



# The Adult Learner

The Journal of Adult and Community Education in Ireland 2005

## CITIZENSHIP & PARTICIPATION



# The Adult Learner

## 2005

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# Editorial Comment

2005 has been designated the European Year of Citizenship through Education. It marks the culmination of many years of work by the Council of Europe to define concepts, policies and strategies to support good practice in the area of education for democratic citizenship. The living and learning of democracy is important for all of us as members of society. In recognition of this the 2005 edition of the Adult Learner has chosen citizenship and participation as its theme. It explores the growing trend towards globalisation and the challenges which we in Ireland face as we move towards a multicultural society. It looks at the notion of active citizenship and how it can be promoted through education but prevented by prevailing social and economic circumstances. It also looks at how Adult Education can contribute to the development of citizenship and examines a number of sites where through adult education the voice of the 'other', the excluded citizen, is encouraged and heard.

Today, we live in a multicultural Ireland, an Ireland which has seen many and significant changes over the last ten years. Almost weekly we are confronted with the challenges of building an inclusive, multicultural society which respects the rights of all. The most recent incidents concerning the Turkish workers and GAMA Construction and the deportation and subsequent return of Kunle, the Nigerian schoolboy, are two of the more high profile cases which have served to bring into clear focus our disparate views about the citizenship rights and entitlements of people from other countries and cultures who find themselves in Ireland. In addition, the recent rejection of the proposed European Constitution by the French and the Dutch also sends out a clear signal that citizens of nation states are not willing to cede any greater power and control to European and global quangos which they feel powerless to influence. These, together with low voter turnout in successive elections in Ireland,

suggest that people have become disengaged from the democratic process and feel powerless to influence it.

We now live in a world where issues are increasingly seen as requiring a global solution. G8 meetings and summits, while significantly impacting on aspects of all our lives, mean little to the average citizens going about their daily routine. It seems that rock stars like Bono, Sir Bob Geldof and others with a high public profile are needed to give voice to the concerns of ordinary citizens. Kumi Naidoo in his article alerts us to the need to 'Act Globally'. He suggests that in many democratic systems the 'form' has taken over from the 'substance' of democracy and while elections are held fewer people are choosing to vote. All of this would indicate that we need to change the discourse around inclusion to take account of the needs of those who feel excluded be that at an individual, community, national or global level.

The current narrative on citizenship and identity in Ireland is very fluid and incomplete. It reflects the struggle of a modern Ireland projecting an image of a country which is energetic, vibrant, economically sustainable and mature in terms of its ability to be inclusive and tolerant of difference and an Ireland which has historically seen Irish identity in very definite and confined terms. It is this friction which is being referred to by Fidèle Mutwarasibo in his article. He looks at issues of identity, citizenship and tolerance in an Ireland struggling to meet the demands placed on it by increasing levels of immigration. For Irish society this has created a new set of circumstances and demands which we seem ill-equipped to deal with. Perhaps we need to reassess what we mean when we talk about citizenship, what we believe to be active citizenship and how we promote it.

Much of the literature on citizenship refers to it as the ability to have influence on public life and the critical capacities for reflection, enquiry and debate. These, according to Clodagh Harris, are central to democratic citizenship education. But what of our record in this regard? Traditionally, democratic citizenship education has been given a low priority in the Irish education system. This remains the case today. It would seem that, over the years, what little has been done has been more concerned with developing the disposition and virtues for 'good' rather than 'active' citizenship. Unlike most other countries, Ireland still offers no senior cycle subject in social and political democratic education.

Indeed, it is only through a process of ongoing dialogic education which promotes critical thinking, debate and reflection that we will learn to be comfortable with who we are and find within ourselves the ability to listen to the voice of the 'other', the 'excluded, invisible' citizen. In the article by Anne Ryan and Helen Fallon one such site is described where students were encouraged to "consciously encounter their values and beliefs in order to reassess their view of the world, their place in that world and how they want to 'be' in the world" (p.37). Students discussed issues of citizenship through the literature of African women writers and related these to their own lives, thus creating the space and the time to learn about themselves and the 'other'.

In many respects the 'celtic tiger' narrative into which Ireland seems to have become locked doesn't allow us to acknowledge that side of our national character, those in our society who have failed to share in the spoils of the economic boom. It is this narrative which Tracey Connolly speaks of when she explores the relationship between educational disadvantage, early school leaving and one's ability to participate fully as an active citizen in Ireland today. She argues that the complex nature of educational disadvantage means that initiatives to combat it need to extend right across the spectrum from childhood to adulthood.

It is perhaps in adult education sites more than any other educational space that one encounters those who feel that sense of 'otherness', those who because of race, faith, age, ethnicity or disability feel excluded and marginalised. These are our 'invisible' citizens. Adult education with its emphasis on the needs of the learner and its creative methodologies creates space for meaningful engagement for many of our citizens who feel marginalised. For many it is their first meaningful engagement with the education system and a site which respects their sense of 'otherness' and difference. The remaining articles, Growing into Greatness, The Education Equality Initiative and the Citizen Learner and Why Positive Access Policies in Higher Education can Contribute to Active Citizenship provide concrete examples of how this sense of otherness can be respected and valued in the field of Adult Education and these are representative of the many, many examples of inclusive Adult Education taking place in learning sites throughout the country.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this edition and the members of the Editorial Board for their assistance. In particular this year I would like to



express my sincere gratitude to Kathleen Forde who has been a member of the Editorial Board for many years and has written regular book reviews for the journal. On behalf of us all I would like to wish Kathleen well in her retirement.

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# Citizenship, Education and Governance in a Global Context

KUMI NAIDOO

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*Knowing one's rights as a citizen, and how to exercise them, means more than going to the polling station. It entails taking an interest in the day-to-day problems of one's home town, keeping oneself informed and informing others of current political and social issues and, at the same time, helping to integrate vulnerable groups and minorities into the community, in a spirit of solidarity and of shared responsibility for civic affairs.*

*It is also a matter of inculcating more widespread awareness of the principles of socially responsible consumerism and of all forms of behaviour and measures that perpetuate and strengthen mechanisms for the direct and indirect practice of democracy.*

European Year of Citizenship through Education, 2005.

## **Introduction**

Two decades ago an adult who was innumerate and illiterate was considered to be at a great disadvantage in terms of navigating the challenges of individual personal growth and in terms of being able to participate actively in public life. However, today adults who are computer illiterate are considered to be at a similar disadvantage. The sad reality of civic education and education more broadly is that today, while a minority of the world's citizens speed off on the information superhighway, the majority, especially in developing countries, remain in potholes of disadvantage and exclusion from public deliberation and active democratic participation.

Compounding matters further is the reality that in a world of constrained resources for education, adult education, long the distant cousin of the broader educational family, remains badly under-funded in most societies around

the world. Sadly, many policy makers in developing and developed countries alike use a crude cost-benefit analysis to justify investment in children's education at the expense of adult education. This educational deficit has serious consequences for educational development generally and for the attainment of participatory democracy in particular. This challenge is all the more acute given the deepening democratic deficit that now reigns supreme in many countries around the world.

Given the above, we can easily see why many national elections are deeply flawed before the first ballot is cast. Adults who have been educationally deprived are more vulnerable to electoral manipulation. However, it is critically important for all of us today to ask the following questions: How democratic is our democracy? What do we need to do to democratise democracy? And here special mention is merited of those governments who see themselves as promoters of democracy and who might believe that they do not have to deal with their own deepening democratic deficits. For example, during the latest US Presidential elections, the fact that certain communities faced greater difficulty in casting their votes, the suspicions about the accuracy of the voting equipment and the power of incumbency (those in elected office are returned to office nearly 95% of the time) all suggest that the challenge of saving democracy is one that affects more countries in the world than many in power wish to admit. Broadening access to participation of all of humanity is the critical challenge of our time. But understanding the complexity of the moment of history we find ourselves in, and understanding the role of education to advance democratic participation, is critically needed at this juncture of human development.

### **Problematising Globalisation**

It is against this backdrop that we need to explore the global context in which democracy and citizenship are being reshaped. What has erroneously been called the "anti-globalisation" movement is ironically one of the most globalised movements of our time. Globalisation has drawn the people of the world into closer proximity with one another; it has intensified contact between them; lowered many – but certainly not all – types of barriers to the movement of goods, ideas, technology and cultural products; and accelerated the pace at which information is shared. One of the contradictions of globalisation though is that we have seen the curtailment, particularly post-September 11, of what we might call "international civic mobility". As an African, travelling on

an African passport, working at the global level, I often muse that if I were to write a book about my time in my current job, the title of the publication would be, “Visas, Bloody Visas”. While cheaper travel has increased the movement of many, there has never been such a high the level of legal restrictions on movements of people from poor countries to rich countries, unless they have distinctive skills that the developed economies need. Those adults from developing countries who have educational deficits, even if they are literate, face these problems most acutely.

It is the more benign aspects of globalisation that have made possible gatherings like the World Social Forum, where tens of thousands of people from scores of countries organise themselves to descend upon a chosen destination at a given time, using email and the internet to coordinate everything from the programme schedule and travel arrangements to the advance exchange of discussion papers. One of the achievements of the World Social Forum is the broad diversity of educational competency amongst its participants. The average participant at the World Economic Forum will have at least a first university degree or much more.

Yet it is other aspects of globalisation which cause these meetings to be called in the first place – it is the harsh contradictions of globalisation, its unevenness, its sheer cruelty, that is driving people to join forces in collective efforts to discuss and debate ways to harness the forces of globalisation for the common good. These critiques of globalisation are now well known:

- Globalisation is exacerbating global inequality, and its “rules,” to the extent we can call them that, appear to be driven by the rich at the expense of the poor. The relentless lauding of so-called “free trade” in fact masks a set of double standards that protect certain markets in wealthy countries and deny poor and developing countries the chance to benefit from the most promising segments of their own economies.
- Globalisation and the forces driving it are throwing up a set of intractable challenges which brazenly cross national borders and which, by their very definition, defy intra-national solutions. The spread of environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, the drug trade and terrorism are all enabled by globalisation.

