior citizens enables them to connect with sources of social support when face-to-face interaction becomes more difficult,’ said study co-author Sherry G. Ford, a professor at the University of Montevallo in Montevallo, Alabama.

Yet, despite the potential benefits usage may offer and the rapid proliferation of digital technologies there is international evidence of the continued existence of an age related digital divide. According to a recent survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project ([www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)) 92 percent of Americans ages 18-29 are online. The rate falls modestly to 87 percent for those ages 30-49, and somewhat more steeply to 79 percent to those ages 50-64. But for those 65 and older the rate falls dramatically, to 42 percent. Recently, the UK digital inclusion campaign Race Online 2012 estimated that 10 million people in the UK had never been online and that 6.4 million of these were older people ([www.raceonline.org](http://www.raceonline.org)).

In Ireland, a report last year by the Work Research Centre (WRC) and Age Action Ireland found that although older people were enthusiastic users of mobile phones, finding them beneficial for communication with friends and family and adding to their sense of security and safety, usage of the internet 'only reached a minority of those aged 65-plus'.

Considering how the Internet is becoming a fundamental tool in everyday life for shopping, banking, booking travel and holidays, finding information and accessing government services, and a forum for creative self expression it is important that older people are not excluded or disadvantaged.

Projects such as DCU's Intergenerational Learning Project tackle this issue in an innovative and creative way. By bringing together younger students with older learners the project is not only building up basic online skills, showing how useful the internet can be and encouraging ongoing online participation but it is also facilitating a dual exchange of knowledge and skills between generations. There is no doubt that skills training has a vital role in tackling the issue of digital exclusion but by also the bridging the generational gap this project opens up many other avenues of opportunity beneficial to younger and older participants.

*The Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI) is a not for profit organisation developed by leaders from the ageing field across Ireland (North and South) with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies. CARDI focuses on promoting research cooperation across sectors and disciplines and influencing the direction of research on ageing and older people. CARDI's website [www.cardi.ie](http://www.cardi.ie) provides access to an extensive library of ageing research and policy reports, research contacts, funding opportunities, key events and the latest news on ageing research and older people.*

## **Eamon Timmins Head of Advocacy and Ageing Age Action**

**Wednesday, August 11, 2010 Can you imagine? By Eamon Timmins**

Could you imagine life without computers and the internet? Imagine all the things you could not do.

To start with, you would not be reading this blog, or keeping up to date with dozens of other interesting websites. Forget about checking your email, or keeping contact with family and friends by Facebook or Skype.

Online banking and shopping would also be off the list. And when you heard a DJ on the radio advising to check out the latest review or important piece of information on a website – well you know he would not be talking to you.

But this is not an imaginary world. Some 80% of over-65s in Ireland do not have computer skills or access to a computer. What's worse is that the Government has decided that its digital inclusion funding, used to train groups such as old people, ends in October.

In the U.K. the National Plan for Digital Participation was launched in March, with a target of getting 60% of older people on line by 2012. In contrast, Ireland has no plan, no target and, after October, no funding.

To add insult to injury, the Irish Government's Local Government Efficiency Review Group advised recently that drivers who do not pay their motor tax using the online service would face a €10 levy. Like many people in Ireland, they fail to recognise that the reason a large number of older drivers are not using the online option is that they cannot use a computer. The solution is to train them, not penalise them.

Using a grant from the Government's digital inclusion funding, Age Action's Getting Started computer training programme has helped train over 5,000 older people in the last two years.

Getting Started has transformed the lives of those it has taught, providing them with basic computer skills to word process, surf the internet and use email. The programme has been running in 12 counties, with 500 volunteer tutors and 200 partner organisations. However, the end of Government funding has placed a question-mark over the future of the programme.

Age Action is currently searching for a corporate sponsor to enable the programme continue and to expand. We are determined to do all we can to ensure that every older person who wants to be trained, is trained.

Where once computer skills were a luxury, they have now become a necessity. No section of society should be left behind. No caring society should allow this to happen.

