Psychological Capital: The Missing Link

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Abstract

The funding model for further education and training (FET) in the Republic of Ireland currently describes provider and learner success in narrow quantifiable terms as captured on the national Programme Learner Support System (PLSS). FET practitioners have grappled with the restrictive rigidity of these outcomes and measures of success for adult learners. This article investigates the concept of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) as a means of widening outcomes and measures in FET.

Keywords: Psychological Capital, Psychological Resources, Forms of Capital, Psychological Outcomes, Measures of Success

Introduction
The what, the why, and becoming

The changed policy context of adult, community and further education in Ireland has resulted in an increased emphasis on labour market activation and enabling active inclusion of the populace through socio-economic participation. The impact of the changes has generated concern amongst practitioners that soft indicators of success are being ignored in favour of hard, objective outcomes. The article describes the policy context and the reactions of practitioners, and then considers Psychological Capital (PsyCap) for its rigour and reliability in workplace and academic settings.

Links are made between the implications for using PsyCap in educational settings and good practice in adult and further education. The article provides a shared language for educators, including further education and training

(FET) practitioners, that reflects what they may already do in practice. PsyCap is placed alongside other forms of capital that can be provided in education showing the move from providing learning that hitherto may have been thought as being about personality rather than as a competence. However, the issues and dilemmas in so doing must be addressed. While the learning domain of attitudes is being considered by the European Commission, much use of PsyCap can be made by the practitioner, the provider, and the funder to enable success to be defined in what hitherto has been regarded as soft outcomes.

The article draws on the doctoral research areas of both writers: one based in quantitative research, the other based in qualitative research. Gaps in research and practice are identified, along with recommendations about possibilities for practice. Both writers are involved in initial teaching qualifications for adult and further education, and both are active practitioners in the adult and further education sector, both statutory and non-statutory, in Ireland.

We make several assumptions in this article. The first assumption is that adult and further education pathways are excellent opportunities for the populace in general and for educationally-disadvantaged learners in particular. FET, adult and community education can facilitate transformational learning for adults. This is the context for considering the concept of PsyCap and its potential. The second assumption is that many adult educators are challenged by the emphasis on measuring success in terms of hard outcomes rather than soft outcomes. PsyCap is offered to them as a means of providing a language for what they may already be partially doing, but without a mechanism to capture these efforts, they receive little recognition for their successes. The article therefore draws on the sociology of adult and community education, and critical educational theory in particular, to examine PsyCap from equality and critical perspectives. The article concludes by identifying possibilities for its application at different levels of practice. A further assumption is that other readers, like ourselves, are conflicted by the use of the term 'soft and hard outcomes'. However, motivated by the purpose of considering an innovative concept that will be of service to practitioners, we use these terms from the policy literature because it provides a language for some of the outcomes that practitioners can recognise and that reflects the voice of learners. PsyCap could frame the search for capturing soft outcomes.

Context
Ireland's education policy has enabled substantial gains to be made in the field

of adult and further education for adult learners previously unable to access courses and improve their life chances. We now have a coherent set of vocational qualifications in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The qualifications framework makes visible the pathways between qualifications gained in lower and upper secondary schooling, and qualifications in further and higher education. Amalgamating the original FET providers, Vocational Education Committees (VECs), with the state training authority (then FAS) to generate Education and Training Boards (ETBs) has simplified the provider picture. The creation of the state's further education and training agency, SOLAS, provides clarity about policy directions and links to funding.

While wider educational outcomes can be facilitated by the NFQ, funding prioritises employability and the funding for courses in the NFQ framework is linked to labour market activation policies and employability outcomes. The assumption here is that the solution to the poverty of many adults is gaining employment, so that funding is targeted towards vocationally-oriented qualifications. Adults who are social-welfare dependent are therefore likely to be directed to such qualifications and FET.

Certification, progression and employment are the outcomes sought by funders in further education. An adult learner, however, may gain a qualification but not have the hope, agency or persistence to compete in the jobs market, the confidence to gain and retain employment, or may not be sufficiently academically skilled to avail of qualifications' opportunities following redundancy. While standard education practice accepts the predictive power of qualifications (Steadman, 1995), providing the opportunity to gain skills for a specific area of occupation may not be enough. Personal skills and psychological resources are also required.