- At the same time, the momentum toward economic, political and cultural integration weakens the ability of national governments to take actions in the national interest. Globalisation is having a seismic impact upon the traditional role of the state in service provision and is elevating the power of new actors, such as supranational governing institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and trans-national corporations. Local control over decision-making is rapidly shifting upwards to structures and processes that are not accountable to ordinary citizens.

Arguments about globalisation tend to occur in extreme terms – globalisation is often presented as either “all good” and full of promise for a better future, on one hand, or as irreparably flawed and diabolical, on the other. Yet globalisation is too complex and multi-faceted to be boiled down to a caricature. Independent surveys<sup>i</sup> conducted in Northern and Southern countries over the last two years reveal that citizens are ambivalent about globalisation: they hold generally favourable opinions about global integration, yet they are highly anxious about growing inequality and the loss of local control. They are also concerned about the non-economic dimensions of globalisation such as threats to local culture and the disappearance of indigenous languages.

The grassroots action we have been witnessing on the streets of Porto Alegre, in cyberspace, outside the headquarters of the World Bank and IMF, is emerging in direct response to a perception that, increasingly, important decisions affecting people’s lives and well-being are being made in non-transparent ways in supranational institutions that are not accountable to citizens and not accessible to citizen engagement. Decisions about trade rules, intellectual property rights, macro-economic restructuring policies, privatisation of vital public services and debt relief are being made behind closed doors in ways that are largely perceived to be undemocratic. These avenues of political action are deeply dependent on a range of educational competencies: basic literacy, numeracy, analytical capabilities, and the basic ability to cut through the bias of much of the media hype that is fed to citizens around the world.

It is against this backdrop that the notion of “civil society” has re-entered mainstream discourse. Civil society is, of course, not a new concept, but it is one that has been re-discovered over the past decade with this rise in citizen

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<sup>i</sup>Enviroics survey, 2001 and 2002.

activism. Unfortunately, in the media and in the minds of some people, views about civil society as a whole are often framed by the actions of its “un-civil” elements – groups who espouse violence and destruction, or who pursue racist or exclusionary goals. Furthermore, activists are often portrayed as “radicals” who are not interested in dialogue.

Yet, what the World Social Forum and recent global civil society gatherings have come to represent for many people around the world are spaces where the voices of average citizens, irrespective of their educational competencies, “count” in discussions about social, political and economic justice. They are venues where people and groups who feel increasingly alienated from the prevailing global system can join together to explore alternative visions for a more ethical form of globalisation that works for the benefit of average people, rather than simply for the benefit of powerful interests.

### **Civil Society in the Context of Globalisation**

Attempts to define civil society are often contested, but one way to think of it is in terms of the activities that are undertaken for the public good by groups or individuals in the space between the family, the state, and the market. This means that we must look today not only at non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – often taken as synonymous with civil society – but also at a rich array of heterogeneous civic elements that include trade unions, foundations, faith-based and religious groups, community-based organisations, social movements and networks and ordinary citizens who are active in the public sphere.

The last decade has witnessed a dramatic growth in the number of citizen groups and their capacity, scope, reach, public profile and influence. This ‘global associational revolution,’ as it has been called, is being driven by the same forces that are producing globalisation – democratisation, the spread of new technologies, and global integration of various forms – but it is also reacting to many of the effects of globalisation previously mentioned.

Historically, much of the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) has occurred at a micro-level, where they are involved in providing important services to vulnerable communities in areas as diverse as health care, education and professional training, legal advice, humanitarian relief, women’s empowerment, technical assistance in agriculture and environmental protection, and so on. Civil society groups have often stepped into the uneasy vacuum of post-

conflict situations and have compensated for the state – not without controversy – in the growing number of instances where vital public services have been rolled back due to macro-economic reforms.

Increasingly, however, civil society groups have recognised the need to rethink the well-known slogan “think globally, but act locally.” Experience has shown that acting locally will not get to the root cause of many social and economic problems – if the real locus of power is global, or regional, such as is increasingly the case for citizens in Europe as the European Union assumes a greater policy making remit than previously, then there is a need to “think locally and act globally” as well. A growing number of CSOs have become actively engaged in advocacy work, campaigning, and policy-making. Public campaigns on issues such as landmines, debt relief and the international criminal court have had a definable impact.

As civil society has matured, its credibility with outside audiences has grown. Many governments seek to harness the expertise and local knowledge of civil society groups in policy-making. High profile civil society groups, particularly those working around environmental issues, have developed a certain “brand recognition”; their endorsements or criticisms of business practices, for example, carry weight with the public and have become an important force with which the private sector must reckon. Perhaps most importantly, civil society groups generally enjoy a high level of public trust – in fact, a recent survey revealed that, among 17 institutions ranging from national governments to educational systems to media and the legal system, NGOs are the institutions most trusted by average citizens after their country’s armed forces.<sup>ii</sup>

### **The Challenges Facing Civil Society**

Accordingly, civil society is attracting a new level of scrutiny in its role as a major public actor. It is being forced to grapple with both external and internal challenges, from those who are seeking to make civil society stronger and more credible to those who question its right to play certain roles. I would like to touch briefly upon five of these challenges.

The first is a **challenge of power and power imbalances** within civil society. The sector is vibrant and extremely diverse. It encompasses both major trans-

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<sup>ii</sup> Study completed by the Canadian firm Environics and launched at the World Economic and Social Forums in January 2003.

national NGOs with multi-million dollar operating budgets and tiny citizen-based organisations with highly constrained resources, access to information and capacity. It embraces highly structured groups such as trade unions alongside loose issue-based social movements. While this diversity adds to the sector's richness it also throws up fundamental questions about whose voices are heard and in which venues, how resources are accessed and distributed, and who is speaking for whom.

The second challenge internal to civil society is **about bridging narrow interests and broader goals**. Many civil society actors are committed to advancing a specific issue, whether this involves protecting rainforests, promoting fair labour practices or advancing women's rights. While recent civil society activity has been noteworthy for the alliances that have been formed among groups with different areas of interest, there remains a type of "silo mentality" which prevents CSOs from working across areas of speciality towards common goals.

For example, dialogue between human rights organisations and development organisations has historically been weak and many potentially productive synergies have evaded us. With many human rights organisations now embracing social and economic rights, and with many development organisations adopting a rights-based approach to their work, it is an opportune time to bridge this divide. The dichotomy between the world of volunteering (defined as the provision of direct services to communities in need) and the world of social activism (defined as that which more is concerned with structural and policy change) remains a challenge. We also need to create an environment where, for example, NGOs rise to defend workers' rights of association in cases where trade union rights are threatened, and where trade unions vocally defend the rights of NGOs.

A third internal challenge for civil society is **to articulate a coherent vision for a more just and equitable global system**. One of the frequent criticisms of the so-called "anti-globalisation" movement is that it is against everything imaginable, but not for anything discernible. Although many within the movement are working proactively for social and economic justice, civil society is challenged to move beyond debate and ad-hoc mobilisations and formulate a strategy for achieving its vision. The core issue, however, may not be an absence of alternative visions, but rather the fact that the world's powerful governments appear to be unwilling to engage with these alternatives. As an exam-



ple, the 2001 study produced by Third World Network for the UNDP, entitled *The Multilateral Trading System: A Development Perspective*, provides a detailed set of recommendations for transforming the international trade system into an instrument for balanced and equitable human development. Yet because they seek to redress power imbalances, such visions are often rejected out of hand.

The fourth challenge is one that emanates from outside civil society. The allegation is made that **citizen activism threatens to undermine democratic systems** by “short-circuiting” established procedures for decision-making. This is a critique that we in civil society vehemently reject. An active, engaged citizenry is essential for a healthy democratic society. We must resist the notion that elections equal democracy, that a victory at the ballot box is a blank check to rule without any interface and dialogue with citizens in between election periods. To reduce democracy to the singular act of voting once every four or five years is clearly an error. Civic activism complements democratic practices and makes them more effective by drawing citizens more fully into public life and providing a constant check on official accountability.

Clearly, it does not make sense for political leaders to deprive themselves of the policy knowledge that civil society actors acquire from working directly with vulnerable communities. Who better to inform the drafting of a domestic violence law than women who work with survivors of such violence? Who better to inform the drafting of an adult literacy strategy than those that work day in and day out with adult learners in our communities? Who better to help craft a rural or urban development strategy than those that work on the ground addressing these issues? Studies show that engagement with citizen voices leads to more effective policies that better address the concerns of primary and secondary stakeholders, that integrate innovative ideas and knowledge from the local level, and that result in greater reach and ownership within communities.

The fifth challenge is perhaps the most complex of all, and is heard both inside and outside civil society. Here I am referring to the challenge of **legitimacy** and the related issues of transparency, representation and accountability.

Challenges to civil society’s legitimacy come from many quarters. They are often voiced by national political leaders and occasionally by prominent voices at global institutions. It is frequently said that civil society groups don’t repre-

sent the views of anyone but themselves and that if they are accountable at all, it is usually “upwards” to their funders, rather than “downwards” to those whom they purportedly serve.

Legitimacy cannot be taken for granted and must continuously be earned and civil society groups are taking up this challenge head on. Self-regulation mechanisms such as codes of ethics and standards of excellence have been adopted at the national level by civil society in several countries; a culture of transparency in governance structures is also gaining strength across the sector. Civil society groups work to derive mandates and legitimacy for their activities through extensive consultative processes.

There is also a powerful accountability factor in play with the functioning of CSOs, which CIVICUS calls the principle of “perform or perish.” Not a single cent secured to undertake CSO activities is secured on the basis of obligation. Whether funding is derived from a government department, individual, foundation, business organisation or multi-lateral institution, resources will not continue to be available if civic organisations are not performing on the basis of their vision, mission and objectives.