*Eamon Timmins is Head of Advocacy and Communications at the national older people's charity, Age Action. To join, make a donation or support Age Action, visit our website at [www.ageaction.ie](http://www.ageaction.ie)*

## **AONTAS Senior Learner Network - The Voice of Senior Learning!** **Niamh O'Reilly, Aontas O'**

The AONTAS Senior Learner Network has been running for 2 years with almost 233 learners involved from across the country. The network was established after AONTAS conducted a piece of research 'Don't Stop Me Now – the Lifelong Learning Needs of Older People.' The aim of the senior learner network is to provide a medium for dialogue with, and between, older learners. By developing networks, learners are enabled to come together to discuss their experience as an adult learner and also the barriers and issues that arise during their learning journey. Through this process of sharing experience specific issues are identified and a solution found through the support and assistance of AONTAS. Adult learners are empowered to take on these issues and through a collaborative approach with others reach a satisfactory outcome.

Learner networks are inspirational in that the learner's experience is used to motivate others to work together for a better adult learning service in Ireland. This is one way of addressing the needs of senior learners (55+) and raising the profile of this important, but often overlooked area of lifelong learning.

Running for 2 years and after 4 meetings the Senior Learner Network the outcomes of the senior learner network include:

- A Manifesto for Senior Learners
- A submission to the National Positive Ageing Strategy
- A logo for senior learning.

The manifesto was created from the outcomes of the Senior Learner Network Meeting, which took place on Wednesday 4th February 2009. This Manifesto is based on the views of learners themselves, it is the result of discussions with over 120 learners. Basically it says why senior learning is important and what would be done by government and education providers to create the best possible learning service for older people. Use this manifesto yourself, let your local politicians know about it – keep senior learning on the political agenda! To download a copy of the manifesto click [here](#).

The last AONTAS Senior Learner Network meeting took place in the Davenport Hotel, during the Bealtaine Festival. The theme for the meeting was creating a logo for senior learning. The reason for doing this is that at the last meeting, in September, the Network discussed how to move ahead with the Senior Learner Manifesto. One of the proposed actions which would help address manifesto point 2: Creating and distribute information on the learning opportunities for older learners in every community - is the creation of a logo which identifies that the course is aimed at older people. Therefore this was the basis for the meeting as it moves on implementing

the manifesto and is also creative, because the learners will create the logo, and therefore fits into the criteria of the Bealtaine festival. We were delighted with the wonderful

ideas that were presented on the day, 6 logos were proposed. The report outlines these logos. The results of the final voting for the best logo did not provide an overall winner so we will go back to the senior learner network in the autumn to get the final agreement on the logo. To download a copy of the report from the meeting click [here](#).

The Senior Learner Network is moving into its next phase in line with the new AONTAS strategic plan, which will be produced following extensive consultation this year. It is ready to take the leap into being part of a greater movement of learners through a National Adult Learner Forum. The future for senior learning is bright and exciting! “It has put life in my years and hopefully will add years to my life.” Ardee Senior Learner, on the value of lifelong learning for older people For more information please see <http://www.aontas.com/membership/learnernetworks.html>

*AONTAS is the National Adult Learning Organisation. The mission of AONTAS is to ensure that every adult in Ireland has access to appropriate and affordable learning opportunities throughout their lives, thus enabling them to participate in the economic, social, civic and cultural development of Irish society. With almost 600 members it aims to increase the profile of adult education and to lobby with members to improve the sector.*

## Appendix I

### Intergenerational Narrative of both older and younger students on the DCU ILP

**DCU Student Piers Dillon-Scott a DCU volunteer student wrote the following: Dublin City University's Silver Surfers**

WHILE [SENATOR DAN BOYLE was attempting to bring down the government last week with the social networking site Twitter](#), JJ Higgins was doing something slightly more worthwhile. He was sending his first email.

JJ (62), a retired postal worker, is among a growing number of older internet users in Ireland. A recent survey by the [Department of Communications](#) shows that nearly 50% of Irish people over the age of 50 have a computer at home. And about 30% of these older people are eager to learn how to use them. But can you teach an old dog new tricks?

