

**VOICES FROM THE FIELD**

(Abridged)



**Voices from the Field**

**Abridged**

**INDEX**

**Page**

Introduction: The Task at hand 3

Anything is Possible – We are in Liquid Times 5

Setting the Scene 6

System Dynamics 7

Suggestions for Change 10

**ANNEX**: The Teaching Profession 13



**‘Towards a More Creative Education System’**

**Introduction: The Task at Hand**

We live in a time characterised as Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA). The OECD in its recent [Education 2030](http://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf) recognizes that the challenge this poses for educational systems is to equip students with the personal agency and the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to navigate this uncertain terrain. Given that education systems have been characterised as fuelled by nostalgia, innately conservative and influenced by an industrial-age ideology, the shift to creative agency is a profound challenge to the education project as traditionally conceived.

Until very recently, curriculum and pedagogy could be anchored to the knowns of teachers’ pasts, safe in the knowledge that this would be appropriate for pupils’ futures. In the age of globalisation, climate change, digital innovation, artificial intelligence, and other disruptive changes this can no longer be the case. Putting the student’s creative agency centre stage with the ability to question, be curious, make connection, innovate, problem solve, communicate, collaborate and think critically is the transformation which the current context makes urgent.

Creativity cannot be mandated. Ghandi’s injunction to ‘be the change you want to see in the world’ seems a relevant message for all stakeholders. Neither can creativity be an ‘add-on’ to the existing way of doing things. It changes the system. How might the education system meet this challenge which calls into question much of accepted practice up to now? And what role can the arts play in this transformation?

The following short document presents an abridged harvest of views on the Irish education system primarily from interviews collated in the first half of 2018 and framed in anticipation of the Symposium ‘Towards a More Creative Education System’. (The much more extensive unabridged harvest may be made available after the Symposium). The interviews with the actors from across the field of education were largely unstructured and designed to elicit frank perspectives on the system. What emerges is the articulation of a set of preoccupations and concerns which, while varying in emphases, often paradoxical and frequently contradictory, coalesce into a coherent picture.

In spite of anger, frustration and overwhelm, the overall tone is one of optimism that now is a good moment in education and that the system has potential for a major reset. While there are deep-rooted systemic challenges there is also huge energy and experimentation at play at all levels. How to harness this energy into a more coherent whole capable of realizing the ambition to be the best education system in Europe? The conditions seem right, or so many sense, for a maturing of the system to match the shifting contours of the modern world. What might this reset look like?

‘Voices from the Field’ point towards a set of possible conclusions about what is necessary for a systemic reset that might be characterised as ‘from co-dependent to co-creative’. Ultimately, what is at stake is a reset of mental models, assumptions and prerogatives towards:

* Making the best interest of the child the lodestar of all policy;
* A decentralising of initiative and trust from the centre in a system that is more capable of open self-reflection and dialogue at all levels;
* A process of empowering, trusting and enhancing the professionalism of, and collaboration between, those at the coal-face of education, the teaching profession;
* A teaching profession that stands in its own power vis-à-vis the centre, trusting itself and trusting students in turn as the active agents in learning;
* An integration of arts initiatives within a coherent understanding of their role in a creative education system;
* Higher Education Institutions challenging themselves to engage seriously and urgently with reform of the transition to third level, the tail that many feel is wagging the dog and
* Systemic leadership, particularly from teachers, that allows parents have confidence in the unsettling but necessary transition towards a more creative education system.

Some comments in the unabridged ‘Voices’ venture into more speculative and contentious territory suggesting:

* The resourcing of unions to embrace a stronger role in relation to the professional development of teachers (in place of a strictly IR role) and
* Providing a process to assist the church to unburden itself of the responsibilities it carries in the field of education.

1.8.18

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Voices from the Field - Abridged**

The following is an abridged summary of the main themes emerging from consultations across the field of education. The comments follow as closely as possible the words of those interviewed. Many voices are mixed together, sometimes in the same paragraph, to convey the diversity of often contradictory viewpoints.