I would like to emphasise, therefore, that the issue of civil society legitimacy is a valid one – particularly when it is voiced with an eye to building up the long-term credibility and effectiveness of civil society as an actor. All too frequently, however, the critique is lodged by those who would dismiss the right of civil society groups to give voice to citizen concerns and to engage in decision-making processes.

### **Civil Society, the Crisis of Governance and the “Democracy Deficit”**

The view that government has a monopoly on truth and wisdom reflects an outdated notion of governance, one that sees it as the exclusive domain of governments. In the case of electoral systems, governance occurs through a system of representative democracy where citizens vote for individuals to represent them and leaders to make decisions on their behalf.

It is rapidly becoming a truism that this old notion of governance is breaking down in an era of globalisation with the emergence of a devastating “democracy deficit” in several local and national contexts, and certainly in a global context. There are declining levels of citizen trust in political institutions. In many

democratic systems the “form” has largely overtaken the “substance” of democracy: elections may be held, but fewer and fewer people are choosing to vote and the meaningful interface between citizens and the elected is minimal between election periods. Affiliation with traditional political parties is on the decline as the parties themselves are characterised by a lack of internal democracy or fail to address issues that citizens believe to be important. The influence of monied interests in many political systems is also turning citizens away from traditional engagement in favour of new forms of participation.

Although faith in traditional political institutions is waning this should not be taken as a sign of citizen apathy. On the contrary, people are finding new and more direct ways to get involved in public life and decision-making – marking a shift from representative democracy to what is often called participatory democracy. Citizens are arguing for a new notion of governance that requires political leadership to engage with citizenry in ways that allow for on-going input into decision-making and policy formation.

These new models take many forms, ranging from concerted attempts to build public-private partnerships to the establishment of transparency and oversight mechanisms, which allow civil society groups to play quasi-regulatory or watchdog functions. The Social Watch Network based in Uruguay is an excellent example of how civil society groups have taken the initiative to monitor progress on international commitments and to report publicly on findings. This type of public accountability mechanism is now widely regarded as an essential part of good governance.

Finally, civil society groups are slowly carving out a more active role in actual decision-making processes, as witnessed by their direct participation over the last decade in UN conferences, with some national governments including civil society participants in their delegations. Certain innovative international commissions involve civil society groups as equal stakeholders in policymaking, rather than in an after-the-fact consultative role.

While the space for civic participation in the global policy-making environment is growing, the overall picture overwhelmingly remains one where citizen voices are marginalised or are belatedly solicited after key decisions have been taken. Some key examples:

- The constrained status of CSO engagement can be seen in the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), perhaps the most important, albeit flawed in many respects, development initiative of our time. Although thousands of CSOs actively campaign around the issues that have been targeted in the MDGs, there was no significant role for civil society in the development of these goals. If the Millennium Goals are to be achieved, ordinary citizens around the world, whether they be literate or not, must feel a true sense of ownership and must be willing to campaign to hold their governments accountable to them. This can only happen if the MDGs are “owned” by the people and not appropriated by elements of the international system.
- If we were to ask ourselves to name the single most important act that a national government engages in annually, we would most probably agree that it is drawing up the national budget. In analysing budgets, we can see how much a government values children, gender equality, older people, education and so forth. However, when we look at the level of influence that parliamentarians have over the budgeting process, let alone that of civil society, it is frighteningly minimal in many systems of governance. What does this say about the quality of governance and the strength of democracy?
- If we reflect on the positions taken by certain governments with regard to the situation in Iraq, we find clear instances where governments blatantly disregarded the views of their backbench MPs, ignoring the views of their citizenry and, in some cases, crassly manipulating arguments and supposed “evidence” to support a military intervention that has provoked a devastating humanitarian crisis in Iraq that has threatened to polarise the world’s peoples even further.

To understand the voicelessness that so many citizens feel, we perhaps need to look more deeply at the discourse around social exclusion. In the coming decades humanity should judge itself not on the basis of the progress made by the most privileged sections of the global populace, but on the basis of the progress made by those that have been historically marginalised. This includes minority communities such as people living with HIV/AIDs, people with disabilities, racial, ethnic, religious and cultural minorities, indigenous peoples, people with alternative sexual orientations, people who are not literate and so on, and should also include constituencies not often thought of as minorities *per se*.

Young people are becoming increasingly alienated from public life. On my continent, given the decimation being caused by HIV/AIDS and the fundamental impact it is having on our demography, in very real ways young people are not simply the leaders of tomorrow, but are leaders of today as well. We must also consider older people and take note of the levels of alienation they feel and the fact that we deprive ourselves of their experiential wisdom. We must live up to the scandalous fact that, after decades of activism for full gender equality, women still occupy on average less than 10% of leadership positions in government and business. What does it say about the quality of our democracy when women are so heavily under-represented even in long standing democratic countries, let alone those that are fledgling democracies? When we add this all up, it becomes increasingly difficult to deny that the democratic voice does not prevail in public life and that we are facing a serious “democracy deficit” on multiple levels.

We do not suggest that civil society is intrinsically good and that governments are intrinsically bad. That is far too simplistic. However, we need to recognise that effective democracy needs a vibrant civil society as well as an effective and accountable government. Both face struggles of accountability, but they bring a vital diversity to governance and provide complementary and mutual accountability systems. We can anticipate that this arena will always be contested, but this should strengthen democratic practice rather than weaken it.

Given the shift of power from national to global levels, it has become a critical priority for civil society to be embraced at a global level, yet it is here that the “democracy deficit” is felt most strongly. Many of the global institutions that have become increasingly powerful in our current age were constructed at a particular moment in world history that is a far cry from the context we currently find ourselves within. The geopolitics of 1945 continue to dominate the governance structures of key institutions, even at this point deep into the post-colonial era. We need to concede that many of these public institutions appear to be operating under rules that are not in keeping with the realities that citizens confront around the world today. Clearly the time has come for a revamping of governance institutions within a more visionary framework that puts the interests of people at the centre of our deliberations.

### **Implications for Adult Education**

Ensuring that citizens have a basic educational competency to be able to receive a broad spectrum of information and make up their minds about their own views and perspectives is critically necessary for addressing the macro challenges identified above. Too many citizens are spectators in a game of governance when they should indeed be central players at the local, national and global levels.

Seeking a more innovative and creative role for the mainstream media to offer citizens these alternative perspectives is a critical success factor for enabling participation. In the electronic media environment the notions of “infotainment and edutainment” have gained some currency over the last two decades even though much more needs to be done.

While we seek ways to advance educational empowerment for adults we need to recognise that there are many brilliant leaders who have not been able to read and write and some of the most inspirational leaders in society are sometimes those who were too poor to secure educational progress in their own lives. In Africa, for example, the substantial reach of radio suggests that citizens who are educationally underprivileged can still participate in debates and participate actively in public life. The sad reality of broadening educational access to adults is that those who gravitate towards educational opportunities are those who are relatively educationally “rich” already. This challenges civil society generally and adult education practitioners specifically to promote the notion of life long learning more vigorously.

We live in times of immense and rapid change, and unless adults are continually being enabled to continue to advance their educational skills and knowledge they will soon find that their ability to participate is diminished. We can see that whereas in the past seeking democracy was simply a local and national affair, with intensifying globalisation we now need the knowledge and the skills to analyse and understand how global discourse, global institutions and global practices effect our democratic reality at the domestic level.

### **Final Thoughts**

Few would contest that we are in the midst of one of the most volatile and dangerous periods of world history. New threats to our security – both natural and human-made – challenge us like never before to find common ground in the

pursuit of social justice and sustainable development. I would argue that, if this is to be successful in the long run, we are facing a double challenge of reinventing democracy, along the lines discussed above, and reinventing a viable, equitable and just economic system that is premised less on the imperative of crude economic growth and more on a model that marries environmental sustainability, poverty eradication and broad-based development. Failure to include notions of justice, equity and fairness in this process will be fatal indeed.

The gap in inequality is growing, and with it the space for dialogue and common ground may be shrinking irrevocably. The recent public assertion by none other than the UK Trade Secretary that there is an incontrovertible link between peace and prosperity, between destitution, war, conflict and terrorism, is an unusually explicit one for a top figure in a wealthy government. But Patricia Hewitt's remarks echo the concerns of hundreds of thousands of us in civil society who fear the consequences if current trends are allowed to continue unchecked.

One of the challenges that we face is not to allow current institutional limitations to constrain our ability to envision a different kind of governance framework. We have to pose some bold questions about the fundamental changes that are needed to create a framework that is more fair and equitable than the one we are currently working within, and that has a realistic chance of delivering social, political and economic justice. We must question the prevailing logic of a system that enables the movement of capital, but not of people, across boundaries; a financial system that essentially rewards unemployment and consolidates a notion of jobless growth; a system that rewards rampant over-consumption rather than grappling with the challenge of sustainable development.

Our vision should be of a world where citizens and the groups they choose to organise are regarded as legitimate stakeholders, not only by the public, among whom they already enjoy high levels of trust, but by governance institutions who value engagement and recognise the many benefits it brings.

Our vision should be of a world where those of us who are serious about the long term future of this planet address these questions, as difficult and as intractable as they are, honestly, courageously and with a commitment to ensuring that the views of not only government and business are considered, but also those of citizen groups working at the local, national and global levels.

Failure to do this will leave us charged by future generations with tinkering with incremental adjustments here and there, when what is required is a fundamental rethink of a national and international governance architecture that is rooted in notions of democracy, social and economic justice and sustainability.