The European Commission has added personal skills to the list of key competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2018). Prior to 2018, there were eight competences in the list in the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, all considered equally important, but personal skills were not mentioned. To enable competences to be achieved by learners, providers are expected to identify the learning outcomes that underpin them in terms of the constituent knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge is defined as facts and theories, skills as the ability to use the knowledge, and attitudes as the disposition to act, and the latter can include values, thoughts and beliefs. The Commission are now revising the list of competences and replacing

'Learning to Learn' with 'Personal, social and learning competence':

> Personal and interpersonal skills, sometimes referred to as 'life skills', socio-emotional, 'soft skills' or 'transversal skills' have become more important in today's society. They can respond to the growing needs of individuals to deal with uncertainty and change, remain resilient, develop personally and build successful interpersonal relations (EC, 2018, p.39).

The area in Ireland where there is more emphasis on personal skills over vocational skills is in the informal adult education sector, where time is provided to build confidence and academic skills. The fields of adult, community education and adult literacy developed considerable competence in building the general learning skills of adults because practitioners are encouraged to attend to the process of learning, and not just the content. For example, starting where the learner is at by building on the strengths of the learner, and tailoring the teaching process accordingly. They attend to the affective side of learning, especially with learners who may not feel confident in a formal educational setting.

In adult literacy, adult and community education, formal measuring of outcomes has been an issue for some time as they have become subject to the same demands made of higher NFQ- level programmes in terms of results, and the first FET strategy (SOLAS, 2014) stated that funding would be allocated on the basis of results and was thus focused on hard outcomes. This model, previously associated with higher-level NFQ programmes, has now become applicable to adult literacy, community education, and further education. A common outcome described by learners in adult literacy and by learners in community education, is 'confidence'. The Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy (SOLAS, 2021) makes reference to 'confidence' throughout. In her research for the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) on the wider benefits of learning, Byrne states that the highest rating given by learners is to the outcome of increased levels of self-confidence (Byrne, 2018). The Adult Literacy Strategy calls for a core skills framework, but it could be cognitive skills that are implied. It is notable that all of the policy actions are linked to health and wellbeing.

Research by AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, exploring the outcomes of Department of Education & Science-funded community education, identified the role in facilitating 'persistence and retention' in

the way in which 'dispositional barriers are addressed'. This research lists a considerable range of mental health outcomes (AONTAS, 2011, pp.147-9). SOLAS researched assessment in adult literacy at NFQ levels 1-3, in order to consolidate initial screening, placing and diagnostic assessment instruments (McSkeane, n.d.). The focus, however, is still on assessing cognitive skills rather than psychological resources. Wellbeing was identified as an outcome in O'Grady's doctoral research in women's community education (O'Grady, 2018). The research was in response to questions by practitioners for the provider to reflect upon in relation to wider developmental outcomes standing against 'hard outcomes'. Recognition for what community educators call 'pre-development' outcomes in the non-statutory community education sector is an issue in the context of funders' demands for accreditation and having to work with funders' indicators of success that are performance-centred rather than reflecting the outcomes reported by learners themselves. Grummel (2014) states that such issues are inevitable following the shift of attention away from the learner and learning processes caused by the policy changes. There is an appetite from practitioners and providers to have a framework for naming 'success' beyond performance and progression.

Transformative adult education provides time and space for learners to identify and overcome dispositional barriers to participation and progression without feeling pressured to submit work for certification. However, O'Grady's (2018) research focused on the impact of a learning culture on dispositions rather than researching the methodologies of feminist pedagogy that enables dispositional and information blocks to be changed.

Multiple frames for describing wider outcomes or benefits of learning exist, conceptualised as different forms of capital. For example, in researching the wider benefits of learning, Schuller et al. (2002) identified social capital as one of the three types of benefits (the others being human capital and personal identity) that adults derive from learning. This they mean as: 'civic skills and engagement, social networks, and social values such as trust and tolerance' (Schuller et al., 2002, p.44). Where does PsyCap fit in relation to the wealth (or capital) of a society or of an individual? From the traditional view of capital being economic wealth or 'what you have', human capital from education is the wealth-generating potential of the populace based on 'what you know', represented by their educational qualifications. Cultural capital is what you know about wider society and its structures, and how to use it for individual advantage. Social capital, 'who you know' gives the ability to some in society to

use social networks to their advantage. PsyCap, 'who you are', is about the self-knowledge needed to be a 'responsible learner', an individual able to navigate successfully through life's challenges. Education has traditionally concerned itself with providing human capital, but the need to address cultural, social and psychological needs is becoming more accepted. Education is also concerned with who students are becoming.