For those 'Silver Surfers' who are willing to learn there are a verity of computer skills courses across the country. Dublin City University runs an award winning computer skills course specifically for older people.

Called the '[Intergenerational Learning Project](#)' the course was set up by Trudy Corrigan, a lecturer in DCU's School of Educational Studies in 2008.

It has already gained a number of awards. In 2008 Trudy won The Irish Times '[Living Dublin Award](#)' for her work on the project.

The lessons take place every Saturday morning during the university's 12 week semester. Each class lasts about three hours.

For the first hour the students are given an informal lecture on subjects such as sending emails or saving to USB. After a short coffee break they return to the computer labs to put their new skills into practice.

With some students in their early 40's to others in their mid 90's it is not hard to see why some students, many of whom may never have used a computer before, may need a little extra help.

Help is readily available. Despite having a small staff of only 5 paid lecturers the classes are busy with DCU students.

Students in the university are encouraged to volunteer their time to give one-on-one help to their older colleagues. Trudy believes it is this one-on-one support that has led to the success of the project.

“The [older] students are allowed to go at their own pace, they lead the lesson and the DCU students help them along”, says Trudy.

Joan McGrane, a former student and now a teacher on the course believes this is how adult courses should be taught. She is keen to point out that older people should not feel they are going to be talked down to, “There is a certain way of dealing with adults because they learn differently from younger people”

But neither, she says, should they be scared of the technology. “The beginner’s class is like a showcase, it’s like Rumsfelds ‘known knowns and known unknowns.’ A lot of participants know the internet as a vague concept but they mightn’t know what it offers.”

Listening to the student chat before the class it seems that many come to socialise as well as to learn.

Indeed, the aim of the course is not just to teach computer skills but to help the students improve their quality of life. Unlike other computer skills courses the DCU course emphasises social technologies such as mobile phones, Skype and email rather than more traditional fair such as spreadsheets.

This emphasis is supported by a recent study by Age Action Ireland and the Government. The study found that digital social skills can have important benefits for older people.

Simple tasks like emailing children and grandchildren or ordering groceries can improve the quality of life for older people.

As Trudy explains the ability to use a mobile phone or online-telephony service like Skype can go some way to reducing social isolation in Ireland’s older population.

These benefits, she says, are especially important for people who housebound, ill or living alone.

JJ agrees, despite having a computer at home he says it never occurred to him to learn how to use it. It was only with the encouragement of his adult children that he decided to take the course.

“It never occurred to me before this year to learn to use computers. But now that I am I wonder why I didn’t start sooner.”

JJ, who has been attending the course for three weeks, says this focus on social technologies is the course’s strength.

At the moment however he is eager to learn how to use his new email account. He wants to tell his son in Scotland he has joined the information revolution.

So, has it been worth it? Yes, says JJ, “At the start of the year I was homeless and illiterate. I was homeless because I didn’t have an email address and I was illiterate because I didn’t know how to use the internet. That’s how important it is.”

**Poem written by one of the older students as part of the DCU  
ILP.**

**Monday, April 26, 2010 Bridging the gap of time, by Sean Murray**

**BRIDGING THE GAP OF TIME**

To upgrade our budding computer skills  
We have come together with younger folk  
To bridge the generation gap for a while  
Along the daunting miles of adult education  
As we set our sights towards distant goals  
Open mindness became our middle name  
While old doubts from distant fumbblings  
Were blown away on headwinds of change  
Amid coy interchanges of wisdom and wit  
We saw two lifestyles function as one  
So what had begun as a learning curve  
Became a full circle of feisty fellowship  
Our parting gifts were not measured in coin  
For work sharing has a shine all of its own  
From close encounters with laughter and tears  
During our dogged pursuit of computer literacy

*Sean Murray*

## **Reflections of Martha DCU volunteer student:**

Personally I found the Saturday mornings to bring a bit of balance to the stress of college life. While I was stressed with assignments before, I found I was switching off during the classes on Saturdays and was in a much better mood afterwards. I believe this was due to the fun we usually had with the tutors and the older learners. I found it very rewarding to offer help and just sit beside them, as well as exchanging 'private' stuff about their daily life and worries and mine.