In conclusion, we all face the challenge of doing our work in our different institutional environments in ways in which we ensure that we respect and value the integrity, wisdom and contributions that the poor themselves can bring to the development process. The poor should be considered as full citizens and not simply victims, as full citizens and not simply recipients, as full citizens and not merely beneficiaries or charity cases. Every single human being that walks this planet has the potential to make a positive contribution to public life, whether he or she be educationally privileged or not. The challenge for all of us as citizens is to ensure that we create just, meaningful and relevant ways in which this contribution can be harnessed for the public good. Unless we put people, and particularly those who have been historically excluded, at the centre of public life, our development goals will continue to evade us.

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# From Emigration to Immigration: New Dawn for an Intercultural 21st Century Ireland

FIDÈLE MUTWARASIBO

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## Context

Within the course of a decade Ireland has emerged from being a country of emigration to a country of immigration. Since the mid-1990s, Ireland has undergone rapid economic expansion with the recent economic growth resulting in approximately 252,000 migrants entering Ireland over the last 6 years, according to the Irish Times (2003). While a large number of these are returning Irish nationals, there has been a significant increase of non-Irish nationals from outside the European Economic Area (EEA<sup>i</sup>) and Switzerland entering the country, primarily as temporary migrant workers. Additionally, the number of people applying for refugee status has increased from 39 in 1992 to just over 10,000 in the year 2001. Know Racism<sup>ii</sup>, the national anti-racism programme, suggested that in 2002, 116,588 non-EEA nationals registered with immigration officials nationally. It was estimated at the time that there were 160 different nationalities living in Ireland. Economists have been suggesting that we will need up to 50,000 immigrants annually to keep up with our economic growth in the next 10 years or so.

In the 2002 census there was a question about ‘nationality’ rather than ‘ethnicity’; of those who filled the relevant box, 91.6% stated that they were Irish and a further 1.3% stated that they had Irish and another nationality. Of the 5.8% who stated that they were not Irish or part-Irish, about half were British and the remainder came from other parts of the world (32,801 EU excluding UK, 26,235 other European, 26,515 Africa, 28,132 Asia, 29,119 America including South America and 8,363 Antipodes).

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<sup>i</sup>EEA: European Economic Area (EU Member States and Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein)

<sup>ii</sup>Know Racism – The National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme (updated in March 2002): Information Pack. See [www.knowracism.ie/pdfs/info\\_pack.pdf](http://www.knowracism.ie/pdfs/info_pack.pdf).

It should be stressed that there are variations in the legal status of non-EEA/Swiss nationals who have come to Ireland, including categories such as: ‘migrant workers’, ‘family members of migrant workers’, ‘family members of EEA Swiss-nationals’, ‘business people’, ‘visitors’, ‘refugees’, ‘asylum seekers’ and people who have been granted ‘leave to remain’. Over time some of today’s immigrants will become Irish citizens through naturalisation and others, legislation permitting, will acquire permanent residency. The current generation of immigrants will give way over time to the second, third, and so on generation of ethnic minorities.

### **Identity**

Immigration into Ireland has revitalised debates on Irish identity. According to Johnson (1994), ethnically, the Irish nation is a pluralist hybrid of Firbolgs, Celts, Vikings, Normans, English, Scottish, Huguenots, etc. He argues that racial purity in the case of the Irish is blatant nonsense. In material published by Know Racism (2002)<sup>iii</sup>, it is argued that minority ethnic groups have been, are and will continue to be an integral part of modern Irish society. Yet, definitions of ‘identity’ – particularly national identity – typically involve a strong distinction between the “internal other” and the “ultimate other”. For example, Ireland’s “internal others” prior to the recent immigration waves, included such groups and communities as Protestants, Jews, Travellers, Black Irish, Irish-Chinese, Lone Parents, Gays and Lesbians, etc. Socio-economic status also serves as an identity marker in the Irish context. For example, in Dublin there is a stigma attached to having an address in flat complexes such as Dolphin House, St Michael’s Estate, Fatima Mansions and Ballymun. This is the case in Cork for those living in Knocknaheeny and those living in Corrib Park, Galway. “Ultimate others” are generally those deemed to be complete outsiders. The “ultimate others” are often graded. In Ireland, for example, migrant workers are on top of the scale and asylum seekers are on the bottom of the scale.

Jacobs and Maier (1998) argue that the concept of identity can only be used with respect to individuals. They argue, however, that individuals do not live on their own, but associate in groups and communities and this association will have consequences for their identities. The concept of identity involves

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<sup>iii</sup> Know Racism – The National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme (updated in March 2002): Information Pack. See [http://www.knowracism.ie/pdfs/info\\_pack.pdf](http://www.knowracism.ie/pdfs/info_pack.pdf).

two processes: “self-identification” (the way a social actor identifies him/herself) and “categorisations” (identification takes place within parameters imposed by various more or less powerful actors). According to Turner (1982, p.18), group identification has meaning when “we associate ourselves with certain groups and contrast ourselves with others”. Weldon (2003, p.3) claims that “the presence of difference is what creates identity and social meaning for individuals”. Kertzer and Arel (2002, p.5) claim that “the use of identity categories in censuses and in other mechanisms of state administration creates a particular vision of social reality. All people are assigned to a single category, and hence are conceptualised as sharing, with a certain number of others, a common collective identity.” However, Jacobs and Maier (1998) emphasise that identity is not static, but dynamic; hence no form of identity is ever complete or totally stable. On the other hand, they claim that identity should not be conceived of as a loose patchwork but as a more or less integrated symbolic structure with time dimensions (past, present, future) and which provides important competencies to individuals such as assuring continuity and consistency.

### **Citizenship**

Identity and citizenship are related but do not necessarily have the same meaning. Castles and Miller (1998) argue that the laws on citizenship or nationality derive from two competing principles: “*ius sanguinis*” (based on descent from a national of the country concerned) and “*ius soli*” (based on birth in the territory of the country). Changes in relation to acquiring citizenship by birth in Ireland were introduced in January 2005 following the June 2004 citizenship referendum. Increasingly, entitlement to citizenship grows out of long-term residence in the country: the “*ius domicili*” concept. It is worth noting that spouses of Irish nationals may acquire citizenship through “*post-nuptial declaration*”. This provision will cease to exist after November 30th, 2005 due to amendments to the nationality legislation enacted in November 2002. In some countries they have the concept of “denizen” that refers to immigrants who have not acquired citizenship but have permanent residency. They are afforded rights and entitlements over and above those considered short-term residents.

### **Case Studies**

Experiences of Irish citizens, who happen not to be Caucasians, in claiming their Irishness have been mixed. The following three case studies illustrate these experiences. The case studies are drawn from real stories that the author

came across over the last 2 years. The names and other biographical details have been changed to keep the anonymity of those concerned.

1. In 1998, Kofi (originally from Ghana), his wife (Fatuma) and children (Mustafa, Ayub and Amina) moved to a new estate in a Dublin suburb. All things seemed to be going very well and everyone seemed to be very welcoming, “on the surface at least”. The family was very optimistic because they were moving from a tiny flat into a house. Having been granted permission to work based on parentage of an Irish citizen child and subsequently naturalisation, Kofi had finally found “a dream job” having previously struggled to find a job commensurate with his skills and experience. It seemed that nothing could go wrong. After a few days though, children next door started calling the children names. The names called related not only to their skin colour but also to the fact that Amina and her Mum were wearing “Hijabs.” This was not a new experience for the family and they hoped that this was going to be temporary. Eventually, some individuals from the community who were appalled by their experience became very supportive and this made a big difference for the family.
2. Muhammad and Zainabu arrived in Ireland from Afghanistan in 2000 having been victims of abuse by the Taliban regime. They applied and were subsequently granted refugee status. Shortly after they arrived in Ireland, they met Mary McDonald who worked as a development worker in the Lebanon. She met them and took them under her wing. She became their “surrogate mother”, taking the place of their parents who died in the late 1990s during the war. The couple recently became Irish citizens through naturalisation. Their two children (born in Ireland) enjoy paying a visit to Mary, “their surrogate grandmother”. Although sometimes they are victims of verbal racial abuse, they feel accepted, especially by Mary.
3. Frances Sutton was born in the early 1980s from a mixed “race” marriage. Her father (Brian) met her mother (Louise) when he was travelling in India during his gap year after college. Up to the age of 4, Frances had not realised that she was different. Having said that, she used to hear people admiring the ‘tan’ of her skin. When she went to school, she started experiencing subtle forms of bullying from her col-

leagues. A number of her classmates were very supportive and friendly which alleviated her experiences. She made a decision from the age of 10 that she was going to go to a British University on completion of her Leaving Certificate. She felt that the situation in relation to her “categorisation” was going to be different in the UK since they had many more people from ethnic minority communities. Recently Frances went to Paris with her classmates. They decided to pay a visit to an Irish pub. Irish people she met in the pub recognised her “Dublin accent”, however, they questioned her Irishness. Her British classmates were surprised that Frances’s Irishness was an issue of contention just because of her skin colour.

These three case studies outline the mixed nature of the experiences of members of the ethnic minorities in Ireland. Different individuals react differently to their experiences. Human nature tends to take the positive experiences for granted and yet even one negative experience sticks in people’s memory for a while. Raven and Whelan (1976) write that a survey on the attitudes towards minorities conducted in 1970 revealed that 61% of the interviewees believed that they would be justified in imposing on others something they believed to be good. Subsequently, Mac Gréil (1997) revealed that a large survey in Dublin in 1972-73 concluded that there was a relatively high level of dormant or latent racism and a moderately high degree of intolerance against political and social outgroups. According to Weldon (2003), Ireland has low social tolerance and high political tolerance.