**‘Anything is possible – We are in Liquid Times’**

In spite of the many challenges that confront the education system there is considerable optimism about the potential for change at this time. “Thanks to the efforts of many who have spent years ‘bursting a gut’ trying to reform it, the education system is not in a bad place as measured by international metrics. Teachers are now well-trained. We are close to joining the dots - we are very close to coherence. There are nodes of possibility each carrying exciting vision within our grasp. The capacity for the system to reset at this time is powerful.

The JC reform is the single most important reform in second level education and there is now more money in the system to help progress. Its focus on wellbeing and mental health is commendable. Reform of the Senior Cycle (SC) will move faster. There is a national consensus on the importance of education. There are good people at the helm of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the universities. Parents are happy with schools - well-run, safe places with more than 80% happy with quality of school life. There is a retention rate of over 90% at 18 years – quite exceptional in Europe – and 70% of the 90% go on to some form of 3rd level.

The DES has a strategy to make the Irish education system the best in Europe by 2026. There is a broad consensus across the system about the direction of travel – built around the idea of cross-cutting competencies. This reflects international [research](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/teachers-as-designers-of-learning-environments_9789264085374-en#page1) as well as feedback on extensive consultations which have been a hallmark of the NCCA’s work. . Reform has also taken place in early-years education.

Already ten-year olds are best in Europe at reading. The inspectorate ranking of schools as poor has halved. Drop-out rates in DEIS schools have halved to 15 %. More children with special needs and from dis-advantaged backgrounds are going to 3rd level. A new Admissions Bill will provide for non-discriminatory entry. A Parent/StudentCharter is coming shortly which will enhance the rights of both parents and students. The DES is seeking to facilitate new models of patronage.

Teachers talking to teachers and amplifying best practice is happening all over the country at teachers meeting with speed-dating approaches to spreading new pedagogical approaches.”

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Setting the Scene**

Alongside the sense of optimism that now is a good time for a reset of the education system there were frank characterisations of the system as: lacking the capacity for self-reflection; being inherently conservative and self-perpetuating; serving the interests of the middle-class and being deficient at addressing larger issues of purpose and citizenship.

**Self-reflection**:A recurring theme is the apparent inability of the education system to hold a mirror up to itself. “The education system doesn’t like space and can’t hold a question– it only wants solutions. At national level we lack the ability to design and co-create. Things need to change.”

**Whose interest are being served**? “The system probably serves the interests of the middle class with it academic focus.Longitudinal studies show that many are not well served - those who get switched off from 2nd year on. The system may work for compliant middle-class females but less so for males and completely fails non-compliant working-class males who are brutalised by the system.”

**The bigger context and framing**: **“**Given the state of the world with the planet at a tipping point and a tech revolution under way four levels of learning are required – global for living sustainably, societal for navigating a disrupted landscape of work, inter-personal to develop capacity for good relationships and intra-personal for self-nurturing and wellbeing.In the next five years ‘learner agency’ will be a defining concept, with forms of personalisation, familiar in the primary system, taking hold more widely.”

**Purpose & Assumptions:** “In theory the system is child-centred, particularly with the wellbeing agenda; in practice the caring school is about getting students over the exam line. The foundational narrative of education which was driven by the economic paradigm is a ‘busted flush’. Education should prepare young people for an unpredictable world. Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial skills are all closely related in creating economic, cultural and social value. The senior cycle consultation is starting with exploring the question of purpose. This is a subversive question that will bubble up uncomfortable truths.”

**Education is innately conservative and about control?** “All inter-generational systems are fuelled by nostalgia and are innately conservative. Formal education was always about control**.** Parents are universally conservative. A US report likened education policy formation to a big storm over the ocean with the ocean in a state of constant froth and ferment; meanwhile down in the murky depths education goes on in its usual way.

