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Critical Media Literacy Education in Ireland

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Abstract

The Media is omnipresent. Many young people begin their day by dexterously texting, navigating their way through Facebook , listening to their iPod, watching television, tweeting, skypeing , blogging or a combination of such habitual rituals. Arguably, there is a general subsurface awe of the media as a *tour de force* in an information age. Less attention is given to how and why media messages are ingeniously manufactured and attractively packaged for mass consumption by society. Since the media has become embedded into our democratic processes, it makes sense that citizens must be supported through media literacy to realise the ways, means and importance of making educated decisions in their interpretation of the media and its messages.

In this context, it is bewildering that the concept of *Critical Media Literacy Education* as a fundamental human right has not yet materialised as a praxis within the education system in Ireland. Its rightful status, as a structured mainstream subject on the National Curriculum has yet to be recognised and established. Although young people display varying degrees of inherent competencies, skills and knowledge in the practical application of information technology, they are being denied structured opportunities to develop *critical thinking* towards *critical autonomy*. This paper highlights the principles and purpose of Critical Media Literacy Education and considers a number of paradigms and major pedagogic changes surrounding it. It highlights areas of best practice and offers tangible catalysts to bring about

the urgent changes to be addressed in the education system in contemporary Ireland, in an accelerating information age.

Keywords: Critical media literacy education, critical pedagogy, young people, Information Technology .

Introduction

The 1982 UNESCO *Declaration on Media Education* argues that the responsibility of preparing a young person for living in a world of powerful images rests mainly on the school and the family. Parents, teachers, media personnel and decision makers therefore, must realise their role in establishing ‘greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers’ and political and educational systems must address their obligations to promote ‘a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication in their citizens’ (Masterman, 1990: 340-341).

De-Mystifying Media Literacy Education

Critical Media Literacy Education continues to be a misunderstood and fragmented concept globally. Some of the confusion may be rooted within the general ambiguity and blurring of a cacophony of media-related terminologies. Potter (2004) argues that without a synthesised definition and theory, there is no rationale for researchers who wish to design treatments or for educators who wish to design teaching modules. Buckingham (2003) offers a simplistic delineation of two popular terms : *Media Education* is described as the process of both teaching and learning about media and *Media Literacy* is the product of that learning (Buckingham, 2003: 4). *Critical Media Literacy Education* is the chosen term used throughout this paper, to describe being educated about ‘media’ towards becoming media literate.

The Centre for Media Literacy in Canada (Roman: 2008), also supports the notion that media literacy is the expected outcome of media education and identifies five useful and distinct, interactive domains of Critical Media Literacy Education designed to help achieve this goal.

These components are:

1. **Media Arts Education:** A creative and aesthetic approach to the process of developing media literacy skills, such as scriptwriting and production, using digital cameras, lighting and sound.
2. **Media Education:** A process of formally educating teachers, parents and citizens about media literacy, using media content and technology.
3. **Media Criticism:** A process of critically analysing media messages from historical, political, economic or socio-cultural perspectives and theorizing their effects on individuals and on society.
4. **Media Activism:** A process of developing strategies for social and political action, to bring about change in areas of the mass media system, considered detrimental to individuals and to society.
5. **Media Advocacy:** A process of developing good public relations and communication with the media itself in order to effect particular social, political or policy changes.
(Roman, 2008: 2)

The *National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy* suggests that a media literate person is able ‘to decode, evaluate, analyse and produce, both print and electronic media’ (Aufderheide, 1997:79). Adams and Hamm (2001) believe that it is vital that people understand all technologies that provide information. Considine (1995) and Hobbs (2002, 2007) agree that *Media Literacy* is an individual’s ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate and believe that being media literate is not only about consuming information, but about being able to produce, create and communicate information in all mediums.

Purpose and Benefits of becoming Media Literate

Buckingham (2003) highlights the need for young people to become literate not only as consumers of media, but as potential media producers.

(Media Education) ...aims to develop both critical understanding and active participation . It enables young people to interpret and make informed judgements as consumers of media but also enables them to become producers of media in their own right. Media Education is about developing young people’s critical and creative abilities. (Buckingham, 2003: 4)

O'Neill (2010) argues for a rights-based framework of Critical Media Literacy Education to be put in place in Ireland and stresses the urgency of media literacy as a fundamental human right, that is as important as other forms of literacy. He points out that vulnerable citizens such as children and young people, constantly negotiate online risks, as they navigate their way through modern information technology, without the necessary forms of support from trusted information sources. This notion is reinforced in the study *Critical Media Literacy in Ireland* (Barnes et al: 2007) which argues that media literacy is a requirement for full social participation and active citizenship.