### **Tolerance**

Weldon (2003) argues that tolerance is a fundamental and necessary value of pluralistic democracies. Sullivan et al. (1982) and Sniderman (1996) stress that tolerance requires citizens to uphold and secure the right of groups, even those they find objectionable, to participate fully in political, social and economic life. Weldon (2003, p.1) concludes that failure to respect the rights of all and tolerate minority voices may lead to “social and economic oppression”, or “tyranny of the majority.” According to Walzer (1997) tolerant attitudes may include a genuine openness, curiosity, and perhaps respect for different ideas and groups, or at a greater extreme, an enthusiastic endorsement of difference for its own sake. Thus, according to this theory of tolerance, and bearing in mind the mixed experiences of non-Caucasian Irish people as well as the future immigration trends, it is very important to reconstruct the notions and identi-

fications associated with 'Irishness' if the intercultural society that we aspire to is to become a reality in today's Ireland.

Castles and Miller (1998) argue that trends towards the political inclusion of minorities and cultural pluralism can threaten the mainstream constructions of national identity, especially in countries in which it has been constructed in exclusionary ways. According to Delgado-Moreira (2000), societies, regardless of their size, have always been involved in a continuous carousel of identity construction and destruction. No society can resist the absence of differences as organising principles; nor can it keep the same borders forever. He suggests that the concept of diversity stresses the need to agree on fundamental rules (including ideas and values of what is good and just) precisely because they cannot be taken for granted. These ideas will need to be represented so that they can be known, shared and enforced by diverse communities. Such representations must also be consistent and articulated in the rules of a society.

Reflecting on the post-apartheid era in South Africa, Seepe (2002, p.2) argues that "the process of identity definition and formation is linked to the inauguration of a new cultural, political and human consciousness". Castells (1997, p.8) identified three forms and origins of identity including '*legitimising*', '*resistance*' and '*project identities*'. Dominant institutions and those who are marginalised by the establishment respectively generate legitimising and resistance identities. They both devalue and stigmatise people and have negative connotations. Project identity on the other hand comes about "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure" (ibid, p.8).

The reconstruction of identity requires, according to Jacobs and Maier (1998), the relativisation and subordination of differences between individuals and groups. In other words, differences have to become secondary or superficial because of a common "we" which discriminates between 'the people' and those who are 'outsiders' of the nation. Hall (1986), Keith and Pile (1993) suggest the need for interpreting identity as a process rather than an outcome. For the newcomers, according to Prestreshi (2003), the diasporic experience offers a unique context and opportunity for redefining and transforming identities because it offers a re-negotiation between circumstances both in the country of origin as well as in the host country.

### **Role of Adult Education**

Education plays a critical role in the reconstruction of identity. According to Salt (1985), the multi-positionality of diasporans in and between two cultures (homeland and new home) makes education a prime vehicle of identity reconstruction by pulling people towards integration, whilst at the same time becoming a focus of resistance stemming from homeland identity. As the Irish nation becomes more and more intercultural, it is time to start thinking about what it means to be Irish in the context of the current demographic situation. This debate can get inspiration from the project identity concept. It is better to act now rather than wait for troubles in the future to redefine who “we” are. Education, both in the formal and informal sector, will play a vital role in the reconstruction of Irishness.

Adult education has a crucial role to play in the reconstruction of Irishness. On the one hand, adult education offers a second chance to those who did not get the opportunity to learn about diversity through the formal education acquired in the past and to familiarise themselves with the realities of today’s diverse and intercultural Ireland. On the other hand, just like today’s school-going generation, adult learners have a chance to meet with people from the ethnic minorities through the education setting.

Adult education offers a unique setting in so far as it offers the opportunity for participants to participate in discussions without worrying too much about exams associated with the formal system of learning. Issues around diversity and immigration are sometimes emotional and adult education is better positioned for rational discussions stemming from such emotive issues. It is also fair to say that the response to immigration from the general public has been great in as far as volunteering in immigrant/refugee support groups is concerned. It is the case that some of the participants in adult education have an interest in the discussions on immigration and diversity. In having balanced discussions, adult education participants will acquire knowledge and information that they will be in a position to pass on to members of their family and those with whom they have regular interaction.

It is critical for adult education providers to include modules on anti-racism, cultural diversity, globalisation and immigration in adult education programmes. The delivery of such modules will stimulate rational discussions and this will help in dispelling the myths about immigration and the rights and entitlements of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland.

Innovative initiatives such as intercultural food fairs, mentoring programmes and other intercultural activities will enhance the potential of adult education participants in the reconstruction of Irishness. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for adult education providers and society at large.

The adult education programmes with anti-racism, diversity, globalisation and immigration modules, coupled with interaction with immigrants both direct and indirect will, over time, inspire participants in adult education programmes to play an active role in the redefinition of Irishness. As MacEinri (2002) suggests, multiculturalism and integration are not just about the foreigners in our midst, but also about accepting diversity in the broadest sense. Adult education has the potential to offer the participants the tools to participate actively in the discussions on the redefinition of “Irishness”. It offers also the opportunity to participants to engage within a group setting and, indeed, with the wider society in dealing with the myths associated with “otherness”, and more specifically with the “ultimate others”.

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# Citizenship: A Way of Being *in* One's World and *of* One's World

ANNE RYAN AND HELEN FALLON

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## **Introduction**

This article explores the global dimensions of citizenship. By way of contextualising the discussion, the authors describe a component of a course that was designed to introduce students to the lives of people they may otherwise never have had an opportunity to encounter. Our challenge, as we saw it, was to reveal the humanity, individuality and ordinariness of these 'strangers'. The purpose was to gain an insight into the perspectives and values of those who differ from us in significant ways so that we can empathise with them and better appreciate the varied cultural, social and economic contexts that shape the world we all share. We used literature as the means to gain easy access to a range of diverse cultural perspectives. In particular, we selected novels by African women writers. The focus was on what the stories revealed about the everyday joys and cares of the characters rather than on the literary merit of the novels.

Three fundamental principles permeate our approach to citizenship. The first is a belief that awareness and understanding are vital to build a strong civil society because they counter the forces that alienate or disconnect people from each other. The second is that those whose 'voices' have been silenced cannot participate in their society and their exclusion impoverishes the community as a whole. The third is that the primary purpose of a strong civil society is not to fill gaps in the state's provision of services but rather it is to ensure that a multitude of arenas exist where important ethical as well as practical issues can be discussed with a view to creating informed public opinion.

### **What is meant by citizenship?**

This year, 2005, has been declared the 'European Year of Citizenship through Education'. Documents<sup>1</sup> produced as guides to support educators in their efforts to promote citizenship make it clear that citizenship refers to more than a legal status; being an active citizen entails a level of continuous and meaningful engagement in the public sphere. The ways in which people relate to each other determine the quality of this engagement.

The active citizen is generally described as one who has: the opportunity and capacity to participate in shaping the society in which s/he lives; an ability to appreciate difference; and a desire to promote social cohesion. Although the emphasis is on involvement in the local community, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the local and the global are intrinsically linked. Being active at the local level calls for an appreciation of the economic and social forces that can be felt locally but have their origin in distant places. Similarly, decisions taken locally impact elsewhere. Appreciating the complexities of problems such as environmental degradation, conflict, natural disasters and the movement of refugees, requires a global perspective. Therefore, in order for citizens to have the capacity to participate in shaping their local community they need to understand the links that connect peoples and places well beyond their locality and national borders.

### **Creating Citizenship through Education**

Education has been designated as the medium to promote citizenship. Like citizenship, education conveys a sense of on-going process rather than a fixed position. Latin scholars tell us that 'educare' means 'to lead out gently'. It is less about learning new information and more about revealing what we already know. This definition sits well with the radical adult education approach that informs the course under review here. It implies (i) making space for those voices that are not usually heard and at the same time (ii) undermining the conventional and unconscious discourses that shape our ways of thinking and everyday behaviours. In a Freirean (1972) sense the goal is to become reflective, to become an observer of our own behaviour so that we can probe the meanings and inferences of what we take for granted.

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<sup>1</sup> See Council of Europe publications listed in the reference section at the end of the article.

The task of promoting citizenship through education, as we saw it, was to reframe our emotional and intellectual understanding of what it is to belong to a local and global community and in so doing become conscious of our assumptions about people whom we perceive as geographically or culturally distant. We wanted to create the conditions that would make it possible for students to consciously encounter their values and beliefs in order to reassess their view of the world, their place in that world and how they want to 'be' in the world.

### **Who were the students?**

The students around whom this learning experience was built were undertaking a BA in Community Studies. This is a degree designed for part-time mature students. In the main these students are aged between 30 and 45. Approximately three quarters are women. For the duration of the degree, most have to juggle family, work and study commitments. As one would expect, these adults bring with them a wealth of experience that greatly enriches the learning across the entire course. Finding ways to tap into this experience was an important consideration in designing the learning experience described here.

### **How We Constructed the Learning Experience**

This learning experience was located within a module entitled Development Theories. The module explores (i) the beliefs that have shaped development interventions over the past fifty years and (ii) the statistical data that illustrate on-going wealth / poverty divides, gender inequalities and such like. We wanted students to further explore these theories and statistics through reading at least one of the works of nine African women authors who either wrote in English or were available in translation in English.

The writers were chosen because they give a perspective on issues of citizenship that transcend religion and nationality and are therefore of universal concern. The topics included: the impact of national and international conflict on women's lives and roles; the experience of colonisation; the barriers that make it difficult for women and girls to access education; constraints posed by economic dependence; the importance of motherhood and children in defining a woman's identity and the psychological and social problems that childlessness induces. These were all issues the students had encountered at a theoretical level within the module. We hoped that through the novels these issues would be re-encountered within the intimacy of individual lives and so elicit responses beyond those of the purely intellectual.

### **Why African Authors?**

In terms of development Africa is the continent where the gap between the wealth of the west and the poverty of the rest, evidence of environmental degradation, and the impact of wars, gender and religious-based discrimination are blatantly evident. It is also a continent of great natural beauty, close-knit, strong communities and renowned storytellers. The combination of these problems and strengths drew us to this literature.

