

# Atypical Students need Atypical Education or Vice Versa?

## Recovery College

Facilitating Transformative Change in Recovery from Mental  
Health

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# Abstract

Both the addiction and mental health systems of care have much in common, not least of which is that historically, they both share a dark past which involved those living with either/or both disorders expected to

"end up in the least favourable places in society, the gutter, prisons, asylums or morgues (Gagne *et al*, 2017)

On the contrary, it is currently being recognised that people can and do recover. Indeed, it is also being recognised that people in recovery from mental illness and/or addiction disorders - and who might be referred to as atypical learners- are leading the call to change the current service systems of care to those that are recovery-oriented. In the field of mental health and more recently in the addiction field ( White, 2009), this change is being driven by the demands of service user/survivor activists (McDaid, 2013). The Recovery College is an initiative designed to re-orientate services away from a traditional therapeutic approach towards an education-focused mode of service provision. The courses in these colleges are co-produced and co-delivered by those who have personal and/or professional experience of addiction /mental health issues. In this presentation, it will be argued that the form of learning that is required for recovery and that informs the curriculum in Recovery Colleges, is the same form of learning that has as its aim, both personal and social justice.

# Vision of Recovery

- Addiction and Mental health services are undergoing recovery-oriented systems transformation efforts at national, state and local levels (Lamb *et al*, 2017)
- Shift from historical focus on brief bio-psycho-social stabilisation or sustained amelioration of personal pathology and its related social costs
- Towards support for long term recovery and enhanced quality of personal/family life in recovery (White, 2007)

# Lack of Integrated Care

- It has been recognised for some time that the **lack of integrated and co-located care** for co-occurring substance use and psychiatric disorders has been linked to poor recovery outcomes and cost ineffectiveness (Hoff and Rosenbeck, 1999)
- It is now being recognised that those who are living with co-occurring psychiatric and addiction disorders **will benefit greatly** by being able to avail of service systems (MH, A) that work together with people in recovery as individuals and communities, to develop effective services, strategies and supports (Gagne et al , 2007)
- Despite this, **only a little more than half** of specialised addiction treatment programs have provided such **integrated care** (Ducharme, *et al*, 2010)

# Irish Situation

- Recovery Academy of Ireland Inaugural Conference (2017)
- *“Examining the characteristics influencing recovery from addiction and recovery from mental illness, it is astonishing that the two fields have not collaborated to organize services under a common vision of recovery”*  
(Roisin Shorthall)

# Sharing a Dark Past

- Substance use/abuse and Mental health disorders show a high degree of co-occurrence
- It is also recognised that both the Mental Health and Addiction Systems of Care share a dark past with those living with either/ or disorders expected to :
- “ end up in the least favourable places in society, the gutter, prisons, asylums or morgues” (Gagne,et al 2017)

# Who are Responsible for Pushing the Recovery Agenda?

- The Recovery ethos set out in Vision for Change (2006) driven by the demands made by user/survivor activists (Mc Daid, 2013)
- Significantly it is being acknowledged in both fields that people can and do recovery.
- People in recovery from mental illness and/or addiction disorders are leading the call to change the current service systems of care to those that are recovery orientated (Gagne, *et al* (2017)
- The international literature indicates efforts to transform behavioural health systems has met with some success
- These transformations owe much to the transformation of relationships within these systems (Lamb, 2007)

# Recovery College- Education not Therapy

- Concept well known in fields of mental health and addiction.
- **Distinguishes** between educational and therapeutic approaches to recovery (Perkins, *et al* 2014)
- **Designed** to re-orientate a mental health service away from a traditional therapeutic approach towards an education-focused mode of service provision (Mc Daid, 2013)
- **Reframes** the supports provided for an individual's recovery into an educational journey in which an individual participates in 'courses' of their choosing that facilitates their recovery (2013)
- **Co-produced and co-delivered** by people with professional and personal experience who learn together and from each other.
- **Recovery education** takes a strengths and adult education based approach that offers the choice to engage in learning opportunities

# RECOVEU

## Ireland in Collaboration with European Partners (Gruntvig)

- Designed access to learning programme designed *by* people in recovery *for* people in recovery in collaboration with professional researchers.
- Emerged when fields of mental health, addiction and adult education suffering effects of severe economic depression.
- Aftershock felt most acutely in disadvantages and disempowered communities with those who are susceptible to addiction and mental health, being among the most affected.

# Findings

- Initially key aim was to assess the impact of participation of self-efficacy and sustained participation in learning
- Continuous prioritising of recovery as prerequisite changed the research focus
- Sustained participation in *recovery* and learning
- According to lived experience of participants the form of learning required for recovery is same learning that has as its aim personal and social justice (Doyle, 2017)
- Quality access to learning programme with equity for people in recovery **cannot simply focus on the individual learner but will of necessity, have as its goal personal, social, cultural and political transformation (ibid)**

# Linking Recovery and Adult and Community Education

- It would appear that both fields are beginning to undergo **transformation** in the manner in which **Mezirow** (2007) describes when he refers to transformative learning at the level of the person.
- Recovery Colleges as agents of social and cultural change have the capacity to drive **systems transformation** at many levels
- Personal (physical/ human recovery capital),
- Family and social networks (social and community recovery capital)
- Culture of Recovery (Cultural capital)( Cloud and Granfield, 2008)