The current FET Strategy, Future FET: Transforming Learning (SOLAS, 2020), recognises the space in further education for adult returners:

> It can offer personal development and fulfilment, a link to community and social networks, and a range of supports that reflect the diverse base of its learners (SOLAS, 2020, p.10).

The data collected by SOLAS on the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) data management system enables the identification of FET outcomes and impacts (SOLAS, 2020, p.20), but only in relation to the goals stated in the Strategy. Successful outcomes for learners are defined as 'performance-centred' (SOLAS, 2020, p.57): employment, progression on a learning pathway, and the award of certification (SOLAS, 2020, p.27). The need for measuring wider outcomes is to reflect more 'learner-centred' (SOLAS, 2020, p.57) values: 'improved learner confidence, empowerment and engagement; increased appetite for additional study; community development; and enhanced societal engagement and integration' (SOLAS, 2020, p.28).

The Strategy describes an example of a qualitative tool developed for the State's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) for capturing personal development in the learning journey in terms of literacy and numeracy confidence; confidence, goal setting and self-efficacy; communication skills; connection with others; and general work readiness (POBAL, 2020). This section demonstrates that a wider breadth of outcomes are recognised and valued in policy, research and practice. Instead of framing wider developmental outcomes as a personal journey or as the development of personal attributes, we argue for a more robust framework for psychological resources or, more specifically, for psychological capital, which is described in the following section.

PsyCap: The Concept

Psychological Capital, or PsyCap, is an overarching construct which is comprised of four individual, interconnected personal/psychological resources: efficacy (confidence), optimism, hope and resilience. Luthans et al. (2015) define PsyCap as:

> ..an individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success (Luthans et al., 2015, p.2).

PsyCap has been given the acronym HERO in the literature which provides an abbreviation of the psychological resources of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism that contribute to the construct of PsyCap. These psychological resources and their associated beneficial outcomes are now explored.

Hope

In their 1991 research, Snyder et al. offered a definition of hope within a goal setting framework that viewed the concept as having the two dimensions of agency and pathways. Agency was described as 'a sense of successful determination in meeting goals in the past, present, and future' and pathways as 'a sense of being able to generate successful plans to meet goals' (Snyder et al., 1991, p.570). Snyder's research suggests that for hope to be present both the will (the agency) and the way (the pathway) to succeed must be operationalised in the individual. Hope is associated with higher cumulative GPAs and increased likelihood of graduating from college amongst US College students (Snyder et al., 2002; Luthans et al., 2004; Luthans and Jensen, 2002; Youssef and Luthans, 2007).

Efficacy (Confidence)

The idea of self- efficacy (also referred to as confidence in the literature) was first presented by Bandura in 1977 and researchers on motivation have continued to build on his work. Efficacy relates to how an individual judges their capacity to execute a task, achieve an outcome or succeed. This judgement determines their behaviours and the associated outcomes. In instances where this judgement

perceives a task, activity or action as being beyond an individual's capabilities, it may be that they won't contemplate an attempt, believing it to be a pointless and fruitless endeavour. Essentially it is like the adage often attributed to Henry Ford: 'Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right.' Self -efficacy plays an important role in determining an individual's attitudes, motivations and behaviours as it:

> ..influence[s] the courses of action people choose to pursue, the challenges and goals they set for themselves and their commitment to them, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, the outcomes they expect their efforts to produce, how long they persevere in the face of obstacles, their resilience to adversity, the quality of their emotional life and how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the life choices they make and the accomplishments they realize (Bandura, 2006, p.309).

Self-efficacy is a predictor of individual wellbeing, workplace performance, supports prosocial behaviours and has also been shown to enhance academic performance (Bandura et al., 1996, cited in Newman, 2014, p.25).

Resilience

Life and setbacks go hand in hand and for most individuals the experience of adversity is unavoidable. Resilience is an individual's capacity to adapt in such circumstances in their lives and essentially whether s/he can bounce back. Resilience is a state and Luthar et al. (2000) defined it as 'a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity' (p.543, cited in King et al., 2015, p.784.) Individuals who are resilient may not only weather their setbacks but throughout these they may even thrive and grow (Avey, Luthans and Jensen, 2009).