I do think that the older participants benefit from the project. Although there are some offers of courses for elderly people, the participants I have talked to were always excited about the Saturday morning classes and usually came back the next semester, telling all their friends about it. They certainly benefited from the acquired knowledge, opening up new opportunities that the Internet and e-mailing or Skype offer, as well as from the new people they have met. Even those who only stayed with their friends during the breaks benefited from a place to meet. While for some the learning was very important, others appreciated more the fact that they were going into a class room on a college campus. I know from one participant that she found it was 'terrific' since she never had the opportunity to study when she was young. She didn't care about what was taught on Saturday mornings, she just enjoyed being on campus. Considering this and the findings from the TILDA report etc., I think the older participants benefit from a better quality of life, where they can acquire new knowledge, meet other people, experience something new, feel included and may be able to forget the worries they have outside campus such as an illness or people they have to care for.

Although the project causes costs to the university, I think the university benefits from it in terms of giving students the opportunity to participate in volunteering. The careers service preaches that volunteering is substantial in terms of acquiring needed skills etc. but not enough is offered to make volunteering for students more accessible. Offering such a project that is so flexible to current DCU students is great to get more students to participate in volunteering because it is on campus, it couldn't be easier for students as they know the location and grew up with computers.

On the other hand it is good for the university to have older people on campus who are a source of learning for younger students and who promote the university with their friends or grand-children

I can imagine that society might benefit from the project in the long term as it is proven that lifelong learning supports a better quality of life. If the project can be expanded to a larger audience across Dublin and across Ireland, making learning in general and between generations more accessible, I am sure that the project will benefit the Irish society by happier

and healthier older people. If in the long-term the older generations become more involved through the project they will cause less costs and may even be able to stay longer in the workforce.

Great project! :) I really hope I will have time to come back and support you guys on Saturday mornings or just in securing funding or some of the administration stuff or so. For example, I would be more than happy to help you with setting up a participant database or similar. I think if the project is extended and becomes bigger something like that is needed to have all information in one place. I really hope the business plan will secure funding from different sources and will help the project sustain in the future as it is a great project and I know so many people would be really sad and disappointed if they weren't able to come back next year.

## Appendix J

### Samples of description of DCU ILP information communication technology modules and other seminars and workshops.

#### Friday, September 10, 2010 ICT Beginners Module ICT Beginners Module Joan McGrane and Joan Flood

**Aim:** To introduce learners to the operation of computers using laptops, to encourage and develop confidence in using Information Communication Technology and to familiarise the learners with basic applications.

**Outcomes:** The learners should be able to:

- Recognise hardware and software.
- Identify the functions of the elements of the keyboard and scroll bar.
- Utilise the mouse effectively.
- Identify the Microsoft Office Word programme.
- Utilise the features on Word.
- Utilise Word to start writing creatively and insert images with Clip art.
- Recognise the concept of saving data.
- Utilise the features of copying and pasting
- Identify the Paint programme.
- Identify the Internet programme.
- Utilise the Internet.
- Receive and send email.

#### **Prerequisites:**

The learners will have either no knowledge of very little knowledge of using a computer. Learners who have already started to write creatively will be encouraged to develop this along with first-time writers.

#### **Description**

There will be three elements to the module:

**Technical:** the basics of how to utilise a computer, the jargon and how to navigate around the Internet and use email to communicate.

**Writing:** using the Word programme to tell their own stories, giving the learners the platform to use their own voices, thus contributing to their confidence levels.

**Social:** to develop interaction in a safe, comfortable and fun environment, with learners being guided at their own pace Friday, September 10, 2010

## **ICT Intermediate Module**

**Carmel Conroy, Eimear Ni Chearnaigh**

### **Aims**

To build on basic computer knowledge, whether gained through the beginners module or elsewhere. This will include Learners developing their usage of Microsoft Word. The module will also look at further ways of exploring the internet which they can integrate into their everyday lives. The Intermediate modules have been designed to enable learners to progress towards the advanced modules at a comfortable pace and if they so wish they will be equipped with the skills to undertake further learning opportunities.