# Recovery College - Co-Production Friere 'Problem Posing Dialogue'

- A pivotal relationship in common is **concept of co-production**
- Unique instance in which **Friere's 'problem posing dialogue'** is realised in practice.
- In the international literature it is summarised as:
- *"When the teacher acknowledges the students authority, and engages in discourse with the student to raise critical consciousness. In true problem-posing dialogue, the teacher regards the student as an equal and together they decide what to learn and how to learn it"* (Oh and DeVlder, quoted in AHA, 2018)

# Recovery College- Democratisation of Knowledge

- Value system that underpins the Recovery Culture and that will be interwoven throughout the Recovery College Curriculum represents ' the democratisation of knowledge' (Brooks, 1991)
- It has long been recognised that the privileged position of the dominant classes is **justified by educational success**, while the underprivileged position of the lower classes is **legitimated by educational failure** (Bourdieu, 1973;1974)
- The curriculum is one space where dominant groups render their knowledge hegemonic and as such, is a reflection of whose culture and world view counts and whose is discarded.

# Recovery Education- Subverting the Values of the 'Dominant Culture'

- Recovery education is co-produced and co-delivered by the people most affected by the issues
- As Gramsci noted education is about producing knowledge.
- It is hoped that in practice, the democratisation of knowledge will feed into a broader Culture of Recovery which will be produced by those who have most to gain from it.
- In this way Recovery Colleges may contribute to the legitimate subversion of the values of the 'dominant culture

# Challenging the 'Commodification' of Education

- Recovery Culture- Damning indictment of **narcissistic 'Culture of Individualism'** (Valverde and White-Mair, 2000) that has insidiously invaded all aspects of western society including the education system
- By contrast, the **Culture of Recovery** holds that people in recovery do not compete with each other for the scarce resource of sobriety.
- On the contrary, the ethos behind the saying 'you won't keep it if you don't give it away' is **very antithesis of this individualistic culture** and will form a fundamental part of the value system that will underpin the culture of **RAI's Recovery College**

# Recovery College- Value System

- Mainstream Education views **education as a commodity**, its sole purpose being to provide students with a competitive advantage in the struggle for desirable market roles.
- This in turn feeds into a culture that dictates that **'sharing is cheating'** ( Labaree, 1997)
- **In complete contrast**, the values that will underpin RAI's Recovery College are those that underpin the Recovery Culture and include
- **Co-operation, experiential, collaborative and participatory learning and sharing ones strength and hope with others.**

# Recovery Colleges- Advocating for Human and Civil Rights

- Addiction and Mental Health have come to be conceptualised as socio-political constructs within a rights-based discourse
- At a global level we are witnessing a multiplicity of social movements that are becoming politically active with aim of **advocating for their human and civil rights.**
- To this end Recovery Colleges may provide a forum whereby experts by experience working alongside experts by profession, will join with others to **advocate for personal and social justice**

# Adult Education as organising construct for Transformative Change in Mental Health and Addiction/Recovery or Vice Versa?

- It is often the case that people who succumb to substance abuse and/or mental health come from a background of extreme **socio-economic and educational deprivation**.
- Furthermore in its earliest usage the concept of **addiction** at the level of the person was held to refer indiscriminately to a **person's enslavement** by someone or something (Weinberg, 2002)
- It would appear that these are extreme examples of those whom Friere identified as being in most need of **liberation and emancipation** (1970)
- Yet these are the people who are making significant strides in **challenging their own experience of 'oppression and discrimination'** (Connolly, 2010)

# Vision for Higher Education Creating a Third Space?

- Expand campus boundaries by drawing on multiple communities of experts who collaborate...in a shared 'third space'
- A two way street for teaching, learning, and discovery, transforming the history of one-way engagement between universities and communities.
- Universities no longer legitimate experts who use communities as laboratories with little benefit to them (Cantor, 2010)
- Creating a shared sense of community and communal responsibility (Cantor, 2010)
- **Recovery Colleges are already creating this 'space'**

# Legacy of Neo-Liberal Policies

- **Adult Education** tempered by neo-liberal policies
- **Critical pedagogy** itself is under threat
- **University departments restricted** in what they can do
- Strategic rhetoric of inclusion, community engagement and outreach is rarely fully realised in the educational practices of many universities.
- **Policies, procedures and bureaucracies** of higher education, keep academics busy without letting them do enough that matters.
- While people and communities of people in recovery continue to forge ahead in advocating for personal and social justice.
- **Universities may find themselves left behind** in the wider social mission-rather than business- of education(Smyth, 2014)

# Adult Education Challenging its Own Oppression?

- Katz has observed, the Great Recession "*has unveiled an economy dangerously out of whack, frenzied with consumption, wasteful in its use of energy, more adept at increasing inequity than sharing prosperity*" (in Cantor, 2010 )

Referring to the potential of Higher Education it is noted that:

- In such a world the future of democracy itself will depend on our ability to educate "*complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements*" (Nussbaum, in Cantor, 2010)

# Recovery Colleges Reclaiming the Third Space

- It is being suggested that the Adult and Community Education **Community of Practice** which will contribute to the development of a '**Third Space**' between the University and the Community
- This Community of Practice will pool research resources, share new practices and new knowledge and facilitate research conducted by 'experts by experience' and 'experts by profession'

Thank you all for listening