### ***Talking with paper: the shift from the oral to the written***

The early African writers in the 1950s belonged to a generation to whom “this thing of talking with paper” – to borrow a phrase from the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka – was new. Many people do not know how to write in their first language. There is little indigenous publishing other than school textbooks and religious tracts. The fact that Africa has primarily an oral culture means there is no tradition of reading as a leisure activity. To sit and read is, in many cultures, regarded as anti-social behaviour. The on-going shift from the oral to the written emanates from the drive towards modernisation that accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century.

### **In Search of a Reader**

The vast majority of African literature is written in English, French and Spanish, reflecting the colonial past. The economics of publishing and the range of languages within a country (Sierra Leone, a country the same size as Ireland with a similar population, has over six languages) militate against the likely development of indigenous African language publishing. The cost of books is also a consideration. Most books cost more than the average civil servant earns in a month. These factors, combined with an overall low literacy rate in most of the African continent, make it necessary, for those who want to make their living from writing, to look overseas for the type of international audience and market necessary to earn a living.

### **The Struggle of African Women Writers to be ‘heard’**

In selecting women writers we wanted to encounter voices that are not generally heard within development literature or within literature in general. The experience of African women as writers, echoes the silencing and exclusion their fictional characters struggle to overcome.

Among the first anthologies of writing by black Africans was *Native Voices: an Anthology of Native African Writing*, published in 1958, in which 2 of the 37 African voices are female. Women fared little better in subsequent anthologies. The establishment of the UK-based Heinemann African Writers series in 1962 was the first major effort to promote African literature. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was the first book published in the series. Achebe's theme was the clash between colonial and mission institutions and traditional African society. This was a theme addressed by a number of the first generation of African writers.

Most of the writers in the series came from families where they, or their parents, were the first generation to attend western style schools. The vast majority of these writers were male. Exceptions, such as the publication of Nigerian Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* in 1966, (Achebe sent her a guinea to post her manuscript to Heinemann in London) were rare.

The predominance of male writers reflects the colonial bias which favoured the education of males and the fact that the first generation of sub-Saharan women writers – Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana), Flora Nwapa (Nigeria), Grace Ogot (Kenya), Efua Sutherland (Ghana) and Bessie Head (South Africa) – were largely ignored in the emerging African literary criticism. In the 1980s, with the strengthening of the women's movement internationally, female African writers received more attention. However, it wasn't until Charlotte Brunner and later Yvonne Vera (1999) produced collections devoted exclusively to African women writers that many new writers were made known to an international English speaking audience. Despite these efforts and the global literary boom during the closing decades of the twentieth century, many African women writers remain unknown.

In selecting women writers we wanted to make space for the voices of these writers and for the voices of their characters.

### **Student Responses**

Students were asked to read at least one<sup>2</sup> of the range of novels and to respond to the content on two levels. First, there was a discussion of the stories with a view to (i) getting to know the characters (ii) identifying the forces that shaped the events that are depicted in the stories (iii) speculating on the values that

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<sup>2</sup> We were surprised to find that many students had read two or more of the novels.

underpinned the behaviours of the main characters. Second, students were given an option to write an assignment that used one or more of the texts to demonstrate the impact of dominant development theories on the lives of individuals, families and communities.

In the discussion students talked about the book(s) they had read and their responses to the perspectives and events they encountered. The facilitators added information about the authors when appropriate. The discussion was animated and moved easily between the different novels and the characters. The cross cutting themes of poverty, gender and power generated the most discussion.

In the novels students encountered African women who are resourceful, strong and resilient and determined to break through barriers imposed by tradition and society on their sex. The texts described life from a woman's point of view giving the female perspective on issues like polygamy, marriage, love, motherhood and relationships, education, economic independence and the impact of national and international conflict on society. Through the skill of the writers, the students saw the characters in the novels as real people, grappling with universal issues.

### **Exploring Difference**

“The African lassie was from a really well to do family. The lad she fancied was an ordinary lad. His father was a plumber or something like that,” ...was how one student explained the background to the short story *The Museum* by the Sudanese writer Leila Aboulela. He described how being brought up on images of Biafra, Band Aid, famine and wars, it seemed like a role reversal. He had expected her to be poor. *The Museum* is one of the stories in Aboulela's collection *Coloured Lights*. Many of these stories illuminate Muslim immigrant experience in Britain. They are about people who are in an in-between space between cultures. Students loved these lyrical and evocative short stories which provoked much discussion about how different belief systems can be accommodated in our increasingly diverse society and how difference can be a source of growth, strength and solidarity.

### **The Pressure to Succeed**

“Her husband was so horrible to her. It was horrific what happened in Germany. She thought she was going to be so well off when she got to Europe,” a women in the group said about Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* – the tragic story of Mara's transformation from a Ghanaian village girl to a prostitute in

a German brothel. Mara believed her husband Akobi when he told her: “In Britain the people are so rich that they throw fridges away. And in Germany they throw cars away”. “Could people in African countries really believe this?” one man asked.

Students were interested to learn that the author Amma Dark had worked in Germany and, while there, met women from Ghana and other West African countries who worked as prostitutes. Talking of these women and their families back home Darko said: “The expectations put pressure on the women there. They don’t have the heart to disappoint their people... Apart from that there are financial situations. People would really part with things to help you go. A brother would sell a plot of land meant for the whole family, and the family would say that’s OK, because we know if you go, you will come back and buy more plots”. Darko admitted that because she was only able to get low paid work in Germany, she felt she had disappointed her family on her return home.

Some of the students had relatives or friends who had gone to England or the United States in the past. Like the African emigrants, their family back home had expectations, and the same regular remittances formed a vital part of family income.

### **Citizenship as Status**

Themes of emigration and exile – the desire for a better life, a new citizenship – ran through a number of the novels. “Bits of it were lovely, but it was difficult to understand,” was the response to Bessie Head’s novels, which draw on her experience of being coloured – a particular South African term to refer to a person of mixed birth – and her desire to cast off the citizenship of South Africa, a country which she described as “a place where it is impossible for black people to dream”. After seven years in neighbouring Botswana, Head was eventually granted citizenship and made a new home for herself and her son.

Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen*, the loosely autobiographical novel based on Emecheta’s experience of finding herself on her own with five children to support on social welfare in 1970s London, drew parallels with Nigerian women in Ireland and the citizenship debate surrounding the rights of children of non-nationals born in Ireland.



## Women and Education

The need for female education, as a route to economic independence, featured in many of the stories. In *Women are Different*, by Nigerian Flora Nwapa, pupils from two schools meet to debate the topic “that the education of girls is a waste of money”. Further south on the continent the Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga portrays in *Nervous Conditions* – the first novel to be published in English by a black Zimbabwean woman – a girl called Tambu who sells mealies (corn) to raise the money to attend a local school. Her father and her uncle – a teacher – believe that their limited money must be spent on the education of her brother. Marriage laws govern their thinking to some extent. Any money Tambu earns will go to the family she marries into – and this is a society where a woman must marry to be valued.

In her autobiography *Head Above Water*, the Nigerian Buchi Emecheta relates how she had to fight to be allowed to attend school with her brother. Eventually her parents agreed in the hope it would increase the bride price she would fetch. Emecheta, in her novel *In the Ditch*, describes her efforts to get a university education, when she is separated and living in poverty in London with five children, at the age of 22. At the same age her fellow Nigerian Chinua Achebe graduated from the newly established University of Ibadan, later going to study broadcasting with the BBC in London. Many of the students, who have themselves struggled to return to education, empathised with the experiences of these women.

## Motherhood

The only novel on the course which covered the position of women in a pre-colonial rural society was *Efuru*, by Nigerian Flora Nwapa. Those that read it found it challenging. *Efuru* is a beautiful and prosperous young woman living in a traditional precolonial Igbo society. Her only child dies in infancy. She is destined to remain childless because a local river goddess has chosen her as a companion. This was a strange and alien story to the students.

They found the Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta much easier to relate to when dealing with the same topic – the psychological and social problems that childlessness induces. In her novel *The Joys of Motherhood* Nnu Ego, from an Igbo village, returns to her family home in shame when she fails to become pregnant as a new bride. Her father sends her to Lagos to marry another man. Nnu Ego believes that if she can have a child fulfilment and security in old age will be hers. She becomes the mother of eight children. When her husband inherits his

brother's three wives after his brother's death he brings one of them to share the house in Lagos with Nnu Ego. While polygamy can work in rural societies where each wife can have their own household, it does not sit well in this new urban environment. Nnu Ego strives to educate her sons who, once well educated, emigrate. At the end of her life Nnu Ego dies by the roadside "with no child to hold her hand no friend to talk to her".

### **Polygamy**

The issues raised in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, a poignant look at polygamy through the eyes of a woman, were found to be quite challenging. Ba explores polygamy and wife inheritance – both permitted under Islamic law – against a background of French culture and Islamic beliefs in post independence Senegal. The novel is written in the form of a letter from the recently widowed Ramatoulaye to her friend Aissatou. She uses the period of mourning prescribed by Islamic law to write a letter, almost a diary, reflecting on her life and the life of her friend Aissatou. Five years before his death, and after 25 years of marriage, Ramatoulaye's husband Modou decided to take a second wife, a girl the same age as their daughter. Hurt and betrayed Ramatoulaye resigns herself to being a co-wife. However, Modou decides to cut himself off from his first family, leaving Ramatoulaye to provide for their twelve children. "He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account," she tells her friend. This novel generated discussion about the status of women even in societies where we assume equality exists.

### **Importance of Marriage**

Of the two novels by Ghana's best known woman author Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy*, which uses a mélange of genres – narrative, poetry, drama – was regarded as very difficult. This probably related to the students' experience of previous study of literature as the study of precise forms, e.g. poetry, drama and narrative. Shifting and merging such forms was something that was new to them. Students preferred *Changes*, Aidoo's novel which explores the role or absence of a role for a well-educated divorced woman in modern Ghana. Esi, a divorced middle class woman opts to become a second, or junior wife, to Ali, rather than live life as a single woman in a society which does not acknowledge the existence of single women.