### **Objectives**

Learners will be able to:

Use word processing to create, save, edit and enhance documents  
Create a g-mail account and use e-mail to communicate on-line  
Access the internet and be able to search for information  
Use the internet to access the various online facilities including music, film, radio and TV.

Upload photographs from digital camera/mobile phone onto computer  
Create a slideshow/presentation using Microsoft PowerPoint  
Identify the various social media platforms provided through the internet

### **Prerequisites**

Learners should have an introductory knowledge of computers including navigation of the different functions and elements of the keyboard. Learners will also have a basic knowledge of Microsoft word and the internet including an understanding of e-mail and the functions therein.

### **Description**

Practical: Using the internet for everyday purposes i.e. banking, travel, communications.

Technical: Understanding the various elements of computers both hardware and software

Creative: Designing documents and presentations, using imagery, text and music

Social: Interactive modules designed to create a rapport between learners, tutors and volunteer students

## **Friday, September 10, 2010 ICT Advanced module**

**Marian Flanagan**

### **Aims**

To build on what the students have covered during the intermediate module, including social media, and to prepare students for the more advanced module in blogging and social media offered by Cathy Fowley. In addition, this module will allow the students to use the Internet for practical purposes, for example, researching a holiday destination or checking the availability of a product in a shop. The students will have the opportunity to work with Microsoft Office programs. Overall aim is to build students' confidence when using the Internet so that they use the Internet in their own homes.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Following this module the students will have the confidence and the know-how to use the Internet for many different purposes: checking email, interacting with online social media, conducting practical tasks online, and to listen to radio shows/watch tv programs online. They will be able to stay in touch with people, upload photos, create photo slideshows, and to use the Internet for general purposes. The power will be transferred to the student and they will decide how the Internet can help them with various tasks.

### **Prerequisites**

The students should be very familiar with using a computer and have had experience using the Internet. They should be at the stage where they are comfortable using a browser and are familiar with searching online, clicking on links and saving files. It would be preferable if the students have experience working with email packages.

### **Description**

The module is divided into practical and creative sections.

Practical: setting up email account if they haven't already done so; organising emails; browsing websites of interest; bookmarking; using the Internet to help with daily tasks

Creative: creating an iGoogle page; creating a facebook/twitter account; uploading photos to share with friends and family; starting a blog; creating a powerpoint presentation to show friends and family; listening to/watching podcasts

**Friday, September 10, 2010** Blogging and social media module

**Introduction to Third level learning through blogging and social media**

**Cathy Fowley**

**Aims:**

To introduce students to different forms of blogging, both in practice and theory, to encourage participation in social media from older learners, familiarize all students to different styles and genres, and develop critical thinking and appraisal

**Outcomes:**

The students will create their own blogs and maintain them for a period of time, both in form and content.

The students will participate in online conversations with other bloggers. Through introduction to academic articles and blogs, the students engage in reflective thinking on the practice.

**Prerequisites:**

Students should be familiar with Word (typing, basic formatting, cut and paste) and email packages, have a basic understanding of Google products (Gmail, search), know how to use digital cameras and download the photographs. An interest in writing is a bonus, or an interest in a specialist subject (music, cooking, knitting, stamp or postcard collecting, etc.)

Sample of seminars: [Wednesday, April 13th, 2-4 pm](#)

 posted Apr 8, 2011 9:52 AM by Cathy Fowley

*Intergenerational conversations:*

Embracing life changes with Paul King (lecturer, School of Education), Eimear Ni Chearnaigh (ILP tutor), Sean Murray and Ruth Meehan (ILP participants)

Self confidence and motivation can be a major issue in many of our lives, especially when it comes to embracing new learning opportunities. Some of the reasons for this can be a past experience of 'chalk and talk' schooling and lack of self belief. Moreover, retirement is a life changing experience that if not handled well can lead to motivational issues and lack of self worth

Our conversation will be led by Paul King, lecturer in psychology from the School of Education, Eimear Ni Chearnaigh, one of our Intergenerational tutors, and Sean and Ruth, who are both learners in the Intergenerational project

The session will run from 2pm to 4pm approximately in room C114 upstairs in the Henry Grattan building.