Narrow framing of issues (curriculum/transitions), instead of asking fundamental questions, maintains the status quo. It is difficult to get decisions such is the current fixation on corporate governance. We are missing the students’ voices in an ongoing way. The tradition of the Church’s role in social control needs to be borne in mind.Educationis a strangesystem **–** often privately ownedbut publicly fundedwith verycentralised control. Education is a profoundly complex system.**”**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**System Dynamics**

Among the most interesting comments were those on the nature of the dynamics at play within the education system ranging from the perception of increased control and decentralisation of responsibility by the centre after the financial crash, the disjuncture between the quality of policy formulation on the one hand and problematic implementation on the other - such as was evident with the reform of the JC; the perceived dysfunctional relationship between the DES and the teaching profession; a somewhat similar patriarchal relationship between teachers and students; the creative opportunities opened up by technology with the capacity to free up teachers from their role as gate-keepers of knowledge and, finally, a wide-spread critique of the points system and the failure to seriously address its failings.” (Comments on the effect of the crash, implementation of the JC, the role of technology, the unions and the churches are omitted here so as not to overwhelm this abridged account.)

**The DES-Schools Dynamic – a co-dependent Relationship?** “The default setting of the DES is ‘tell them’ and the default setting of many schools is ‘tell us’ what we need to do to produce what you want. The managerial bodies look to the DES for circulars when an issue arises. There is lack of consultationwith teachers on the ground – expecting teachers to keep on top of documents on the DES website is not real consultation. The unions do a poor job of mediating with DES.There is structurally-ingrained rigidity between the teaching profession and the DES and its agencies which control everything and make it difficult to pilot anything. There is no room for ‘reasonable risk’.

Teachers are suffering from ‘Stockholm Syndrome’; they’re so inured to the DES unidirectional approach that when invited to assess their own students they feel unable to do so. The top-down mind-set informs the current drive-by inspections instead of inspectorate as a support to schools. Looked at as a co-dependent relationship, the dynamic between the DES and the teaching profession evokes the image of two drunks propping each other up. Their post-colonial habits are predictable. The DES pulls levers never saying what it means or doing what it says. The other parties understand the routine and respond accordingly. This post-colonial guerrilla approach contrasts with the Scandinavian willingness for policy-makers to say what they propose and be happy if others disagree with them. And yet the senior inspectorate is visionary and very knowledgeable about international thinking**.**

Teachers as suffering from ‘Learned Helplessness’, which Martin Seligman defines as the state of people who feel oppressed and who develop behaviours and attitudes which accentuate the condition. We engage as positively as we can with change that comes from the top down. The DES has always decided what and how much change and we creatively find ways to implement it.

The principles of design and co-creation are not in the 2nd level curriculum and assessment. There is a national inability to unlock the potential for change in the teaching profession. We’re great at policy but poor at implementation. We’re good at curriculum but poor at getting it out there. We consult interminably but fail at implementation.”

**Teacher-Student Relationship:** “The LC promotes a teacher-centred approach with passive students, homework, the teacher talking and little group or project work. Teaching to the test becomes seen as ‘good teaching’ – students have developed an instrumentalist attitude, wanting the teacher to focus on what gets points.

Students want greater autonomy. In reality there’s a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student with the teacher stricter than parents. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is quite critical of the Irish system’s failure to give voice to students – an authoritarian system characterisation which is echoed by the ESRI. Student and migrant voices need to be heard.”

**The Points System – brutal and unchanging:** “The points system has been looked at twice during my time and there is no political appetite for change. Two tweaks have been introduced which have been effective. The scoring protocol was made less granular last year and this took some of the heat out of the leaving-cert results as reflected in the diminution of press coverage. Secondly research was conducted into the predictability of leaving cert questions and showed the concern to be unfounded.

The NCCA/HEA Transitions Conference 2012 which gave rise to the Transitions [Group](https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Regulation-of-Lobbying-Act-2015/Groups-Committees-exempted-under-the-Transparency-Code/Transitions-Reform-Steering-Group.html) was thebiggest missed opportunity in Irish education.Lots of effort went into ensuring no real change occurred. Instead of addressing how the 3rd level recruitment process through the CAO points system was overwhelming the second level and making it a supplier of fodder for the third level they focused on issues such as the predictability of leaving-cert exam questions. This ensured the process never went anywhere serious.

The leaving cert and points/CAO system is institutionalised child and family abuse by the third level system which can’t be bothered to create its own forms of assessment. The CAO system has process virtues such as being transparent, equitable and scaleable. However it is vicious from the point of view of creativity - forcing essay marking to be capable of being reduced to a fixed categorisation that can be defended on appeal. The weaknesses in the system are now too great and require a change process to be engaged.