Paradigms and Pedagogies of Media Literacy.

Potter (2004) explores Masterman's (1990) suggestion that three distinct paradigms of media literacy have emerged over the years and suggests that these do not satisfy the needs of a modern society. The first of these is a 'protectionist' paradigm which regards the mass media as a dangerous phenomenon against which young people should be 'inoculated' because of its threat to high level-culture. A second more balanced 'popular arts paradigm' emerged in the 1960's, stressing that there are good and bad aspects in any medium of the mass media and that society should be educated to recognize both. A third paradigm, which manifested itself in the 1970's, focussed on semiotics and a belief that society must consciously seek meaning behind signs and symbols, to avoid a 'false consciousness' presented to them through the mass media (Masterman, 2004:56-57).

Potter (2004) believes that it is time to introduce a fourth paradigm. He suggests that it is essential for individuals to realise that media messages are interpreted in an individual way and this can be better achieved through individualistic and informed interpretations. He stresses that it is not plausible to reject all media ideology, any more than it is to accept it, but that media-literate individuals are armed with skills and competencies that enable them to recognize choices and select the ones best tailored to satisfying their personal goals. He believes that non-literate people have no option but to allow the media to choose for them, as their limited choices actually stem from the media itself.

Background of Critical Media Literacy Education in Ireland

The 1992 Green Paper *Education for a Changing World*, is a government publication which highlighted problems and promoted change and critical thinking, in the field of media

information and related technologies. This paper brought about a wide range of useful discourse and debate on the existing structure of the Irish education system, which led to such important events as the *National Education Convention* in 1993, a Government White Paper *Charting our Education Future* (1995), and *The Education Act* of 1998 which brought about reforms of the junior and senior cycle curricula which aspired to cater more fully for ‘effective participation in a rapidly changing society’ (O’Neill 2000: 58).

The Irish Government’s strategy for change in education in an information age is highlighted in two Department of Education and Science documents: *Schools IT2000, A Policy Framework for the New Millennium* (1998) which was instrumental in the founding of The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) in 1998 and *A Blueprint for the Future of ICT in Irish Education* (2001) which stressed the need for a reappraisal of the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in school systems.

These policies were successful in addressing mainly skills-based media education prerequisites, but unwittingly overlooked the importance of a media education paradigm, from a civic or democratic perspective.

However, the *Critical Media Literacy in Ireland* report (2007) indicates that the current state of media education in Ireland remains unsatisfactory and offers a series of solutions towards rectifying this dilemma. The report suggests that a revised and coherent rationale for media literacy in Irish education be put in place, the lack of ownership of the subject be addressed, a curriculum development strategy be implemented and links with media industries be promoted (Barnes et al : 2007).

Media Literacy and Policy at International Level

According to UNESCO, the status of media literacy has heightened at international level , and is ‘beginning to claim a significant place in secondary schooling’ (Domaille and Buckingham, 2001:36). The European Commission advocates media literacy as a fundamental and basic right to full citizenship and democratic participation and defines it as the ability to access all media and fully exploit their potential, actively, critically and creatively. This outline offers a new and welcome incentive to evolve a more balanced ‘skills-based’ and ‘critical analysis’ approach to Critical Media Literacy Education.

<http://ec.europa.eu/media>

Section 47 of *The Official Journal of the European Union : Directives* (2010-2013) suggests that media literacy incorporates skills, knowledge and understanding that enables consumers to utilize media effectively so therefore ‘the development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and its progress followed closely’.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:095:0001:0024:EN:PDF>

Areas of Good Practice at National and International Levels

Masterman(1990) notes that a great deal of media literacy work is generally left to the goodwill of enthusiast teachers. One such group, the now defunct *Teachers Association of Media Literacy* (TAME), was formed following the *Media Education Conference* held in Dublin in 1985. TAME organised workshops, seminars and conferences to raise the profile of media education, publishing a textbook in 2000. Its goals were to ‘support and encourage teachers of media education in both primary and post-primary schools ‘and to lobby for curriculum provision, in-service training and the development of media education resources for educators (O’Neill, 2000: 59).

