

SECTION TWO

Book and Policy Reviews

Policy Review: A Revitalisation Point for Adult and Community Education in National Policy? Review of Houses of the Oireachtas, *Joint Committee on Education and Skills Report on Education Inequality and Disadvantage and Barriers to Education* (2019)

REVIEWED BY PAUL DOWNES

The main substance of the report is in the submissions, from a range of key organisations including: An Cosán, Care Leavers Network Ireland, Simon Community, Irish Penal Reform Trust, One Family, Irish Rural Link, Tusla, Solas and Foróige. These submissions provide important public records of the state of play of many of their key concerns. It is from these submissions, as well as presentations to the Committee (composed entirely of politicians), that the report's recommendations are extracted for national policy makers.

The broad scope of the report is both a strength and a weakness. It allows key issues where State education policy is at best nebulous and at worst largely non-existent to be placed on the record and touched upon in the recommendations. Such important issues include, for example, the educational needs of a) young people growing up in care, b) families experiencing homelessness and c) reform of initial teacher education for better preparation of student teachers for working in Delivering Equality of Opportunity (DEIS) schools. However, the body of the report does not go into substantive detail to interrogate solutions in depth; it offers minimal critique of current national strategies and action plans. Child poverty is adverted to in some of the submissions, yet the severe scale of this increase is underplayed in the report itself, against the backdrop of Ireland having the highest increase in all the EU between 2008 and 2011, increasing radically since then until 2015, where the upward graph does not reduce but only flattens out.

The report recommendations offer many welcome features relevant to the adult and community education sector, such as:

- programmes of support need to include educational, family and community needs to build positive and trusting relationships, reaching out to the most marginalised groups
- education programmes which engage low-educated parents during adulthood are developed and expanded
- education programmes for prisoners are developed and expanded
- lifelong learning opportunities, including informal adult learning opportunities, are available across all communities and relevant target groups
- easier access to the Back to Education Allowance Scheme for all adults who wish to return to education, including those who are homeless, lone parents and asylum seekers; the Youthreach programme should revert to a person centered approach

Significantly, it recommends that:

- support is given to Community Education to achieve parity of esteem with other sectors in the formal education system
- funding for community education is increased in future budgets

Yet, the above is recommended without proposing any concrete figures. This notable set of recommendations could be fleshed out further through an explicit national strategic commitment to the expansion of community lifelong learning centres as part of one-stop-shops involving multidisciplinary teams, as sought by the Lifelong Learning Platform in Europe (2019). This community education through community lifelong learning centres' approach to developing one-stop-shops is an issue pertinent to the Department of Education and Skills (DES) but also to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), where its Area Based Childhood (ABC) initiative could expand to incorporate a distinct funding strand to support these community centres, including family support services, as part of an acceleration of focus on poverty issues in future ABC initiatives.

The following recommendation in the report has potential to address the holistic needs of socio-economically excluded youth in a multidisciplinary manner:

coordinating body/taskforce such as a dedicated unit within the Department of Education and Skills is established with cross-departmental links or a separate agency which can support cooperation at national level and collaborate with all Departments and Agencies in related policy fields (e.g. education, economy, employment, youth, health, welfare and social policy).

However, from an adult and community education perspective, this invites the question as to why the key statutory body of the National Adult Learning Council (NALC) central to the *White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life* (2002) was strangled at birth. It could fulfil many of the roles for adult education envisaged here with regard to social inclusion, as part of the important features of this White Paper framework for Consciousness Raising; Citizenship; Cohesion; Cultural Development; and Community Building.

The recommendation that:

consideration is given to the development of an “early warning signs programme” to identify a range of local indicators of potential disengagement from education, and to use the indicators to target those who require additional support to remain in education

is a central feature of EU policy recommendations on Early School Leaving Prevention. This recommendation would gain greater force through recognising the need for specialised emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools, also pertinent for alternatives to suspension/expulsion, given the still unacceptably high rates of suspension/expulsion nationally. The issue of trauma and early school leaving was centrally recognised in a previous Joint Oireachtas Committee report on early school leaving (2010) and this is a major gap in the DEIS Strategy 2005, perpetuated in the DEIS Action Plan 2017, despite the latter being wrapped in the apparel of the language of wellbeing. Moreover, the DES *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023* that seeks to place a teacher in the role of emotional counsellor as a so-called ‘one good adult’ approach is a fig leaf for this major unaddressed problem relevant for many young people experiencing marginalisation and alienation, to help keep them in the system.