Optimism

As individuals live their lives, events and happenstance, some predicted, and others less so, are inevitable. The way in which a person views such occurrences or explains them to themselves and others, also known as an individual's explanatory style (Seligman, 2006), can be optimistic or pessimistic. A person with an optimistic explanatory style views negative events or setbacks in their lives as temporary, related to a specific situation or part of their lives and externally caused whilst viewing positive events as permanent, pervasive (relating to their whole lives) and personally influenced. On the other hand,

a person who has a pessimistic explanatory style views positive events as temporary, and externally caused and those negative setbacks as pervasive, permanent and personally caused. In their work, Shifren and Hooker (1995) define optimism as 'the current expectancy that positive outcomes will occur in the future' (p.61) and this view of optimism as an individual's generalised positive outlook in life is supported by Higgins and colleagues (2010, p.750). Brennan (2017) describes optimistic individuals as 'flexible, hopeful, motivated and persistent' and outlines a link between optimism and psychological wellbeing, physical health, success and happiness in life (p.226).

Evolution of PsyCap

PsyCap emerged from the fields of positive psychology, Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) and Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB). Up to the mid-1990s, the dominant focus of researchers and practitioners in the psychological fields rested on pathologies and exploring what was wrong with individuals. They used this deficit approach, focusing on individuals' psychological weaknesses and problems, with the aim of helping them to overcome problematic behaviours and the resultant negative outcomes in their lives. This approach began to change in 1998 when Martin Seligman made a call to action for researchers and practitioners in the field of psychology to shift their focus from pathologies to potential. The field of positive psychology emerged after Seligman, known as the Father of Positive Psychology, called for an exploration of the possibilities of human potential and the ways in which individuals could be supported to flourish in their lives. This new strengths-based approach centred on the psychological resources and strengths that could result in positive behaviours and outcomes for individuals and lead them to living more purposeful, meaningful, and worthwhile lives.

As the new field of positive psychology emerged, organisational scholars and practitioners in organisations soon began to notice the influence of positive psychology in human flourishing at individual levels and its role as a catalyst for positive outcomes. Their research was concerned with understanding how organisations could effectively meet their goals and objectives and they began to explore the possibility that positive psychology might be able to make a valuable contribution to these endeavours. They believed that organisations who wanted to flourish could learn and draw the lessons from the field of positive psychology. This desire to foster positive behaviours in the workplace and yield the potential benefits associated with such behaviour led to the emergence and growth of POS and POB.

POB and POS researchers seeking to reap the benefits associated with psychological resources were particularly interested in those personal and psychological resources that could be measured, developed and managed for performance improvement in the workplace (Luthans, 2002b). Early research on PsyCap indicated its potential to predict desired attitudinal and behavioural outcomes and performance at work. Each of the elements of PsyCap had reliable and valid measures. Luthans and his colleagues developed and empirically validated the four-dimensional, 24-item PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) measure (Luthans et al., 2007) noted by Newman et al. as being the 'most widely used self- report measure' of PsyCap (2014, p.127). This led to further research of PsyCap as a predictor of organisational success.

Meta-analyses have shown that an individual's PsyCap impacts their attitudes, behaviour, performance and wellbeing (Luthans and Youssef -Morgan, 2017) across a range of contexts. In their 2011 meta-analysis of 12,567 employees across 51 studies, Avey et al. (2011) noted that employees who are 'higher in PsyCap expect good things to happen at work (optimism), believe they create their own success (efficacy and hope) and are more impervious to setbacks (resilience) when compared to those lower in PsyCap' (p.132).

PsyCap in Educational Settings

Motivated by the research findings concerning the individual and organisational benefits associated with PsyCap in the fields of psychology and organisational behaviour, researchers are now exploring the potential of PsyCap in educational settings for staff and students. In her doctoral thesis, Brennan (2017) explored the psychological resource of optimism, considering its influence on teacher work engagement in the context of the Irish Further Education sector. Analysing data gathered from 156 respondents working in teaching roles in ETBs, Brennan found that teacher optimism directly predicted teacher engagement, and optimism was also operating as a mechanism through which leadership influenced teacher engagement. Her study showed the importance of the psychological resource of optimism in directly influencing teacher work engagement, and also revealed that employee optimism helped educational leaders to enhance their employees' engagement. Brennan is now building on this research by working with colleagues Garavan, Egan and O' Brien to explore data collected from over 430 ETB staff around the role of PsyCap and its constituent HERO components, organisational and social resources in employee wellbeing. Her work in this area led to a desire to explore the potential of PsyCap to support learner outcomes in Irish FET.