The UK Government has made remarkable strides in addressing policy and provision for the inclusion of media studies as a ‘stand-alone’ subject in many schools. A number of media-art schools, that incorporate media across the curriculum, have been granted specialist status by the Government (O’Neill, 2000: 43). It is worth noting that in Scotland, teachers have an option of taking an *Additional Teaching Qualification* (ATQ), in *Media Studies* (Murphy 2001: 3).

According to Hobbs (1998) :

The most successful efforts to include media literacy in schools have taken two or more years of staff development to build a clearly defined understanding of the concept as it relates to classroom practice among a substantial number of teachers and school leaders, within a school district. (Hobbs, 1998: 23-24)

Media education is already compulsory in a number of Scandinavian countries. Sweden, which structured it into the curriculum in 1980, is also to be lauded for establishing an innovative *Youth Council* which is designed to stimulate participation, discourse and political

discussion from young peoples' perspectives. This model could be modified, not only for use in educational settings but also in outreach programmes in collaboration with schools, libraries, universities and community groups throughout Ireland.

Finland's *Action Plan* (2000-2004), aims to promote the role of learning inside and outside of the classroom. The focus of the strategy is on education, training and research in an information age, with an emphasis on teaching with, rather than about technology. Barnes et al., (2007 :17) attribute the Scandinavian countries distinctive contribution to their pedagogical and curricular history to the ethos of *Bildung*, which goes beyond the concept of literacy and strives to foster inner collective values such as 'reflection, criticism, identity, competence and a sense of community. Australia's practice differs from Ireland and the UK in that it has traditionally taught creative arts at all levels of education, with media literacy as an integral part of that curriculum. There is a balance between processes such as critical analysis of media texts and the practical application of media skills. It is interesting to note that only those teachers who earn a specific qualification in media teaching are eligible to teach media literacy in Australia (Domaille and Buckingham 2001: 36).

Transition Year as a catalyst for Critical Media Literacy Education

Opportunities for progress in Critical Media Literacy Education remain substantial within Secondary Education in Ireland, particularly through the flexibility of the *Transition Year Programme* (TYP), a programme run between Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Cycles, which allows schools to create their own curricula. The TYP itself however, is optional so may not be operational in every school. These programmes have the potential to be formulated as stand-alone, malleable models implemented at Transition Year level and piloted for use throughout the school. *Transition Units* are considered conducive for the role, as they feature 'activity-based learning, group and project work, student research, ICT and work experience'. Key skills highlighted by these units are information processing, creativity and critical thinking. The author therefore, chose to conduct research with groups of Transition Year Students to ascertain the feasibility and validity of Critical Media Literacy Education within the education system in Ireland.

Rationale for the Research

The purpose of the research was to study groups of young people that represent a population attending secondary schools in Ireland, to discover if their inherent competencies, skills and knowledge might be advanced through structured programmes of Critical Media Literacy Education, designed for inclusion the national curriculum. This research also aims to stimulate action by policy makers, decision makers, teachers, parents, stakeholders and young people themselves, to take responsibility for the promotion of Critical Media Literacy Education as a structured subject on the curriculum in schools in Ireland.

Competencies, Skills and Knowledge

Competencies

According to Potter (2004) competencies are developed throughout childhood. They are simple to learn and applied automatically. Media Literacy includes three kinds of competencies: They are the recognition of referents, the recognition of patterns, and the matching of meaning to referents.(Potter, 2004 :118)

Foundational competencies such as basic ‘listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing’ are significantly influenced by the child’s cognitive, emotional and moral rate of maturation. Such competencies are regarded as the first steps essential to media literacy. By early adolescence, the young person will ideally have reached a stage of *functional literacy* that supports exposure to all kinds of media, for information and entertainment purposes. However, a young person’s false sense of media literacy proficiency at this level, may promote a mindless acceptance of surface meaning in messages. If this level is not consciously surpassed, the young person may remain stagnant at foundational competency level throughout life.

Skills

The application of skills demands more commitment and requires more ‘active thinking’ than the application of competencies. Skill development determines a person’s passage from low to high media literacy. People who have weak skills will organize information poorly, making them vulnerable to those in the media who wish to take control as ‘the constructors of people’s knowledge structures’ (Potter, 2004: 55).