The recommendation on initial teacher education is notable as it goes a bit further than the rather tepid approach in the DEIS 2017 Action Plan on this issue:

- the DES work with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in assigning a budget to deliver a teacher training programme in order to understand the challenges facing children from vulnerable groups
- that both in-service and pre-service teacher education includes a core compulsory module on how to practice equality and inclusion for vulnerable groups
- prior to entering the classroom teachers should be assessed on their equality practices in classrooms as part of their overall teaching practice assessment

These recommendations are timely in the context of the forthcoming Teaching Council review of initial teacher education, and are a notable development, requiring particular focus for secondary teaching, as well as amplifying the current approaches at primary level. The report left somewhat implicit that learning for student teachers here must be through practical experience in DEIS school and local community settings. Overall, this report is an important, though initial, step towards recognition of the centrality of adult and community education to Irish education and social inclusion in education policy, across both the DES and DCYA.

Book Review: *Liberating Learning: Educational Change as Social Movement*

SANTIAGO RINCON-GALLARDO

ISBN 978-1-351-032087

REVIEWD BY ISOBEL HAWTHORNE-STEELE

Santiago Rincon-Gallardo has valorously grasped the nettle of what it will take to shake the tree of a global common practice of a patriarchal institutionalised education system. His aim is to replace this with an emancipated leadership approach that leads to liberated learning. This liberation learning concept is diametrically opposed to the inimical vertical relationship that predominates current systems of education that is fuelled within a political arena of dominance and control.

He posits the decoupling of the power base that lies within the institutional framework, suggesting this is best achieved by promoting a horizontal relationship between student and teacher. He focuses on promoting effective pedagogies that advocate transformation of education systems towards 'deep learning'.

He has captured the essence of transformational learning through the lens of social movement and aspires to the notion that to permeate the political agenda will help create democracy and equality.

He explicates the principles of liberation learning by mapping the educational institution, the cultural norms and principles and the political arena. He recognises and confronts the tensions that exist, and uses the tools from social movement to transform the cultural, political and institutional landscape to support his argument.

These three concepts; praxis of freedom; liberated learning and social movements, as the vehicle to cultural transformation, underpin the nine principles of practice that he proposes need to be addressed to ensure effectiveness.

Focusing on the school system, he draws from a wealth of examples across a global social stratum where his methods appear to be successfully implemented. The Ottawa Catholic School Board, and the Learning Community Project Mexico; all provide interesting pedagogical insights into what can happen if there is collective action.

The author advocates a Freirean approach to learning, namely taking the curriculum themes and framing these in a problem posing forum. This he claims will free both the teacher and student to explore the solutions in a shared learning environment. While laudable and reflective of some adult education scenarios, the examples given do not go far enough to explain how these are squared to meet the rigorous demands of set in stone assessment criteria. He offers examples that demonstrate those students who have experienced this liberated learning model have achieved similar, if not better, grades in assessments than students who have experienced traditional 'banking' education systems. However, the assessment is an area that would warrant further exploration. The reader is left wondering if it is perhaps time to overhaul the assessment process as well.

The proposed horizontal model, is one that is based on the premise that promotes equality between educator-learner and the learner educator developing a relationship of trust and open dialogue. It does not go far enough to discuss any risk factors as it assumes there are no impending external influences that might otherwise thwart the model or irrevocably damage it.

He competently demonstrates Freire's critical pedagogy in action and frames emancipatory learning in a fresh, dynamic narrative, and interestingly, his primary argument is that emancipated learning is encased in a Freirean framework, using the core tools of problematisation.

He promotes the desired goal that liberated free thinkers are thus enabled, as Ledwith (2011, p.99) asserts, 'to transcend and recreate their world'.

He recognises the basic premise that grounds his argument – that is, the effectiveness of liberated learning depends upon the student wanting to learn. This is a well-founded argument made by Race (2005, p.27), who further developed this concept of motivation that he avers leads to experiential learning, feedback and digesting to reach the point where students then own their learning.

Throughout this book, tutors are constantly challenged to examine their values and how these impact on their teaching. They are further challenged to explore traditional education practices and embark upon innovative life changing pedagogical practices. In short, they have to get out of their comfort zone and embark on a shared journey with students, realising equity and courageously admitting they are not experts in all things, and that letting go and letting students work alongside them, can and will bring freedom to both. He does however, acknowledge the diversity of the socio-economic and cultural background of students and recognises the challenges this presents to the relationship between tutor and student.

