IT Tralee Masters by Research Programme Details

Title of Project: An Investigation of the Relationship between Student Engagement in Community Based Learning (Service Learning) curricular modules and student wellbeing.

Name of Principle Supervisor: Edel Randles

Department/School: School of Health & Social Sciences (Dept. of Health & Leisure Studies)

E-Mail: edel.randles@staff.ittralee.ie

Phone: +353 66 7144198

Brief Biography of Principle Supervisor:
Edel Randles is a lecturer in the School of Health & Social Sciences, (Dept. of Health & Leisure Studies) in Sports Development, Community Service Initiative (CSI) and Community Leadership Initiative (CLI).
She is Civic Engagement Strand Leader in the ITT's UNESCO Chair in Inclusive PE, Physical Activity & Sport. A member of Campus Engage CBR/CBL working group, she has presented widely on Community Based Learning and its student & community/societal impacts, at the International Association of Research in Service Learning and Community Engagement European Conference, (IARSLCE), The International Symposium on Service Learning (ISSL), and the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (Alabama). Her research interests include: inclusive golf, autism & physical activity, sport as a tool for social inclusion and human flourishing through civic engagement.

Contact: edel.randles@staff.ittralee.ie

Recent Research Publications:
Randles, E. (ITT) and Burns, K., (UCC) 2016. Community-based Learning and Research Agreements: an introductory guide for Higher Education staff. Available at: www.campusengage.ie

Randles, E., Quillinan, B. (2014). Community Civic Engagement as an Enabler of Student Flourishing. *Institute of Technology Blanchardson Journal (Civic Engagement Special Issue, no.26).*
Available at: **http://www.itb.ie/ResearchatITB/itbjournal.html**

Moynihan, U., Ringland, A., **Randles, E.,** Barrett, U., Carty, C., (2014). The Power of Physical Education: Towards Enhanced Citizenship and Self-Empowerment **"Physical Education - Quality of Management and Teaching" FIEP/EUPEA Publication (Summer, 2014)**

Randles E., & Harmon, L. (USI) Student Guide to Community Engagement www.campusengage.ie
(2014)

Randles, E. (2014) Case Study Community Service Initiative Module at ITT in **The Student Engagement Handbook: Practice in Higher Education,** Emerald Publishing Group

Research Project Abstract

One of the main purposes of education, according to the Council of Europe, is the preparation of students for life, as active citizens of democratic societies. H.E. plays an important role in building and maintaining democratic culture and institutions ('Report of the Working Group on Student Engagement

in Irish H.E.', 2016). Community based learning (CBL) and Service learning (SL) have grown as pedagogical tools for the inculcation of student **mores** of civic and social responsibility, across the International HE landscape. A catalyst to this was the publication 'Bowling Alone', (Putnam, 2000) which highlighted the demise of American society, and also proffered solutions to same. Putnam challenged the academic world to employ a pedagogy which would involve students engaging with their civic and social world, whereby they could emerge as civically minded graduates.

The world now 'flat', has resulted in a global levelling of opportunities given the way people 'plug, play, compete, connect & collaborate 24/7'; the electronic umbilical computer and cell phone 'connections' paradoxically are producing psychological and emotional 'disconnect'. in response it is imperative that HE provides a 'well rounded' education for this flat world, where we need to educate students to belong, to be active citizens, to have a resilient sense of self, & emotional competence with others and the world.

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (2011) advocates '*significant merit in expanding ….service learning opportunities, where students should spend time in work or service situations.. it should be formally acknowledged by their Institution" (*p.59). Two service learning modules have been delivered in the ITT since 2012, Community Service Initiative and Community Leadership Initiative. Longitudinal data has been captured, to measure the impact of student experiences. This proposal seeks to analyse this data, while also investigating further, utilising phenomenological investigative techniques, to identify specific wellbeing outcomes, applying PERMA model of Human Flourishing as espoused by Seligman (2011).

# Research Context (Technical Merit & Impact)

Students with complete mental health flourish in life, with high levels of well-being. To flourish, is to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically and socially. Students with incomplete mental health may be languishing in life with low well-being. Languishing may be conceived of as emptiness and stagnation, constituting a life of quiet despair, academic disengagement, with maladaptive responses, such as social withdrawal and substance misuse.