Potter (2004: 124) lists *The Seven Skills of Media Literacy* (abridged). These skills generally integrate with one another in some form:

Skill	Task
Analysis	Breaking down a message into meaningful elements.
Evaluation	Judging the value of an element by comparing it to some criterion.
Grouping	Determining which elements are alike / different in some ways
Induction	Inferring a pattern across a small set of elements then generalising the pattern to all elements in the set
Deduction	Using general principles to explain particulars
Synthesis	Assembling elements into a new structure
Abstraction	Creating a brief , clear and accurate condensed description that captures the essence of the message

Knowledge

Potter (2004 :52, 63) differentiates between the terms *information* and *knowledge* which are often regarded as synonymous. Whereas information is piecemeal and transitory ‘knowledge is structured, organised and of more enduring significance’. For example, a young person’s ability to pull the information out of a message and turn it into knowledge, is to reconstruct the information to form a bank of knowledge structures. This, however, is not a natural state

and therefore must be developed. The purpose of developing this state is to give the young person greater control of exposures and the construction of meaning from the information encountered in those exposures: A characteristic of higher media literacy is the ability and habit of transforming information into knowledge structures. (Potter, 2004: 52)

Methodology

Action research is regarded by Gore and Zeichner (1991) as a way to promote the professional development of practitioners in the improvement of their skills, reflection and inquiry. Denscombe (2010:12) believes action research is used to procure recommendations for good practice and to address a problem or enhance the performance of the organisation and individuals, by introducing change to its rules and procedures

Action research always involves a team that includes researchers and subjects as co-participants in the enquiry and change experience. (Baskerville, 1999: 5)

From a contextual perspective, there are a number of different styles and characteristics of action research that may be adopted. *Education Action Research*, a model based on the philosophies of educationalist John Dewey, constitutes the underlying framework of this study (Hansen: 2006). The main focus of *Education Action Research* is to advance social learning, improve the curriculum and to expand professionalism (Feldman and Atkin :1995). This genre of action research was selected as a methodology, to address the research objectives . A mixed method approach using questionnaires, unstructured observation and feedback were used with separate groups of Transition Year Students.

Methods

The main body of the research was conducted with a focus group of Transition Year students, who volunteered to take part in a pilot Critical Media Literacy Education course which was presented as stand-alone modules once a week for a period of seven weeks. The course was specifically designed by the author to help test the hypotheses that young people possess inherent qualities that could evolve through structured Critical Media Literacy Education in secondary education in Ireland.

The author was conscious that the focus group may have displayed an expressed interest in media-related studies by volunteering for the project. To avoid bias and to correlate

information, a random sample of students with no demonstrated interest in media-related studies was also measured. These two groups filled out their questionnaires in separate settings to avoid manipulation. The method employed in the study is underpinned by a holistic action research paradigm, that utilises multiple sources of evidence which aim to reinforce the same fact (Patton : 2002). Note-taking (Richie and Lewis:2003) and digital recordings were subsequently used as method to document participant observation with the focus group.

Data Collection and Analysis

Bell (2010: 6) argues that in all research, the methods used for gathering information depend on the nature of the information required. Purposive sampling, a technique used by the author, to choose samples that are relevant to the research subject was employed (Sarantakos, 1998: 152). The author conducted further research with a separate random sample to avoid bias (Walker: 2010). The data from the questionnaires was analysed using quantitative and qualitative measures to effect triangulation.

Potter's (2004:124) *Seven Skills of Media Literacy* were used to chart and analyse data collected through participant observation during the action research.

The students were observed on an individual basis and regarded as a 'whole-person' as characterized by Fritz Perl's *Gestalt Therapy* (Woldt: 2005). There were also different degrees and styles of participation noted among individuals of the focus group throughout the research process. Empowering secondary skills such as, leadership skills, organisational skills delegation, collaboration and presentation skills began to emerged among participants as participation evolved. Through observation and recordings of oral and written work it was noted that the participants, at varying levels, showed signs of a more acute awareness and application of critical thinking skills than recorded at the start of the course.

Although the focus group had chosen to take part in the Critical Media Literacy Education course, findings indicated that there was a large number of correlating characteristics with the random group. For example, empirical evidence showed that both groups started out with similar access to information technology with indications of matching strengths such as competencies, skills and knowledge that could be progressed through Critical Media Literacy Education.