The points system masks class problems – it’s an apparent meritocracy that is fair/transparent while actually masking the reality of class bias. Ireland is unique in having a unitary stream geared towards university. We haven’t cracked other vocational paths with esteem.”

**Leaving Cert**: “There is a general consensus around the need to maintain a pointless exam. Beware of tinkering with the LC high-stakes exam. Its academic focus is driven by dominant forces in society and it inspires huge confidence. The current system has snob appeal and its published league tables indicates what we value.It’s fair and transparent but is it serving students well? The marking system with open review of scripts means there is little room for judgment. The LC distorts teaching and learning; two thirds of LC girls are losing sleep – it’s not healthy.The message of the current system is that content is king whereas it should be the queen and creativity should be the emperor. It’s an elitist accreditation driving grinds for those who can afford them. It creates chronic stress with LC classes 50% empty as students go for grinds. No attention is given to LCA. .

In a recent survey of parents of primary-school children 65% were in favour of change (interview, assessment and terminal exam), 11% didn’t’ know and 6% favoured staying the same – with 67% in favour of continuous assessment. All parents will tell of stress and the nightmare of the Leaving Cert for them and don’t want it to be like that for their children. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its 2016 assessment, recommended reform of the LC to reduce stress.”

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Some Suggestions for Change**

Lots of suggestions arose in the course of the interview process, some focusing on the process of and agenda for change while others focused on concrete suggestions and desiderata for change at various points in the education system.

**Co-creative Change Process: “**Re-imagining things being different is the first step towards things becoming different. Merely shining a light in an area can cause change e.g. the focus on literacy/numeracy. Full-frontal attack won’t work. We need a side-ways approach from personal stories and testimonies of what actually changed peoples’ lives in the education system. Should we do reform faster?

The honouring of process is required for transforming the system. Successful interventions are the result of solutions co-produced by local agencies, service providers and citizens. Canada gives status to and trusts teachers. They get all the forces into one room as a collaborative professional community. We need to open up spaces of fecundity encompassing bureaucratic, academic and professional voices rather than the current bureaucratic rationality. We need decentralised co-creative approaches to engagement rather than the imposition of top-down expert solutions.

All actors need to be in the same room. We need to find spaces and places in the existing framework to crack open the system.There is no single answer. Change (e.g. re points) is a process requiring engagement over a number of years but is worth doing. It won’t be done by the civil service or ministerial directive. It needs universities, IT’s, unions etc. to create a group that is trusted and funded to work over a period of time with six-monthly reports (rather like the citizens assembly) – a process with Chatham House Rules. I have come to realize that moving from an industrial to a twenty-first century model of education requires a conversational process rather than big declarations. Top-down doesn’t work.

Developing a systemic understanding to underpin system’s change requires a common language. Like a ‘murmuration’ of birds it requires mastery of a very few rules to allow spontaneous emergence to occur. Life is inherently creative. The approach of design thinking is to enquire ‘How might we ……’ vs ‘what’s the problem to be solved?’ The focus is on prototypes around different points in the system. Generating exemplars is very important.

It’s necessary to have the whole system present – the 2nd level is wedged between the greater diversity at 3rd level and the innovations at primary level. We need to have the teacher’s voice heard. There is need for a split-screen approach where one half is improving and the other half is disrupting. We need to move from **‘**Mind full to Mindful’.

‘Focus on reforms that are limited and doable without needing to disrupt everything at once but capable of being built upon. The Teaching Council is largely represented by teachers and needs to open amovement of teachers– needs to go beyond mediation/meeting of teachers to address resistance of teachers, another elephant in the room. A citizens’ assembly is needed to resolve church/state relations.

The growth in classroom supports for special needs to a position where it now accounts for 20% of teaching input has all happened at second level since 2006 which shows how quickly change can happen.”

**Reprise of 1993 Convention on Education**: “A reprise is needed of the model chaired by John Coolahan in 1993 which led to the 1995 White Paper. It is 25 years since the 1993 national convention which showed that Irish society can do what’s needed. It’s now timely and crucial to renew the debate.