This book is focused primarily within the secondary school setting, although adult educators have much to learn from the model presented. It is a must read for all learners, teachers, tutors, leaders and policy makers across the sphere of education. It advocates the absolute need to recognise, radically design and support intellectual spaces that can be created to promote emancipatory learning that has far reaching potential to transform society.

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Book Review: *The Nordic Secret: A European Story of beauty and freedom*

LENE RACHEL ANDERSEN AND TOMAS BJÖRCKMAN

ISBN 978-9188589101

REVIEWED BY JANE O'KELLY

The Nordic Secret is a comprehensively researched yet accessible book aiming to explore and explain the success that Nordic countries have in education and other measures of achievement in society e.g. The World Economic Forum Indexes. It is divided into five parts that set the scene and contextualise Bildung philosophy and the Scandinavian Spring, exploring what they have found and looking forward. These sections explore the origins of Bildung, its impact on Nordic society, test cases in other countries, the lack of Bildung in current global society and how the Nordic experience can benefit the rest of the world. A key part of this success is the establishment of Folk High Schools that educate people for life.

The historical events that led up to the birth of Folk schools included the American Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, which prompted an 'understanding that people must be able to control their emotions, internalise the norms of society and take individual moral responsibility' (Andersen, 2017, p.9). This personal ego-development is called *Bildung* in German. The deliberate ego-development that was invented in Denmark in 1851 came to be known as *Folk-Bildung* and the book goes on to document how it changed Nordic society. This journey is presented in response to five hypotheses and nine questions that challenge and elucidate the creation, evolution and impact of Folk-Bildung over 150 years and its potential for the future.

The second substantial part of the book focuses on the history and legacy of folk schools as a means of empowerment through Bildung from the philosophies, ideologies and work of Comenius, Grundtvig, Kold, Pestalozzi and others. They were philosophers, pedagogues and educationalists. Comenius organised

school systems and structures and originated strategies in education that exist to this day. Grundtvig was a Danish teacher, philosopher and teacher who was influential in the creation of Danish national consciousness. He is thought to be the ideological father of the Folk High School institutions focused on adult education. Pestalozzi was a Swiss pedagogue who wrote about societal changes and pedagogy in the 1800s and how to empower the poor through education.

The book further explores the origins and impact of 'Cultural Radicalism' as a political ideology that became the social liberal agenda that has defined Scandinavian politics in the 20th century (Andersen, 2017, p.295). Cultural Radicalism aims for individuals to become 'self-authoring' personalities – seeking self-realisation and taking a personal stand emotionally and/or intellectually (p.49) - and a society that promotes this. This approach, with its 'rationalism, minimalism and rebellion against traditional norms can carry a coldness that precludes passion, romanticism, traditional gender roles and reverence' (p.301). It has humanistic values manifested through design, culture and art as well as a focus on a good life for ordinary people. Contemporaneously, at the end of the 19th century, the Danes also created the three-party model of negotiation between unions and employers with the government present at the table but without a vote (Andersen, 2017, p.302) which morphed into the Nordic Job Market Model. Other movements such as the Scouting movement, women's liberation movements and libraries all contributed to the social journey that had started in Nordic countries over 150 years ago. As the authors sum up, 'Scandinavia took the best from Germany, Switzerland, France, England and the US, added Nordic spirit and mythology and made it our own' (p.305).

Folk-Bildung as a concept is described as being different to adult education; adult education is what it says – education for adults that generally leads to some sort of diploma or exam. Folk-Bildung aims 'to raise consciousness and conscience and has the purpose of shaping a shared consciousness as a people at the collective level' (Andersen, 2017, p.332). Lifelong learning, popular education and dialogue are key to the folk high school in order to prepare you for life as a person and as a member of society.

The book contains warnings about recent changes in Nordic society, which include increased use of anti-depressants, a growing awareness of increased corruption, a lack of competence at government level and a decreasing vision of and for the wider society. The last part of the book is a fascinating synthesis of all that has gone before and what it means now to the authors personally and

to the modern world. They compare and contrast a complex presentation of ego development and circles of belonging through historical and sociological case studies into an engrossing and deceptively simple consideration of the concerns of modern society and people everywhere. They offer a compelling argument for the recognition of the need for Bildung and an understanding of our current 'meta-modernity'.