When one doesn't have the resources to meet the challenges life projects, one's wellbeing is compromised. According to the 'My World Survey' of Irish adolescents 'mental health difficulties peaked in the late teens and early 20s'. This peak in general, was coupled with a decrease in protective factors such as self-esteem, optimism and positive coping strategies. One of the most significant stressors in adolescent life was found to be: **COLLEGE**, (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). A high percentage (41%) of this study sample (8,221) were categorised into the problem drinking range, 43% reported they thought their life was not worth living at some point. These are all strong indicators suggesting our colleges are not flourishing environments. This research seeks to highlight the opportunities that Service Learning (SL) programmes offer, which will serve to negate some of the above aspects, and enable students to flourish in college

Service learning is a collaborative teaching and learning strategy designed to promote academic development, personal growth and civic learning. It incorporates levels of social connectedness, coherence, shared philosophies, comradeship, social responsibility, compassion, courage and transcendence, while emphasising meaningful engagement, which is active, project based, & requiring ethical and critical reflection.
(http://www.ittralee.ie/en/InformationAbout/Community/CommunityEngagement/ServiceLearning/)

Human flourishing is described as optimum positive well-being, physically, mentally and socially, in the absence of ill being. Seligman (2011) described his multidimensional theoretical construct of flourishing as comprising of **five key elements:**

P E R M A

positive emotion relationships accomplishments
engagement meaning
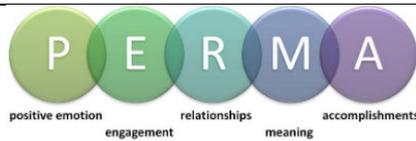
Service-learning is a widespread curricular tool used in educational settings throughout the US (Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, 2013). There exists a large body of research evidence, in the US which indicates that student civic engagement leads to an increase in academic success, career direction and self- esteem, it provides a positive connection with others and serves as an important factor in social identity development (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee 2000; Galura, Pasque, Schoem & Howard 2004). Furthermore, attributes that are positively influenced by participation in SL initiatives include academic performance, critical thinking and leadership skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). Many researchers recognise SL as a unique opportunity to foster civic responsibility and personal growth (Colby et al, 2008; Washburn et al, 2004), where students construct their understanding of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society, as these skills and other personal benefits accrue. It serves to help develop skills, transform perspectives, and create critical self-awareness.

SL scholarship (US) has gained traction, particularly for its positive role in student experience and student retention, however the link to student retention in Ireland, is at an embryonic stage, but will reap HEI further attention as evidenced in the 'Report of the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish H.E.', 2016).

This research serves to highlight in Irish HEIs, the significant impact community based learning (SL) can have on third level student experience. Putnam (Bowling Alone, 2000) threw down the gauntlet at the doors of US academic institutions to respond to the death of US civic society, by embracing curricular models to re-ignite active citizenship, inquiry and social responsibility, amongst the student body. Supporting leadership entities such as Campus Compact, the Talloires Network and Serve America evolved to guide HEIs through best practice. Philanthropic bodies such as the Carnegie Foundation provided an impetus also to CBL growth and development, through the initiation of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification System for HEIs.

Over the last 8 years, across Europe and in Ireland, CBL/SL modules have gained traction. The ITT has been to the forefront in embedding SL across its courses, in particular within the Health & Leisure Dept. with elective modules Community Service Initiative and Community Leadership Initiative.

While there is much research evidence in support of the benefits of CBL/SL, in the US, there is a gap in knowledge and understanding of how it is viewed by students in an Irish context, given cultural and civil society differences that exits. There also is no research evidence (National or International) that focuses on its relationship to student wellbeing in its totality, utilising the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) as a theoretical construct for data analysis.
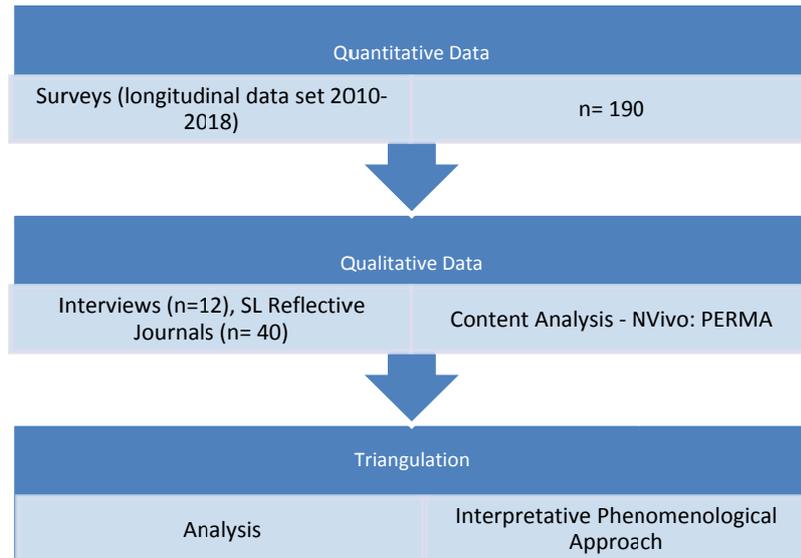
This research will enable an evaluation to be undertaken of the impact of these modules on student active citizen attributes, while also examining wellbeing aspects as evidenced through PERMA model. The research outcomes will enable HEI programme developers and decision makers to evidence the student benefits to being civically engaged through their tertiary education.

Research Methodology

Research design:
This study adopts a mixed method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques as depicted below.