A number of researchers have turned their attention to the potential benefits that could be realised through student PsyCap in educational settings. Researching in the context of third level education, Luthans et al. (2012) collected data from American undergraduate business students and found a positive link between their PsyCap and academic performance. In 2019, Martinez et al. analysed data collected from university students in Spain and Portugal and the results confirmed a positive relationship between academic engagement, PsyCap and academic performance. PsyCap was also confirmed as mediating the relationship between academic engagement and academic performance. A recent study that considered the non- traditional third-level student accessing online programmes by Black et al. (2020) carried out a narrative critical literature review to explore the role of the PsyCap model on online university students' persistence and concluded that the inclusion of the development of student PsyCap in 'revamping curricular and instructional approaches to online programmes…has tremendous value for all societal stakeholders' (Black et al., 2020, p.13). Research in a high school context was carried out by Datu and Valdez (2016) who gathered data from 606 Filipino high school students and confirmed that the respondents' PsyCap was a positive predictor of academic engagement, flourishing, interdependent happiness, and positive affect. Describing the possible processes through which student PsyCap could influence academic performance, Martinez et al. (2019) promoted its potential as a catalyst for positive outcomes for FET students.

These studies highlight the important role that PsyCap can play in predicting positive academic and wellbeing outcomes for students in third level and high school settings and the processes through which this occurs. This research contributes to the authors' view that PsyCap has the potential to make a valuable contribution to learner flourishing, wellbeing, academic engagement, academic performance and success in the Irish FET sector and to widen outcomes and measures in FET.

PsyCap's link to adult education theory

Learner-centred approaches have long been recommended in adult education settings. One aspect of being learner-centred is using the strengths-based approach, which links it to positive psychology. The wealth model, or strengths-based approach in adult education, is that adults 'bring many different experiences and strengths into the class with them' (O'Grady and Byrne, 2018, p.7) which can become known to the tutor and new content related to it. This shows a respect for the learner and their achievements. This model conveys to

the learner that curiosity and the desire to grow is the essence of being human. This foundation enables adults to learn what is 'really useful knowledge' (Thompson, 1977), the knowledge that can be applied to change their lives for the better. The model contrasts with the deficit view of the learner, which blames the learner for educational failure. Adult educators are skilled at contradicting the effects of the deficit model and helping learners overcome internalised negative views of themselves and their capabilities. Training adult and further educators requires a poststructural view to be taken, to help learners locate their skill gaps and attitudes as coming from social and political arrangements and, at the same time, as something they have the power to change. For example, pathways cannot be used if they are not known by the learner, nor can unknown supports be requested. According to Lynch and O'Riordan (1996), educational practice blamed the learner for not availing of opportunities without taking into account the structural barriers, or, as Bourdieu (1986) calls it, their lack of cultural capital, the know-how about overcoming the structural barriers.

Many structural barriers to participation have now been removed, but negative perceptions of adults who fail to engage or participate continue. Negative views of the learner are challenged by training for educators in how to plan and teach differently. For example, providers, as mentioned earlier, are called on to use learner-centred approaches in their curriculum planning and assessment and move away from the deficit view of the learner towards a structural view, to the actions that can be taken by the educator. As the expectation that providers have the capacity to change to more learner-centred curriculum planning and assessment, so too is there more understanding of the contribution that education makes in society and the outcomes of educational participation for different groups. Education, according to Freire (1970), is never neutral. It is always political. It always involves decisions about the distribution of educational resources, so that some benefit more than others (Freire, 1970). It is also about views relating to who is intelligent and therefore capable of learning.

Lifelong learning in the dominant discourse depends on the supported and able learner, identified by Warren and Webb (2007) as the 'responsible learner'. This learner must have sufficient learning skills and supports, and the attitude that they can use them appropriately. Such supports, skills and attitudes are not evenly distributed. They vary by critical factors of class, gender, race and other factors outside of an individual's control. They are the cultural and social factors that surround each learner, enabling or inhibiting their ability to make the most of an educational opportunity.

In this wider structural view of the learner, education is seen as the means of providing necessary skills and supports. Many will be familiar with the idea that the role of education in society is to raise the human capital of the society. All are believed to benefit by the increased level of education of the population. Human capital contributes to the overall wealth of the country. What of the individuals in the society?

The challenge presented to practitioners by PsyCap is to reframe what may have been understood as personality traits that are fixed, into malleable states. Bourdieu's work on forms of capital has been influential in understanding how contexts shape the expectations and approaches of individuals and 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243).