There is an idealistic aspirational call for action contained in the book which includes suggestions for processes and perspectives that could support the development of a Bildung frame of mind. This message in my view must not be evangelical but suggested and explained with care. The anti-intellectual rhetoric that exists in some areas today could justifiably interpret such messages as, at best, elitist and, at worst, insulting. The very nature of Bildung is inclusive, welcoming, connected and people-centred. It is the epitome of adult and community education as we understand it and as we espouse it in Ireland.

Book Review: *The Tyranny of Metrics*

JERRY Z. MULLER

ISBN 978-0691174952

REVIEWED BY ALEX RUNCHMAN

As I write this review, at the end of November 2019, lecturers at universities across the UK are striking in protest at untenable employment conditions. In particular, they are angered by the casualization of labour within higher education – the teaching assistants, especially within the Humanities, who are paid at negligible hourly rates that do not account for the additional hours of preparation and marking that go into delivering a half-decent course, and the early career academics who subsist on a series of fixed-term contracts without any prospect of long-term job security.

In the context of these issues, a debate has erupted on twitter in response to a tweet by the eminent Cambridge classicist Mary Beard. ‘Can I ask academics of any level of seniority how many hours a week they reckon they work’, she tweeted. ‘My current estimate is over 100.’ Among the responses – some supportive, but several angry or disbelieving – are many that question how exactly Beard is measuring her 100 hours. Does she include thinking time? What about time travelling to lectures? What about reviewing articles that the university doesn’t explicitly require her to?

The reaction Beard’s tweet has prompted epitomises a profession-wide malaise about the urge (the need) to quantify something whose value cannot be adequately measured – in hours, in publications, in student graduation rates, in revenue earned for the university, or in any of the other ways in which those who work within higher education are expected to prove themselves. The employment crisis and anxiety among educators about how to account for what they do are symptomatic of what Jerry Z. Muller calls ‘metric fixation’. In *The Tyranny of Metrics*, Muller makes clear, through a series of case studies, that this extends far beyond education. Medicine, charity work, business, and the military are all equally affected by the following key tenets:

- the belief that it is possible and desirable to replace judgment, acquired by personal experience and talent, with numerical indicators of comparative performance based upon standardized data (metrics)
- the belief that making such metrics public (transparent) assures that institutions are actually carrying out their purposes (accountability)
- the belief that the best way to motivate people within these organizations is by attaching awards and penalties to their measured performance, rewards that are either monetary (pay-for-performance) or reputational (rankings) (Muller, 2018, p.18)

Muller outlines the history of metric fixation, locating its origins in Victorian Britain – an age of industrial productivity – and its intensification in early-twentieth century US business practices and, later, management schools. It's a lucid, compelling, and, at times, lurid read: accounts of surgeons refusing to treat high-risk patients for fear of damaging the metrics are chilling, while the ineffectiveness of the US education system's 'No Child Left Behind' policy is simply depressing. Muller makes clear that he is not opposed to metrics *per se* but that using them as the sole way of gauging the quality of a particular enterprise is, at best, misleading and, at worst, dangerous.

Reviewing this book in the *London Review of Books* last year, Stefan Collini argued that the use of metrics is often 'a systematic attempt by one group of people to control the behaviour of others' (Collini, 2018). It is in this respect that the 'tyranny' of metrics can be seen as dehumanizing, and that Muller's conclusions can be linked to Paolo Freire's seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published fifty years ago, which argued against 'the banking concept of education' (with teacher as autocrat and student as mere object). To overcome this, Freire maintained, this dichotomy needs to be broken 'so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students' (Freire, 1970, p. 45) – in other words, the controlling oppressor needs to relinquish control, replacing it with cooperation and, ultimately, cultural synthesis. But achieving this kind of revolutionary outcome seems very far off in a world of metric fixation. 'The moment the new regime hardens into a dominating "bureaucracy", Freire suggests, 'the humanist dimension of the struggle is lost and it is no longer possible to speak of liberation' (Freire, 1970 p. 31). While metric fixation has infiltrated all fields of professional life, it has affected few more so than education: and for all educators – whether in primary school teaching, adult education, or university lecturing – there is

a pressing responsibility to resist finding value only in what can be measured or assessed and, instead, to espouse principles of cooperation and shared (but possibly unmeasured) achievement.

References

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