We would like to address the issue of building confidence and self-esteem in older people following changes in their lives such as retirement, children leaving home, getting older etc, but also the changes throughout our lives, from the student years of our ILP volunteers, to middle age and its challenges, and to retirement. Eimear Ni Chearnaigh will speak of her experience of Neuropathic Pain and how to change negative thinking and to create a "new self". Sean will talk about his experience as a learner and the benefits that has brought to his life. We hope many of you will attend, and participate in what promises to be a fascinating conversation.

## Memories and lifewriting

 posted Apr 8, 2011 9:50 AM by Cathy Fowley

The presentation on [Lifewriting](#) included one particular picture which evoked strong memories for many. It was taken from a blog post on [Coffee cake](#):



## **Report on Health and Wellbeing Workshop**

**(Reporters: Tricia Tormey & Ann-Marie Corcoran**

**Student volunteers)**

The hour long workshop facilitated by Project tutors Joan Flood and Joan McGrane was an informal event, with participants from various areas as well as Project learners and DCU student volunteers. The discussion was framed around the themes of: Learning and the Brain, Learning and Wellbeing and Holistic Learning.

The session opened with Helena Ahern inviting the participants to take a few moments to meditate on a positive learning experience and to hold it in their minds as they listened to the speakers.

**Learning and the Brain –Dr. Kate Irving – Lecturer School of Nursing  
DCU, Dr. Andy Cochrane – Lecturer Maynooth University**

This segment explored the effects of learning on the cognitive domain. What are these effects– is it possible to improve brain function?

Dr. Andy Cochrane opened with an exploration of some myths to do with the brain:

1. You cannot change your brain – it can in fact regenerate.
2. You lose brains cells everyday – new brains cell are created and connections made. However some tissue is lost in the prefrontal cortex so it is important to keep the brain active with problem-solving skills to create new connections e.g. change your habits – try brushing your teeth with the other hand.
3. Memory decline in inevitable – we can adapt and learn new strategies to reinforce our brains, by paying more attention to things and learning new techniques.

Dr. Kate Irving then spoke of evidence about cognitive wellbeing and physical exercise. Brain cells make up 2% of the body weight but use 25% of sugar and oxygen it absorbs therefore it requires a healthy heart to pump blood to the brain. Exercise can spark new growth in an important part of the brain, reducing stress and lessening damage to the hippocampus. Engaging in exercise for 20/30mins, three times a week raises the heart beats which produces a chemical to help make the brain cells stronger.

## **Learning and Wellbeing**

**Ruane Kennedy - Senior Counsellor, DCU Counselling and Personal Development Service**

**Helena Ahern – Head of DCU Counselling and Personal Development Service**

**Eimear Ni Cheartaigh – student volunteer.**

This segment explored the effects of learning on the affective domain. What are the affects on physical and mental wellbeing? What are the effects on issues such as self-esteem, confidence and personal development?

Ruane Kennedy pointed out that stress and anxiety do not help the learning process, and having a relaxed state of mind aids brain efficacy. He described learning as a ‘u’ shaped curve, with experience of a low after it has started then finishing on an upward sweep, and this is particularly true of learning after a long-term absence. A study in the UK of depression connected with giving up full time work, found that life long learning was linked to a decrease in depression. Going back to learning, for example being able to problem-solve, using different types of language all broaden ones social network thereby increasing confidence which in turn increases learning.

Eimear Ni Cheartaigh spoke of her experience of Neuropathic Pain Disorder as a result of being burnt in a fire which caused nerve damage and constant chronic pain. It meant her readapting to a new life and relearning how to deal with the pain, as it affected her emotional wellbeing . This resulted in having to defer modules in her studies, the loss of her identity on losing her job and loss of social interaction. However, a pain management program meant she learned the skills to manage her pain and pace herself which changed her attitude towards it. Through the Project she became more connected to DCU again, and came to the realisation that learning can improve wellbeing.