The Convention was productive of keeping the established order in place. Instead there needs to be disruption – a framing such as ‘Health & Wellbeing in Education’. The Convention was a great idea but one event wouldn’t hold water**.** Changing the curriculum is a complex socio-political enterprise – it needs substance and depth instead of sound-bites.

The system is replete with many ‘fora’ with many people feeling maxed out on participation in existing ‘fora’ which have clear missions.”

**Reform of Senior Cycle, the Points System & 3rd Level:** “Second level needs to be changed to continuous assessment; we need new pathways through the primary and secondary system. Is the assessment system fit for purpose in the 21st Century after 15 years of debate? It should be possible to add a ‘portfolio’ approach to other subjects as is done in art in JC with JC profile of achievement and continuous assessment and credits for extra-curricular.

The SC needs to be a threshold of many possibilities. Finding solutions that are transparent and work at scale is no easy matter. The Leaving Cert (and the points system) should be seen as inflection nodes leading in many different directions rather than one-way filter to university. If progression could be framed in NFQ terms (Levels 1-9) students could begin to look at a scaffolding approach to progression.

Employability statements may be a way of convincing parents to change their thinking. Education needs to be about resourcing students for the longer journey with digital and community (citizenship) skills. At leaving cert we could introduce interviews for transition to certain courses (mindful of the history of nepotism) and there needs to be points for different styles of exam for applied courses.

In my reformed system every school has an independent therapist, measures of self-esteem and self-confidence, active promotion of the 65% who earn less than 400 points, championing of LCA and LC Vocational and support for well-being of teachers as a desirably profession.”

**Structural & Process Reforms:** “Ideally I would also like to see intermediary bodies between the DES and the schools (like the ETB’s) – there are 4,000 schools. DES needs to use IR bargaining (e.g. aligning conditions of new and existing teachers) to secure extension in the school year. Need to change the teaching contractrestricting teaching to 22 hours. There is a challenge of teacher retention with new teachers having the expense of additional two years PME masters for a total of 6 years and related cost with no guarantee of permanent posts at the end.

For innovation to happen senior management needs to give space to teachers to innovate and be on a leadership development path. The overarching structures need to be right.”

**More Suggestions – Primary to Tertiary:** “Can the primary programme be made more like the early childhood approach? There is scope for smoother transition from primary to secondary. ‘Primary teachers love their pupils; Secondary teachers love their subjects’. At second level I would like to see JC realized in its purest form and banish formal exams in JC. Class-room based assessment are valuable for a moment in time to indicate you’re doing what is appropriate – then move on. There would be many pathways through SC with space and time for students to be the learners they can be.

I would like more phenomena-based learning - explore each subject for a sustained period around a theme - but the DES is resisting the idea that formal classes might be closed down for a week to facilitate this. Longer-duration classes give space to explore themes in some depth. The focus needs to be on differentiation – the idea that kids have different abilities and that teaching and learning needs to be contextualised with different strategies for different learning styles.

I would like to throw open the third-level system such that funding wasn’t solely for full-time students; it allowed the accumulation of credits – work placement and international placement; institutions would be allowed to allocate a budget for student support without having to label students as deaf or mentally challenged – integrations vs stigmatisation; there would be positive branding for Technical Universities that celebrates what they have vs every university wanting to be Trinity and every IT wanting to be a university

What set of things should we do to maximize the joy of learning – that all students will find something in the school experience that will support and stimulate life-long learning. There is a lack of joy.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ANNEX 1.**

While the interview process evinced comments on the many actors in the system – the NCCA, the administrative system, parents and students, trades unions, church and state and the role of technology - this abridged account focuses solely on the teaching profession as the key actors in the system who interact with students.

**The Teaching Profession**

The key role of teachers was highlighted in the interviews which reflected on the forces of inertia at play, the sense of overwhelm at the onrush of initiatives and the need for more CPD to enable the greater professionalism of teachers.