The story is told from a number of viewpoints. Fusena, Ali's educated Muslim wife, has given up the hope of getting a university degree in order to bring up

their children and support her husband's career. "And now here was Ali telling her that he was thinking of making a woman with a university degree his second wife. So Allah, what was she supposed to say? What was she supposed to do?" She goes to the older women in Ali's family, some of whom are second, third and fourth wives. They ask themselves why so little has changed for their daughters "school and all".

### **Reflecting on the Bigger Picture**

Students related the themes in the novels to their own life and work experience. They discussed discrimination in Irish society based on gender, disability and poverty. There was some disagreement as to whether the differences in the extent of the discrimination here and in the novels made for any kind of realistic comparison. The majority argued that discrimination here tends to be more subtle but is nonetheless as debilitating as that described in the literature. Others pointed to the rigidities of society that dominated their childhood and early adult lives and how easily they acquiesced to the harsh rules. They talked about how difficult it is to overcome low self-esteem and how easy it is to oppress those who have not learned to be assertive.

Over a period of weeks following the discussion on the novels students also indicated that African people on the streets began to take on a new visibility. They had begun to wonder what it is like for them to be so far from home in a strange country. Others said they had begun to listen to the stories of African neighbours and co-workers in order to better understand their lives. They were amazed to find how easy it was to make connections and how willing people were to talk about their lives and future dreams. One could say that the authors who had 'talked with paper' induced their readers to talk with words.

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# Democratic Citizenship Education in Ireland

CLODAGH HARRIS

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## **Introduction**

*The independent Democracy Commission was established in June 2003 as a result of two think-tanks, Action for Social Change (TASC) in Dublin and Democratic Dialogue in Belfast. It was set up to consider the capacity of Irish Democracy to be inclusive, participatory and egalitarian in the twenty first century. Seeking to engage with a broad cross section of audiences, particularly the under 25s and the marginalised, the Commission acts as a channel for dialogue. It has engaged in extensive information gathering processes, namely written public submissions and public consultations.*

*In its inquiries the Commission has been informed by a variety of groups and individuals on a number of occasions of the need for democratic citizenship education. This paper will address this need by defining what is meant by democratic citizenship education, assessing its current status in the Irish education system and arguing for its effective incorporation into adult and community education.*

## **Democratic Citizenship Education: A Definition**

Democratic citizenship education focuses on the rights, responsibilities and roles of the citizen, locally, nationally and globally and on the concept of human interdependence. In its examination of education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools, the British Advisory Group on Citizenship defined one of their aims as:

for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting; to build on and to extend

radically to young people the best in existing traditions of community involvement and public service, and to make them individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves (1998, p.7).

The Democracy Commission, when it speaks of citizenship education, takes its definition from Kymlicka who states that:

Citizenship education is not just a matter of learning the basic facts about the institutions and procedures of political life; it also involves acquiring a range of dispositions, virtues and loyalties that are immediately bound up with the practice of democratic citizenship (1999, p.79 ).

Political literacy and a critical understanding of democracy and democratic political institutions and systems are key components of citizenship education. However, in addition to strengthening knowledge of political systems, citizenship education should “foster respect for law, justice, democracy and nurture common good at the same time as encouraging independence of thought. It should develop skills of reflection, enquiry and debate” (British Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998, p.11). It should favour “mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue, solidarity, gender equality and harmonious relations within and among peoples” (Council of Europe, 2004, p.3).

### **Democratic Citizenship Education in Ireland**

Since the foundation of the Irish state citizenship education has been a contentious issue. The Catholic Church did not favour the creation of a separate school subject on citizenship as it believed that moral education and personal development were best taught through religious education (Gleeson & Munnely, 2004, p.3). In 1966 the establishment of free second level education coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916 and introduced a new mandatory but non-examined secondary school subject, Civics. Its primary aims were “to inculcate values such as civic responsibility, moral virtue, patriotism, and law abidingness” (Gleeson & Munnely, 2004, p.3). In a document entitled *The Rules and Programme for Teachers*, the Department of Education in 1967 described Civics as “teaching the young citizen to recognise and obey lawful authority, to help preserve law, order and discipline, to respect private and public right to property and to be ready to defend the national territory should the need arise” (Gleeson & Munnely, 2003, p.3).

By the end of the 1970s Civics was a dying subject due to a perception that it was less important than other subjects as it was unexamined. Attempts by the Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey, to replace it with 'Social and Political Studies' in 1984 met with resistance at a political level and it wasn't until 1993 that the Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, requested the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to introduce a pilot programme on Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) for the Junior Certificate. CSPE was introduced as a mandatory subject in the junior cycle in 1997, replacing Civics. Its aim is:

to prepare students for active participatory citizenship... through comprehensive exploration of the civic, social and political dimensions of their lives at a time when pupils are developing from dependent children into independent young adults. It should produce knowledgeable pupils who can explore, analyse and evaluate, who are skilled and practised in moral and critical appraisal, and capable of making decisions and judgements through a reflective citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities (C.S.P.E. Syllabus).

While the concepts of democracy, rights and responsibilities, human dignity, interdependence, development and law and stewardship form a central part of the programme the allocation of only one class period per week over the junior cycle means that the actual time to deal with these issues is very limited.

At present neither democratic citizenship nor political education is taught as an independent subject to senior cycle. In this regard Ireland has been seriously out of line with most of its European neighbours. For instance, in the UK it is possible to take sociology, media studies and politics A levels. No such opportunity exists in the Leaving Certificate in Ireland at present. While the situation is currently under examination as part of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) review of senior cycle post primary education and a number of options are being considered, good practice elsewhere would suggest that social and political democratic citizenship education should be a full leaving certificate subject.

The Commission favours this option and supports the proposal as researched and written on by Dr. Éilís Ward, for the Curriculum Development Unit, which develops a model of citizenship study that extracts the 'best of theory and practice' from citizenship education and the academic disciplines of poli-



tics, philosophy and sociology (2002, p.15). By bringing citizenship education into academic enquiry the proposal rejects the notion that values themselves become learning outcomes.

### **Adult and Community Education**

Responsibility for democratic citizenship education should not rest entirely on the shoulders of teachers, school principals and students. Schools should:

consider the relation of citizenship education to whole school issues including school ethos, organisation and structures and everyone directly involved in the education of our children – politicians and civil servants; community representatives; faith groups; school inspectors and governors; teacher trainers and teachers themselves; parent and indeed pupils – be given a clear statement of what is meant by citizenship education and their central role in it (British Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998, p.23).

The current debate on democratic citizenship education is taking place within the context of the review of the senior cycle and while this debate is both desirable and necessary democratic citizenship education shouldn't be seen solely as confined to second level students. What of those who have opted out or are no longer in formal secondary education in Ireland? While most Irish adults have received citizenship education either through Civics or through CSPE, the 'never-ending' nature of citizenship which is both 'lifelong and lifewide' and 'in permanent construction' means that democratic citizenship education should not stop at sixteen or eighteen (Keogh, 2003, p.11).

Citizenship, along with consciousness raising, cohesion, competitiveness, cultural development and community building is identified as a priority area for adult education in the White Paper. Yet there have been no explicit moves towards the development of the notion of citizenship in Adult Education. *The White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life* (2000) in its introduction mentions a role for citizenship in adult education but makes no other reference to it (Keogh, 2003, p.29). It would appear that the development of democratic citizenship education has been left to the 'usual agents of socialisation' - adult education, community education, community involvement, the media and other sources (Keogh, 2003, p.7).

In Ireland, Community education has provided a forum for “listening to the voices of otherwise silenced people” and has “supplied the wherewithal for disparate groups to engage with empowering processes and become active agents in their communities” (Connolly, 2003, p.9). Community education has been defined as:

education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formulation within the community. It is distinct from general adult education provision, due both to its ethos and the methodologies it employs (AONTAS, 2004, pp.18-19).

It provides the ideal forum for the introduction and/or enhancement of democratic citizenship education. It differs from adult education to the extent that it “enables participants to emerge with more than new personal skills and knowledge.....a strong capacity for social action, a sense of collective empowerment and an ability to tackle issues of social justice” (AONTAS, 2004, p.19).

Although AONTAS supports this ideological definition of Community Education it recognises that it sometimes “fails to reach this level” (ibid, p.19). Keogh states that “all institutions should aspire to becoming learning environments where learning for democracy as well as other types of learning will take place” and to this end she suggests the development of a civil charter (2003, p.33). This ties in quite closely with the British Advisory Group on Citizenship’s recommendation of the need to make a clear statement on what is meant by democratic citizenship education and everyone’s central role in it. One step in this direction would be the development in Ireland of a document similar to *Life in the UK, a journey to citizenship* (2004) published by the Home Office for teachers, mentors and others helping immigrants to integrate. This publication details the UK’s history, its society, how it is governed, its legal system, its public services and lists centres which provide further information and help.

A similar Irish document would not only benefit educators of immigrant communities but would be of use to educators in the adult and community sectors. The development process itself, perhaps, through a system of public consulta-

tion, would be one method through which issues such as “public virtues, the common good, the future of our society and how citizenship and learning it and/or for it are to be understood” could be put on the national agenda (Keogh, 2003, p.32). This document and the process behind it would be one way of opening debate and a creative way of engaging the large percentage of the population not currently in structured learning in democratic citizenship education.

### **Conclusion**

One of the biggest challenges to democratic citizenship education in the adult and community education sectors is the limited reference to citizenship in the general discourse in Ireland and its almost complete absence from most discussion and writings on adult education. One of the notable exceptions to this was the citizenship referendum in June 2004. However, the discussion on the matter at that time focused on who was and was not legally entitled to Irish citizenship rather than on a discussion of public values, the common good, etc. Implicit reference is perhaps made to citizenship through mention of skills and dispositions for participation in civil society and for challenging the existing system, but it rarely goes beyond that. Another challenge is that less than 20% of adults engage in any form of structured learning in any one year.