## **Holistic Learning**

**Briege Casey Lecturer (School of Nursing DCU)**

**Peig McManus project learner, speciality (Stress management)**

**Kay O'Rourke – project learner, speciality (Yoga)**

This segment looked at complimentary approaches to learning. These included an art and narrative-based approach, stress management and yoga.

Briege Casey spoke of learning as being complex and multi-dimensional and about her interests in art and narrative. Life experiences shape our attitude to learning and as individuals we construct our own stories about our relationships with others. This involves learning about ourselves and where we are going so we can make meaning out of our life experiences and share them with others. We learn in all sorts of ways and learning combines the creative forces of mind, body, memory, experience and spirit.

Peig McManus spoke of holistic health and coping with stress and the importance of knowing yourself. Everyone is unique and some stress is good as it can challenge you. What can happen when stress is triggered – a feeling of being overwhelmed and increased emotional levels, getting anxious and sweating. To bring your mind and body together she suggested a technique of breathing into your shoes to ground yourself. The gentle Chinese technique of Tai Chi also promotes mental health as it forces you to live in the present moment, as the past is gone and we do not know about the future. The Alexander technique helps change the posture due to stress, breaking bad habits of a lifetime.

Kay O'Rourke spoke of being physically fit for an active mind and the role of yoga in this. Beliefs about oneself and regrets of the past 'can' or 'cannot' influence who we are and how we act. Wherever we are at this present moment is how it is supposed to be and it is important to try and promote positive feelings about oneself. The discussion that followed came up with the following conclusions:

- You have to respect your limitations.
- What are your life priorities? Sometimes only made obvious by experiencing some life trauma.
- Take some time off, though sometimes not easy to do.
- People always in a rush – importance of listening.
- Valuing older peoples' opinions more.

Life is for living – you cannot stop giving and sharing experience and stories. PACE – Plan, Act, Change and Empower.

You can miss the present moment by regretting and living in the past or thinking of the future. Take physical exercise – Tai Chi or Yoga.

# Appendix K

## Progression for one of the DCU ILP older learners

### **First Writing Assignment of one of the older learners on the DCU ILP who is beginning a part time undergraduate degree programme in the academic year 2011/2012**

My formal education ceased in 1955, with the completion of the Leaving Certificate Examination. Due to family circumstances, University was not an option, so it was straight into the work force. It was always my wish that someday, the opportunity to study for a degree might happen.

My work was in the clerical arena and occasionally the opportunity of development courses did arise. These were, in the main, work related. While they were limited, I did take full advantage of them because they enhanced the prospect of promotion. In later years of my employment, Desk Top Computers were introduced to most of the Clerical staff. Basic in-house training was arranged at first and then it was learn as you go after that. We got the option to complete the ECDL at night, with an outside training body and most of us availed of this.....

After retirement, I developed an interest in cookery, photography and golf and attended classes to improve my proficiency. While these were good in themselves, I really wanted something more tangible. Two years ago I signed on as a mature student at DCU, on the Intergenerational Learning Course (ILP). This was designed with the Older Learner in mind, and persons over 55 could apply. In the main, it focussed on the area of Social Media, like, Twitter, Facebook and Blogs and in general way, how to make best use of the Computer. DCU students acted as Mentors to the Older Learners and this added fun to the atmosphere on Campus. It was soon afterwards that I discovered the (names course at third level college).

In approaching the (names course) I will take with me a wealth of experience gained from a lifetime involvement at work, on School Boards, on Credit Union Boards, within the Trade Union Movement and finally as a family man. Without realising it, at the time, one learned the art of dealing with every day issues which presented themselves. The common denominator at all times was interaction with people. Skills were acquired naturally and over a long period. To survive in the business world it was necessary to employ savvy. Applying common sense and remaining calm during conflict situations always reaped dividends. I was fortunate enough to gain promotion as a Supervisor at the work place. Although, demands on my time increased, so also did the salary. Being young and energetic at the time, it did not weigh heavily on my shoulders. While involved in the Trade Union movement, I completed an Industrial Relations Course and gained a Diploma. Being instrumental in the setting up of the Credit Union at work

was an invaluable experience. It afforded me the opportunity to meet with so many people throughout the organisation that otherwise would not have happened. Arranging Group Study meetings on a weekly basis was compulsory with the Field Officer in attendance. Serving in a voluntary capacity as Chairman and Treasurer was a worthwhile learning experience.