Bourdieu argued that privilege, including the control of wealth, is transmitted by means of cultural capital, with the know-how of how society works and how to benefit from educational opportunities being convertible into wealth through qualifications and professions that are not just meritocratic but where advancement relies on social and cultural resources, thereby closing off possibilities for many. A poststructuralist approach such as Bourdieu's offers a dynamic vision of the possibility for change in contrast to a pessimistic approach that sees improved circumstances out of reach. The first step in change is finding a space for transforming a limiting mindset and reframing one's dispositions to be more realistic and optimistic. Adult and further education offers the individual the opportunity to acquire skills for work; how far does this go, however, if it does not offer the skills to reflect and revise one's assumptions about one's self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience?

Adult educators are already familiar with Kolb's (1984) reflective learning cycle, whereby learners can reflect on an experience, analyse it in light of different perspectives, and take informed action. Mezirow et al.'s (1990) perspective transformation theory tells us that adults are often motivated to learn their way out of a dilemma by undergoing such reflective cycles; educators can work with the idea by problematising the familiar for learners, creating artificial dilemmas, and using a learning process to identify assumptions and consider different perspectives. Mezirow (2009) identifies how each person's frame of reference consists of 'a habit of mind and resulting points of view', which can be changed when open to different perspectives (p.92). Multiple perspectives from theory, practitioners, peers, and benefits from interacting, become available in the adult education setting. The socio-emotional aspect of the adult education

space and its impact on learning is understood by many practitioners. It can involve welcoming people, getting to know them by name, supporting learners at times of difficulty, and celebrating the achievement of learners. For many, this is an equality issue in education (Lynch et al., 2009). The affective or emotional domain is an area where a practitioner can help redress inequalities and their effect on learners. Feeley's (2009) research demonstrates the paralysing impact on the ability to learn caused by experiences of being raised in an industrial school as a child. Many such adults lack 'nurturing capital' (Lynch et al., 2009) which in turn impairs the ability of the adult to learn and work in solidarity with others, or acquire the kind of social capital that converts into better outcomes. Nurturing capital is the basis for acquiring all other types of capital, and self-knowledge, or knowledge about the self and how to meet one's needs, is at the core of it.

Wells and Claxton's (2002) Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) identifies how some contexts provide rich social learning processes and resources for individuals, while other contexts may not. In this research, peers identified good teachers whose common characteristic was found to be their focus on the social and emotional aspects of learning.

Three domains in learning were identified by Bloom et al. (1956): the cognitive, the affective, and the psychomotor. Formal education has privileged the cognitive and the psychomotor; but the idea that emotional development is also an educational activity has been neglected, according to Baker et al. (2004). The definition of curriculum as equally-weighted between process and content that is favoured in andragogy, called 'process and content' (Jarvis, 1985, p.50), is also less well recognised. Content-led conceptualisations of curriculum are more valued in the dominant lifelong learning discourses, according to Burke and Jackson (2007).

Warren and Webb (2007) state that the concept of 'the responsible learner' underpins the discourse of formal education while being unstated. Implied is that a learner has sufficient psychological and social resources to benefit from their formal learning opportunity. Much of adult and further education targets adults who are not confident learners, even those who have achieved an upper-second level qualification and appear to have adequate cognitive skills. Emotions can be used for emancipatory learning purposes, but contemporary lifelong learning discourse emphasises outcomes for individuals, e.g., employability (Grummel, 2014). Low levels of psychological capitals can be

put in a wider context, which can generate a reflexive learning process. Giddens states that reflexivity is a skill needed by everyone in contemporary society because structures require individuals to make choices (2006, p.123): failure to make a choice is a choice in itself for which individuals get criticised or face loss of social welfare benefits.

Findings

The evidence points to the important role of psychological resources, specifically PsyCap, and multiple valuable attitudinal, behavioural and performance-related outcomes. Fostering PsyCap in a learning context enhances learners' hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resilience, and leads to learners who believe in themselves, have positive outlooks and are determined to succeed. Positive associations between PsyCap and academic success and employability signal its potential to catalyse existing measures of success in the Irish FET sector while the link between PsyCap and academic engagement, career success and wellbeing reveal its potential to contribute to desirable outcomes reflected in strategic priorities at national and local levels.

Rather than being a trait, PsyCap is a malleable state, capable of development that responds to intentional interventions and can be measured using existing valid and reliable scales that have successfully captured this development. PsyCap could yield multiple benefits for FET both as an agreed outcome of success and as a lever to broaden existing measures of success in FET. The affective domain in learning has been neglected in curriculum and assessment, as has its potential for enabling learners to gain specific psychological capital. Practitioners who attend to the social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning and help learners build psychological resources do not receive recognition for these outcomes, beyond the gratitude of their learners. The literature of PsyCap makes a language available to practitioners to recognise, frame and build on their good practice.