Methodology:

Quantitative Data	
Surveys (longitudinal data set 2010-2018)	n= 190

Qualitative Data	
Interviews (n=12), SL Reflective Journals (n= 40)	Content Analysis - NVivo: PERMA

Triangulation	
Analysis	Interpretative Phenomenological Approach

Data collection methods:
1. Survey data to assess 'civic responsibility' (Furco et al. 1998); 'sense of belonging' (Anderson-Butcher & Conroy, 2002).
2. Phenomenological Approach - Student Reflective Learner Journals & Interviews
3. Qualitative findings will be assessed thematically applying Seligman's (2011) PERMA model.

Sampling:
The student sample population will be students who have undertaken the electives Community Service Initiative (CSI) and Community Leadership Initiative (CLI), from 2012 - 2018. Both modules involve students engaging with civic society organisations for a duration of one semester. The data set involves a pre and post questionnaire which was utilised to garner aspects of 'civic responsibility' and 'sense of belonging' prior to and after taking the module. Reflective Journals (2018 cohort; n=40) will be analysed and 12 students interviewed. The lived experience or meaning of the programme from a phenomenological perspective will be explored, utilising Seligman's PERMA. Triangulation will be employed at analysis stage.

PERMA Model
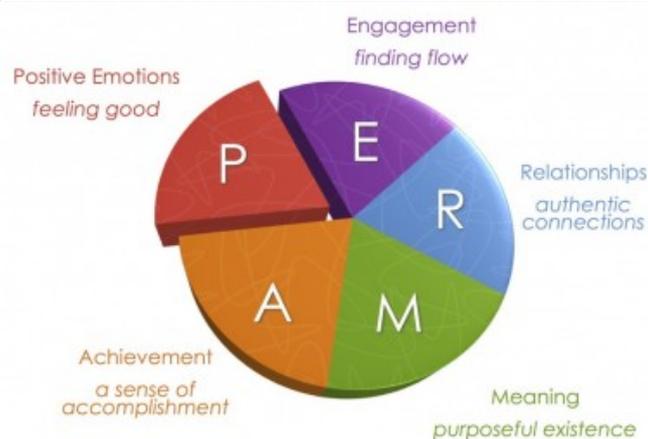
Positive emotions deal with the hedonic feeling of happiness that reaffirms an individual's personal and optimistic mental state (Asebedo and Seay, 2015; Butler & Kern, 2016). It is essentially all the good things that an individual experiences, and Cohn et al. (2009) argue that every individual in the world strives to achieve positive emotions through their actions.

Engagement denotes to the notion of while participating in a particular activity, the individual loses his self-consciousness while getting very attached or involved in the task at hand, in the literature referred to as **flow**, (Csikszentmihalyi, sited Cohn, et al., 2009).

Relationships – as indicated by Bowlby's (1982) study, is a factor of happiness that was most evident - enabling the expression of 'acts of support, kindness, caring, as well as cooperation and social interaction, which contribute to more robust states of physical health, self-esteem, mental health, as well as more meaning and greater social integration' (p.909).

Meaning personifies the application of the talents and potential of an individual to the fullest of their abilities, towards a cause/task that it is eventually greater than their personal self (Seligman, 2011).

Accomplishment, the final component can be achieved through the pursuance of success, mastery, winning, or realization of goals in life for the individual's personal sake.

Data analysis:
Colaizzi's framework (1978) will be used to analyse the phenomenological data. Themes from the interviews and journals will be analysed using NVivo. SPSS will be used to analyse the quantitative data. Multiple data sets will emerge from this research and will be triangulated to extract meaning. Data analysis will be prepared for the MSc. thesis purpose, for peer reviewed journal paper and in appropriate formats for social media circulation – news bites, poster, infographics etc.

PROJECT SCHEDULE – GANTT CHART

An Investigation of the Relationship between Student Engagement in CBL (Service Learning) Curricular Modules and Student Wellbeing

		Months	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Task 1:	**Research Study Orientation**																			
1.1	Literature search		░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░
1.2	Research Skills training, ITT PG Programme		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█		
1.3	Student/Supervisor Meetings		░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░	░
1.4	Review & agree project work plan		█	█																
1.5	Research ethics & integrity planning					█	█	█	█	█										
Task 2:	**Investigative Procedures**																			
2.1	Co-ordination of data set							█	█	█	█	█								
2.2	Pilot testing								█	█										
2.3	Data collection									█	█									
2.4	Quantitative Data Analysis (SPSS)											█	█	█	█					
2.5	Qualitative Data Analysis (NVivo)											█	█	█	█					
2.6	Research data interpretation													█	█	█				
Task 3:	**Communication & Dissemination**																			
3.1	ITT Research Colloquia Presentations					█					█						█			
3.2	Attendance at IARSLCE Conference		█																	
3.3	Production of infographic of findings																			
3.4	Research academic publication																			█
3.5	Article for UNESCO & Campus Engage Newsletters/Social Media										█								█	█
Task 4:	**Thesis Write up**																			
4.1	Thesis draft submission(chapters 1, 2, 3)													█	█					
4.2	Thesis draft submission(chapters 4, 5)																	█	█	
4.3	Revised Drafts																	█		
4.4	Thesis Submission																			█