**The Teacher at the Coal-face (i) – the forces of inertia:** “The status quo is supported by the teaching contract, the tradition of the individual teacher in ‘my classroom’ whose measure is the performance of my students in the final exam. Teachers like the status quo of JC/LC exams. This creates the idea of meritocracy of an objective state-sponsored exam. Removing the State exam places the teacher in the central role. Teachers like the old system – that’s what they know, what they loved and what brought them back to the classroom.

Teachers are self-selecting from a narrow band which is conservative. The colleges of education are likewise conservative. School culture captures teachers who may have been momentarily rendered innovative by their training. Teachers are conditioned by habit and the fear of change. Teachers are products of a middle-class white profession and feel valued for delivering A’s. Reform may need a change of teacher cohort. Thirty years ago teachers were largely left to their own devices. Now there’s much more they are expected to do – bureaucracy, accountability, working with other teachers. With the new JC/LC in Ireland teachers are key in developing or subverting the curriculum.

We have one of the lowest number of school days and include exam days in the school year. There is simply too little time to do all that needs to be done in a very cramped school year. 165 days is too short to carry one-year’s work load. The DES doesn’t want to fight it. The trades unions know that extending this would release pressure but are not willing to change terms and conditions of members even if the structure of the school year is a function of a former agrarian society.

In Ireland teachers’ pay may be fine when you have full hours but, in reality, many are on short hours which don’t support the cost of living, particularly in Dublin. Many of society’s issues are left at the door of the school, the informal curriculum - and we want A’s as well.

There is an inability to translate the individual teacher voice into a collectivevoice. There is a national inability to unlock the potential for change in the teaching profession. Society respects the individual teacher who teaches their son/daughter but are appalled at the Luddite behaviour they see at union conferences.

The 2nd level is very academic in approach and is staffed by those who did well in the traditional academic system and go on to replicate its values. Never being part of the IT world they have no experience or knowledge of level 6 options. They reinforce the academic bias in the system. And the academic model is cheaper than applied approaches.

Teachers enter the profession enthusiastic but find a big credibility gap between theory and practice leading to deeply-embedded cynicism among many.

There are three categories of teachers - ‘Innovators’, principals and teachers for whom the pace of change is too slow; the ‘opposers’ and the middle ground who wake up to long-promised change at the last moment but go along with it. DES lost the middle ground with the JC reform happening at a time of salary cuts, housing crisis, promotional and posts of responsibility cut-backs.

Schools are not set up for collaboration. Provided a subject teacher in her classroom gets the results no one asks how the teaching and learning is done. Teachers are good foot soldiers, following the rules, getting the A’s. Teachers emerging from college need some time to acquire the confidence to be risk-takers. It’s a constant fight to keep them from defaulting to the safety of the curriculum and the plan. A team context of leadership and openness to change is crucial

Teachers are afraid to mark their own pupils – partly a function of the small and familiar nature of Irish society and schools. What went wrong with the JC was the failure to cluster schools for the purpose of assessment given the discomfort teachers have with assessing their own students.”

**Teachers at the Coalface (ii) – in danger of overwhelm:** “Teachers feel rushed, crushed, crunched, isolated, distrusted and under-valued.Teachers’ spirits are crushed. Their souls need to be nourished afresh. We need a new narrative. After an in-service day on GDPR, SSE, Child Protection, CBA, JC framework our general feeling is of being over-whelmed. With so many initiatives there isn’t time to digest. The DES needs to take the foot off the accelerator. There is initiative overload. There were twenty-one initiatives between May and October over two calendar years. It wasn’t possible to keep up with reading, much less assimilating so many initiatives/circulars.

Much is happening with continuous assessment and sequential introduction of subjects into the new JC syllabus but there is a lack of manpower and it’s having a serious impact when combined with the new RSE, internet safety, wellbeing (PE/SPHE/CSPE), coding and Mandarin options. There is initiative fatigue – though this can be over-hyped; but some initiatives should be decommissioned when new ones are launched. Teachers are suffocated and overwhelmed by externally-mandated stuff – things they would do themselves if professionalised.”