Theoretical Perspective

Paulo Freire's (1970) paradigm of critical pedagogy is the theory underpinning this research study. Freire (1972: 30) believes that, to discover valid solutions, everyone needs to be both 'a learner and a teacher'. This notion became a praxis during the research through the interchangeable roles of teacher and learner, particularly in the context of young people as *Digital Natives* with inherent abilities and skills in the adept use of technology. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) describe those born into the digital age in the 1980's as *Digital Natives* with natural abilities to use digital technology as second nature, compared with *Digital Immigrants* who liaise with it, usually with less ease, at a later stage of life.

Digital Natives can learn how to use a new software program in a snap. They seemingly can take, upload, and edit pictures to share with friends online in their sleep.... Digital Natives can rework media, using off-the-shelf computer programs, in ways that would have seemed impossible a few short decades ago.

They are joined by a set of common practices ...and their pattern of using the technologies to access and use information and create new knowledge and art forms.

(Palfrey and Gasser, 2008: 6, 7)

Whether or not one disputes with the terminology or 'labelling' used by Palfrey and Gasser (2008) the concept of teacher as learner is an un-oppressive one that carries the opportunity for individuals to appreciate the intrinsic value of each other.

Giddens (2008) reinforces Freire's (1970) philosophy of education for empowerment in the light that new technologies and internet-based learning are transforming our understanding of schooling and education. However he argues that, as information and technology become integrated into the educational process, those who do not have access to technology may suffer from 'information poverty'.

Freire (1970) also argues for the creation of a positive, relevant, learning experience and warns of the destructive nature of traditional, oppressive, hierarchal learning perspectives and teacher-student dichotomies. He believes education should be designed to liberate oppressed people. He promotes literacy, in the traditional sense, as a key to fostering critical awareness, a theory which parallels with the role of media literacy in today's society. As a proponent of

problem posing education as a liberating praxis, that promotes critical awareness, Freire (1970) argues that many forms of education use a *banking approach* where the values and culture of the dominant class are imposed, to domesticate those considered to be the subordinate class. Freire (1998) suggests that an intimate connection should be established between knowledge, considered basic to any school and knowledge that is the essence of the lives of the students. Thus, non-hierarchical settings were consciously developed throughout the research, to create ethos conducive to the young people's exploration of topics of interest and relevance to them. These settings were regularly revised and restructured through the use of reflective practice (Schon: 1991).

McLaren (2006: 187) believes the critical theorists are united in their objectives to transform social injustices and to empower the powerless, but warns of ambiguity arising from the term 'critical thinking' and its blurring with 'thinking skills' with little emphasis placed how these skills may be exercised. He challenges interpretations of critical pedagogy that incur tokenistic responses and stresses the need for accountability from practitioners, to appropriate critical theory into their own work. He suggests that spaces of freedom should be created in classrooms where students become agents of transformation and hope.

Relevant aspects of such theories were incorporated and implemented throughout the research. Concepts were interpreted and employed in a number of innovative ways to explore the potential for students to enjoy experiential learning inside and outside of the classroom. A praxis for McLaren's (2006) notion of the creation of *spaces of freedom to foster transformation and hope*, was manifested as a song-writing exercise in the local park, a visit to the classroom by an animal rescue unit and a greyhound dog, a collaborative production of a journalistic article for a local newspaper which was subsequently published, a coach-trip to a film festival to participate in a number of master-classes and digital film-making opportunities. These learning environs constituted an egalitarian ethos that served to foster participation and critical discourse on topics relevant to media and digital literacy.

Summary of Research

Participation observation (Bell: 2010) conducted with the focus group indicated that most of the students were initially unclear of the concept, value or relevance of Critical Media Literacy Education within the school context. However an appreciation of the practical, technological and creative aspects of *Media Arts Education* was evident in the group from the

outset which was regarded as a commodity that could offer professional opportunities or effect celebrity status. Potter (2004: 48) suggests that ‘when people do not have enough information or skills to construct ‘meaning’ well, they will arrive at interpretations that are faulty in some way’.