PsyCap is a form of capital that complements and builds on other forms of capital. It sits alongside those forms of capital that enables both the individual to set and achieve goals, and wider society to achieve policy outcomes.

Based on these findings the authors suggest that PsyCap is worthy of exploration in FET and discuss a number of recommendations, also illustrated in *Figure 1*, at the level of practitioners, providers and funders as to how this could begin.
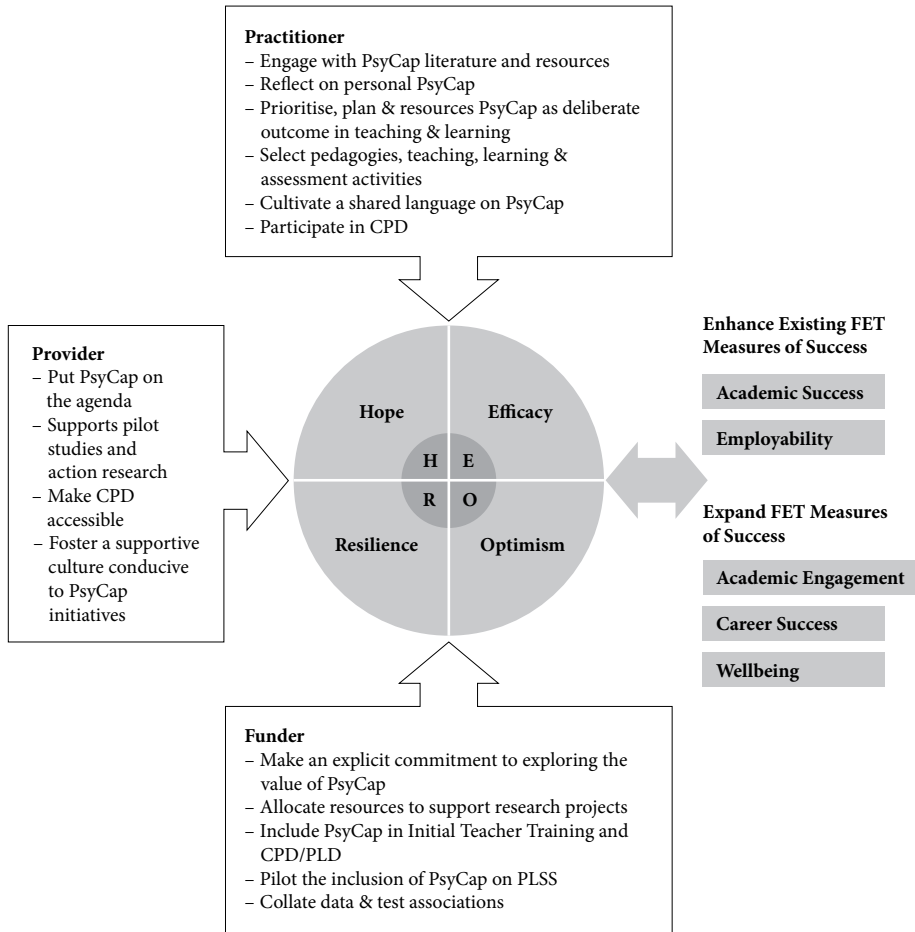
Practitioner
– Engage with PsyCap literature and resources
– Reflect on personal PsyCap
– Prioritise, plan & resources PsyCap as deliberate outcome in teaching & learning
– Select pedagogies, teaching, learning & assessment activities
– Cultivate a shared language on PsyCap
– Participate in CPD

Provider
– Put PsyCap on the agenda
– Supports pilot studies and action research
– Make CPD accessible
– Foster a supportive culture conducive to PsyCap initiatives

Hope   Efficacy

H   E

R   O

Resilience   Optimism

Enhance Existing FET Measures of Success

Academic Success

Employability

Expand FET Measures of Success

Academic Engagement

Career Success

Wellbeing

Funder
– Make an explicit commitment to exploring the value of PsyCap
– Allocate resources to support research projects
– Include PsyCap in Initial Teacher Training and CPD/PLD
– Pilot the inclusion of PsyCap on PLSS
– Collate data & test associations

Figure 1. The development and outcomes of PsyCap in Irish FET

Recommendations

The micro level of the FET teaching practitioners is fundamental. It is recommended that the practitioner explores the literature signposted in this paper to engage with opportunities to enhance their personal understanding of the construct. It is the socio-emotional and affective awareness of the educator that enables the learner to assess their own HERO levels and reflect on how to build them. Practitioners can engage with activities and resources to facilitate reflection on their own PsyCap; scope out the types of professional and life events and activities that gave rise to its development; identify opportunities for further development; and recognise its value in contributing to their wellbeing, life and career outcomes.