**Need for CPD to support Teachers & School Leadership:** “DES underestimated the need for CPD (for new JC) - teachers don’t feel supported in the change. Under the new ‘Looking at our School’ framework there is a national drive to emphasise CPD. The National Teaching Council’s ‘Droichead’ programme of peer observation for teachers entering the system is now being complemented by ‘Cosán’ (three years old) for ongoing CPD. More generally ‘peer observation’ where teachers invite other teachers to drop into their classes to observe is a very empowering approach to CPD. Under the PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers) those aspiring to being principals will get opportunities to shadow other principals in other schools.

NTC’s ‘cosán’ programme is seeking to make the informal learning that goes on explicit – vs hitting teachers with more imposed material i.e. giving a language for explicitly speaking about teaching and learning. Their ‘Droichead’ programme helps bridge the transition from college to classroom. Conversation is crucial. The ‘Féile’ programme talks about and celebrates diversity of learning. We encourages in-service and CPD but there’s a lack of opportunities to implement new learnings. Pop-up workshops as done in-school to share innovative pedagogical practice is part of the solution.

With the eight cross-cutting skills in the JC when do teachers get to experience that which they are supposed to be facilitating in their students? They need experiential in-service training. They need to know what creativity is like. Teachers need to be empowered and to accept as normal that they are accountable and subject to review.

In Finland there is a focus on ‘professionalism’; teachers spend four hours in the classroom but the rest is devoted to working with colleagues on collaborative planning and upskilling. The UK’s administrative burden is more oriented towards control.

**School Leaderships** feel abandoned and overwhelmed, the two primal fears for which we are hardwired. No one represents them. Given the psychodynamics of abandonment and overwhelm the capacity for the system to reset is powerful.

The DES prepares teachers poorly for leadership in terms of CPD – limited and tied to the curriculum. An OECD 2007 report on school leadership found that promotion to principal was as a function of being a good teacher versus being equipped for the administrative responsibilities that principals face. In Singapore there is a structured career path all the way up to the top of the ministry of education.

There is a crisis of management because of the dearth of a structured approach to development for leadership. Induction programmes for new principals are not compulsory. Pathways of development need to be created. Without preparation, becoming principal is too stressful and many are dropping out after one or two years at both primary and second level. The CSL (Centre for School Leadership) is working with NAPD and IPPN to deal with this.”

**The way forward - teachers as true professionals**: “No system can outperform the quality of its teachers. Think of the contact time that teachers have with the kids – moulding the future. They have to be the designers of creativity and collaborative experiences. We assume they can do it but it takes a lot of learning and experience to be able. Are we giving them the opportunity to do group work etc? What stifles creativity is people’s unwillingness to say what they mean.

Change of the education system starts with the teacher – and de-programming student-teachers. There needs to be a better fit for new teachers meeting the reformed junior cycle curriculum - both teacher formation and system reform are important. If I had a magic wand I’d open the hearts and minds of teachers.

A central need is for teachers to acquire a strong sense of self-confidence in their own professionalism and standing in their own shoes with confidence when it comes to self-assessment. They need to find their voice in an age when soft skills become the essential hard skills. They need to be able to deviate from the class-room plans and creatively adapt thereby modelling creativity and the ability to admit not knowing to students.

Make space for creative incubation: teachers are overwhelmed with lack of time and space for incubation within the intensity of the school day; (ditto for students with always-on media). We need to create agency and trust in teachers to bring about change, getting them to work in pairs and using technology to create class-room pedagogy. The parochial nature of Irish life might make assessment uncomfortable but it would do wonder for the status of teachers if they were ready to be professionally engaged in assessing student presentations and new modes of assessment. The real question is, ‘What ought we to be doing in the classroom?’

My biggest message is the need for the re-professionalising of teachers. Teachers need to be internally subversive and re-professionalise. I would dearly like to see a team-based approach in schools – groups of professionals engaged in cross-curricular planning with more conversation and cooperation within and between subjects/disciplines. This is under-resourced – there is need for more CPD. Professional collaboration is the key to progress.

Teachers must model the collaborative style they are asking of their students. They need to be less terrified of others coming to view their innovations and who is in charge. Collaboration is the acupuncture point of most potential in the system. Getting out of professional learning silos may require to be forced initially until it becomes a new culture/habit.

You need to send a number of teachers on in-service who will become the key champions for creativity in school.”

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**