From the perspective of course design, it was noted that it is imperative to cover a wide range of social, cultural, political and economic topics that capture the imagination of the young people and offer tangible opportunities for critical discourse and engagement. Masterson (1990) believes that a good deal of the content of a media studies course should not be predictable but opportunistic and teachers should not plan too far ahead. He supports the notion of the flexibility of topics and ideas with his premise that a young person’s critical autonomy should be nurtured in a way that does not involve the dutiful reproduction of the teacher’s ideas. As the course developed the young people showed clear indications of varying degrees of critical engagement, appreciation and evaluation of topics highlighted throughout the modules. More robust critical discourse and a sense of connection were visible as the course developed. A willingness to contribute and collaborate with peers and in community of practice arenas were evident. For example, as the course progressed the young people became more inclined to share information and skills and to demonstrate their abilities to make their own informed choices and interpretations. Through face to face direct feedback from a key member of staff, the researcher learned that one young person, who generally does not complete tasks and who has poor school attendance, was totally connected to this course, mainly due to its structure and non-hierarchical values. Before this revelation and during prior observation, this young person was listed by the researcher as a key player, whose qualities and skills developed throughout the research and whose contribution to the course was exceptional.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Concepts of media literacy have manifested themselves in various forms and guises in recent times. Commendable efforts have been made by teachers and other stakeholders to synthesise a meaning and promote Critical Media Literacy Education in Ireland. Many of the policies now in place, have emphasised a protectionist paradigm or have not progressed sufficiently to parallel the rapid development of the digital information age. Nor has there been any tangible

effort to address the urgency of media literacy as a fundamental right of every citizen, inside and outside a formal education system.

Transition Year Programmes constitute a useful vantage point for creating and promoting Media Literacy Education in Secondary Schools and producing models that have potential for use throughout the entire curriculum and in Youth and Community Education settings. However, teachers under pressure to complete a syllabus for end of year exams, have little time or inclination to take on additional tasks. Potter (2004) points out that teaching media literacy involves having a substantial amount of commitment that includes the additional training of teachers. It would be utopian of the author, to believe that the design treatment incorporated into this research encapsulates all the ingredients necessary for a comprehensive Critical Media Literacy Education programme. Education Action Research employed as a methodology, highlighted tensions such as the time constraints, financial constraints, personal effort, commitment and training required to produce an authentic but lucid programme that befits Critical Media Literacy Education.

A Critical Media Literacy Education rationale that suits the needs of a contemporary Irish society must be introduced. This can be achieved by reopening the debate on the need for reform within the education system by transforming the isolationist nature of Critical Media Literacy Education to one of collaboration and solidarity.

The difficulties in pinning down high level stakeholders, who might show responsibility in promoting the democratic right of citizens in Ireland to media literacy, is frustrating. There is currently a distinct lack of ownership governing Critical Media Literacy Education and the distraction of the current economic climate provides decision-makers with greater excuses to avoid taking action towards solving this pressing national issue.

At international level, Ireland rests low on the scale compared to a number of other European countries who have tackled issues decisively and placed a value on media literacy, if only from socio-economic and cultural perspectives.

Politicians, teachers, community organisations, media organisations, youth groups and other stakeholders must collaborate unequivocally, to ensure that media literacy is considered an

urgent priority in contemporary society in Ireland. State and cultural agencies, that have been proponents in the fight for media education in the past, must become revitalized and share their expertise and knowledge with those allies who are aware of the impact of media in an information age and realise the urgent need to educate young people to deal with developing trends in the future.

It is clearly evident that there is no time to waste in the implementation of Critical Media Literacy Education in our schools and that although many young people may be proficient in their use of technology, they may also be vulnerable to a media that is finely tuned in the management of its audience.

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An Exploration of Long-term Volunteer Retention in a National Youth Work Organisation

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Abstract

This study explores the long-term retention of volunteers in a National Youth Work Organisation. The researcher wanted to understand the reasons people continue to volunteer over long periods of time and if motivation to volunteer plays a role in continued volunteering. From this the researcher wanted to ascertain what organisations can do to encourage sustained volunteering. The literature review briefly examines the nature of volunteering and factors that can affect volunteer retention. Employing a qualitative approach data was collected from volunteers, who had been involved in a particular Youth Work Organisation (YWO) over a long period of time. Volunteers were interviewed in relation to their thoughts, feelings and perceptions about volunteering and volunteer retention. This information was then analysed and a number of significant findings emerged. The findings of the study show that training, support and praise and recognition are key factors in volunteer retention. From the literature review and findings; recommendations are made in relation to supporting future volunteer retention; for example the provision of supervision for volunteers.

Keywords: Volunteering, Volunteerism, Retention