Although many existing FET Practitioners are already actively engaged in enhancing learner psychological resources including hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (PsyCap), this does not currently occur in a planned and intentional way. The shared recognition of learners' PsyCap as state-like, malleable predictors of success and wellbeing in adult education means that PsyCap can be strategically prioritised, planned and resourced as an intentional outcome in FET teaching and learning.

The route to existing learning outcomes in FET curricula present opportunities for skilled practitioners to proactively build and enhance learner hope, optimism, resilience and efficacy. Regardless of the programme or module concerned, the selection of the pedagogies, teaching, learning and assessment activities can have regard to the development of these attributes in the learner. It is recommended that practitioners consider opportunities to introduce and develop PsyCap in curriculum planning and assessment, especially with peers, and introduce content on the construct into their teaching process and outcomes.

At present there is no shared language on psychological resources in FET and it is recommended that practitioners play an active role in cultivating this amongst their learners and professional peers in the everyday context of their teaching and learning environments. This practice can contribute to an enhanced shared understanding of PsyCap, recognition of its value as a measure of success, reflect the voice of learners, and bridge the current language of hard and soft outcomes for all stakeholders.

The provider has a role to play in supporting their teaching practitioners to gain an enhanced understanding of PsyCap. The authors recommend that the FET Co-ordinator/Manager puts PsyCap on the agenda, supports pilot studies and action research, makes continuous professional development (CPD) accessible, and fosters a supportive culture to resource, practice, implement and share good practice on PsyCap initiatives. This CPD needs to facilitate practitioners to use the concept, create interventions to boost PsyCap, devise instruments, evaluate effective teaching and provide a framework to add to their toolkit in facilitating personal development and reflective practice.

At the macro level of the funder and policymaker, it is critical that there is an explicit commitment to exploring the value of developing and managing learner PsyCap as a practical mechanism to realise desirable FET outcomes. The authors recommend the allocation of resources to support research

projects exploring PsyCap and psychological resources, its inclusion in Initial Teacher Training and CPD/PLD programmes, practitioner action research and the dissemination of findings in the FET community. PsyCap in FET can be explored using the theoretical frameworks of Hobfoll's Conservation of Resource Theory (2018) and the suggestion of resources building upon one another, and Frederickson's Broaden and Build theory of positive emotions (2001, 2013). In addition, it is recommended that SOLAS pilot the inclusion of PsyCap as a measure of success in FET on the PLSS data management system. The collection of the initial data could then be used to test associations between PsyCap and the other captured outcomes.

Conclusion

The literature on PsyCap is drawn from the quantitative research tradition in psychology and POB, with trials seen as robust and reliable. It is at an early stage of use in educational settings and the gap remains about being trialled in adult and further education in Ireland. PsyCap can be placed in the toolkit of good practice, and it has the ability to name learner goals, educator goals, and FET Strategy goals. It can contribute to socio-cultural approaches in education by providing a shared language between all stakeholders for the kind of success reported anecdotally by learners.

Its limitations lie in relying on psychological approaches in education to the detriment of structural and political analyses, by over-emphasising individual responsibility that would serve only to exacerbate educational failure. It therefore must be part of a strengths-based approach that enables adult learners recognise what they have already achieved. It is also noted that we have not yet tested HERO with learners to assess the extent to which HERO reflects learners' definitions of success.

Deployment of PsyCap in adult and further education requires stakeholders to reflect on how they stand with the role of the emotions in learning. Our view is that any educator, provider, and funder who is concerned with developing the confident learner if not the 'responsible learner' will be able to use the concept. The challenge will be to develop measurement instruments that are appropriate and easy to use by learners and educators.

PsyCap offers learners and educators a shared language for recognising, discussing and reporting on what are exciting and transformative outcomes. The research on PsyCap gives us confidence that its deployment in adult, community and further

education will build the psychological resources of learners, that practitioners will find a way of recognising PsyCap outcomes and celebrating them, and we hope that providers and funders will be able to devise mechanisms to capture learner success in building their psychological resources.

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