It was while attending the Learning Assessment Seminar at ( names college) .. that my appetite was whetted. I realised that (names course) was tailor made for my situation. The prospect of studying for a degree, designed for Adult Learners, appealed to me and one where I could progress at my own pace. It was while reading the 'Welcome' letter.that the following line stood out,

'Remember, with patience and perseverance, a snail will reach Jerusalem!' This will be my maxim. Why hurry, I have all the time in the world.

My eyes are fixed on the target of getting the degree within my comfort zone and to enjoy all that the course has to offer. The pleasure derived from studying with like-minded people will sustain me. From past experience, I am confident that this is the most effective method for me, and will yield the desired result.

At the moment, the field is so vast that my mind is all over the place, but with guidance and supervision, I can and will become more focused on what is important. Of course, it will be necessary to make adjustments to my present life style. But this is a small price to pay for such a big reward. While my time is my own in retirement, tighter timetables and greater discipline will be called for. Naturally, this will take getting used to, but, with my goal as the (names degree) my mind will be more focused than ever. Having access to the services of the Mentor will be invaluable, particularly at the early stage of the journey. 'A good start is half the battle' to quote an old adage. It will be essential that I get to grips with how to study fruitfully and to make best use of my time.

When working with Groups, maintaining team spirit makes for a pleasant environment. This can be measured easier in a working group situation. Points aired during discussion can be agreed by consensus.

The disadvantages are that if some of the group is lethargic, it spreads like wild fire, and output suffers.

Contributing to class discussions is not a problem, but talking too much is! Learning how to curb and measure input might make for a more meaningful debate.

There are occasions when I would be apprehensive and uncomfortable. If a topic under discussion is beyond my competence and understanding, I tend to 'turn off' and lose interest.

Older, mature students, bring a wealth of talent gained from life long experience. Enthusiasm, dedication, hard working and desire to succeed tend to be their hallmark. The intergenerational population on Campus creates a healthier atmosphere where young and old can support and encourage each other on the journey through College.

My first writing at school was in the form of essays. The form and style was gleaned from school books but no formal training was given. Teachers tended to concentrate on spelling and grammar. Oddly enough, writing for pleasure never happened. The telephone was the communicating tool. It was at work where writing was required on a daily basis. For many years operating the Customer Complaints Section, called for detailed responses. These arrived at the office by letter, telephone, and calling at the office in person. Convention dictates the customer is always right. There were times when this was challenged. However, tact was always applied and it worked in most cases. In later times, while working at Event Management the task became easy because of the nature of the work. These were seldom confrontational and mostly pleasant, with invitations to the various marketing events. Improvement is needed in structuring, fluency and free flowing style.

(Names course) fits perfectly into my plans. Many of the subjects would have been covered at school, albeit half century ago. The (names modules) may suit me best but up skilling is called for. Attention will be required in Quantitative Reasoning, Critical Thinking and indeed the whole new gamut. Further advice will be sought on this.

For me, this is the best time to return to real learning, without fear or pressure from superiors, or family. I will study because of a desire to learn.

There is no question, but adjustments to my existing life will have to be made. This should not be a major problem as all my activities are social and the diary can be rearranged accordingly.

There was nothing easy about writing the essay. It was not always easy to keep on track and to try and keep to the point. What if the responses were not properly thought out? Having to go back so far in my life and to depend on memory recall was difficult enough. Also hoping that my first ever assignment, was made articulately.

I did change the original once and rewrote it but I discovered it remained close to the original draft. I'm not sure if more time would have helped me.

Before writing it, I read the brief many times over, in order to answer the questions by keeping to the point. Yes, I do believe that I'm reflected as accurately as I can. There were some moments when I may have taken a short cut in order to avoid verbiage.

When invited to write three pages, my heart sank. While it was daunting at the start, it surprised me at how it eventually came to life on paper.