The European Year of Citizenship through Education 2005 endeavours to “bridge policy and practise by empowering policy makers and practitioners at all levels to set up and develop sustainable programmes” for democratic citizenship education (Council of Europe, 2004, p.4) and is furnishing practitioners with a framework and concrete tools to achieve this objective. More significantly, perhaps, it provides Irish educators with a timely opportunity to put issues such as the future of democratic citizenship and democratic citizenship education in Ireland, ‘public values’ and the ‘common good’ on the national agenda.

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*The Independent Democracy Commission is chaired by Mr David Begg, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and has twelve members acting in a voluntary capacity from across the spectrum in Ireland. It is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and is due to present its final report in the autumn of*

2005. Further information on the Commission can be found at [www.democracycommission.ie](http://www.democracycommission.ie)

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# The Impact of Educational Disadvantage on Adult Citizenship and Participation in Ireland

TRACEY CONNOLLY

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## Introduction

Annually a little over 2,000 young people leave school in Ireland without any formal qualification (i.e. before taking the Junior Certificate). Indeed, according to the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) an estimated 1,000 pupils do not transfer annually from primary to post primary education. More often than not educational disadvantage is the reason behind this early school leaving. In the context of adults, this article will examine educational disadvantage in Ireland and its impact on citizenship and participation in Irish society.

## Defining Educational Disadvantage in Ireland

Literature on educational disadvantage in Ireland highlights that educational disadvantage is multi-faceted and finds its roots in the wider context of socio-economic disadvantage. The Education Act (1998) sees educational disadvantage as a product of such social and economic disadvantage, and defines educational disadvantage as “the impediments arising from social or economic disadvantage, which prevents students from deriving, appropriate benefits from education in schools” (Section 32.9). Similarly, the Green Paper on Education (1992), *Education for a Changing World* noted the interplay of social and economic factors that create “barriers to participation, which mitigate against those from disadvantaged backgrounds” and “influence the extent to which young people and adults participate in education” (p. 45). Evans sees educational disadvantage as:

those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, who fail to reach the necessary standards in schools, often drop out, and as a consequence fail to become integrated into a normally accepted pattern of social responsibility, particularly with regard to work and family life (1995, p.13).

### **Cause of Educational Disadvantage in Ireland**

There is substantial evidence in the literature that poverty is the predominant underlying cause of educational disadvantage. This indicates that those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to underachieve in education, compared to those coming from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. A survey by the St. Vincent de Paul on educational disadvantage and its causes as seen by its service users revealed that “many of the difficulties associated with educational disadvantage have their origins in households and individuals struggling to live on inadequate incomes” (2003, p.2).

The Combat Poverty Agency emphasises that certain groups within society are vulnerable to experiencing educational disadvantage “most especially individuals from low-income working class backgrounds (both rural and urban). Other vulnerable groups include people with a disability, members of the Traveller Community and/or other minority or ethnic groups” (2003, p.2).

Kelleghan (2002) recognises the overarching causes of educational disadvantage as being problems associated with low income and material poverty. From this, Kelleghan outlines that poverty gives rise to individuals being marginal to the labour force, which is evident in rates of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment. This disadvantage is transmitted across generations, hence limiting upward social mobility. Consequently, individuals in disadvantaged circumstances rely heavily on the State for income support. In general these individuals have limited schooling and/or poor levels of achievement. Commonly, disadvantage is concentrated in what are called areas of social deprivation in cities, in conditions that breed crime, drug abuse, family breakdown, and general social disorganisation (p.17). In essence, educational disadvantage gets caught in the cycle of poverty.

There is much reference in the literature to family circumstances creating educational disadvantage. Alongside poverty, family issues rank high as being causes of educational disadvantage in that both intertwine – poverty can create family issues and family issues can create poverty. Archer and Weir refer to evidence in the literature that “children's academic achievement and general development are influenced to a great extent by the kind of educational roles adopted by their parents” (2004, p.9). Such roles may include the parents’ attitude to education as well as their level and experience of education. Archer and Weir emphasise findings from studies that “show a strong association between

children's performance in school and home process variables" which are "mostly related to the ways parents interact with their children and how stimulating the home environment is" (ibid, p.9). Substantiating this view are the findings of school effectiveness literature, which show a positive association between student achievement and the level of parental involvement in the work of the school. However, parents who experienced educational disadvantage are generally less involved in the school, primarily due to their own negative schooling experiences.

The literature sees the community as an important variable in contributing to educational disadvantage. This ties in with the notion of educational disadvantage as being multi-faceted and related to socio-economic problems. The Combat Poverty Agency refers to this view that wider issues involving the community cause educational disadvantage. The Agency states that while educational disadvantage is a problem in its own right it "is more correctly understood as a symptom of a wider range of issues affecting the lives of children and adults, the families and communities, and the structure and content of the education system" (2003, p.3).

### **Legacy that Educational Disadvantage Leaves**

The legacy of educational disadvantage is well documented. Ultimately, literature shows that educational disadvantage is debilitating for the individual who experiences it and has a negative impact on society. Educational disadvantage can become apparent at school through low attainment, low satisfaction and self-esteem, lack of participation, truancy, school refusal, drop out, behaviour problems and delinquency. At school level children who become educationally disadvantaged may experience difficulties in numeracy and learning to read and write; as adults their participation in society will be hindered by such difficulties.

Disadvantaged children are more likely to drop out of school, often without formal qualifications. Hence early school leaving is a consequence of educational disadvantage. Generally from here the cycle of educational disadvantage repeats itself whereby individuals have poor employment prospects in the same way their parents had as a result of educational disadvantage. Literature shows that early school leaving is linked with unemployment. It is commonly held that those most involved in crime and drugs are from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The Combat Poverty Agency sums up the consequences of educational disadvantage as follows:

Education and related qualifications determine to a large extent the life chances of people. Those who leave the formal education system with few or no qualifications are at a disadvantage. Their personal and social development is curtailed and they are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion (2003, p.3).

For the wider society educational disadvantage has negative consequences. Lack of achievement in education can mean a reduction in the skilled labour force. A country without a skilled labour force is one that cannot compete efficiently in the world economy. Those individuals who become reliant on the State for welfare benefits as a consequence of educational disadvantage put a burden on the economy. Educational disadvantage increases social problems in society, which presents a further burden for the State to deal with.

Evidently, the legacy of educational disadvantage presents a number of barriers for adults trying to participate in society and raises a number of questions about citizenship. The barriers to participation can arise out of poor attainment at school and consequent lack of confidence and self-esteem. The main questions that arise in relation to such participation barriers are: is there an onus on Irish society to dismantle these barriers, how has the issue been addressed and how should it be addressed in the future?

### **Breaking Down the Barriers to Participation**

There is an onus on society to tackle educational disadvantage for numerous reasons given the known consequences of educational disadvantage. If human resources within society are looked at in terms of capital, then educational disadvantage has an impact on all capital within that society, economic, social and cultural.

Research has shown that educational disadvantage is intergenerational so combating educational disadvantage can have a positive impact on future generations. Kelleghan (2002) argues that educational disadvantage can be perceived as a threat to democracy and social justice. Klasen (2000) refers to the fact that children experiencing educational disadvantage grow up as adults who experience social exclusion and may be unable to be healthy, well nourished and well housed. Klasen further argues that social exclusion may have close empirical relations to other “social problems that threaten the stability and prosperity of society at large such as crime and violence” (2000, p.8).



Educational disadvantage is often looked at in terms of the children that it affects, rather than in relation to its impact on adults. Since the mid 1980s there has been a concerted effort on the part of successive Irish administrations to tackle educational disadvantage. This has been evident in the number of initiatives on educational disadvantage that have emerged since then; however, such initiatives have predominantly been at school level as preventative measures. Since the late 1990s a more holistic approach has been taken and a commitment to tackle social exclusion and educational disadvantage was put on the National agenda in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) *Sharing in Progress* (1997), and remained on the agenda in the revised NAPS (2002), *Building an Inclusive Society*. This strategy aims to support those at risk of leaving, and those who have left the education system with inadequate qualifications to participate fully in the economy, in employment and in society.

Kelleghan argues that “as disadvantage is multi-dimensional ... procedures to deal with it should also be multi-dimensional, and should involve communities, families, schools, and other institutions in society” (2002, p.19). Kelleghan goes on to state that:

where possible, services should be integrated and co-ordinated. Since their educational needs ... cannot be separated from their economic and social needs, it would seem obvious that problems that might arise in meeting these needs should not be addressed in isolation (2002, p.19).

Likewise, the Combat Poverty Agency puts forward the belief that tackling educational disadvantage should ensure integrated responses to educational disadvantage at a national level to “guarantee effective delivery of professional services and programmes”. In addition, the Agency recommends ensuring “integrated multi-level responses, involving the home, school, adult education, community and relevant services” (2003, p.6). At an international level, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) claims that “the integrated provision of education, health and social services is regarded by many member countries as the most promising solution” to educational disadvantage. (2000, p.13). As with most other commentators on integration, this indicates that educational disadvantage is multi-dimensional.

## **Role of Lifelong Learning**

To date, attempts to make an integrated response to educational disadvantage have been put forward in the National Development Plan (NDP). This has involved the identification of the areas with the highest levels of disadvantage, followed by state investment, which is channelled through the RAPID programme in urban areas and CLÁR programme in rural areas. The NDP (1999) notes that the need for a lifelong learning approach is necessary as it holds that “addressing educational disadvantage requires intervention in the context of a continuum of provision from early childhood through to adulthood” (pp. 97-98). The focus of the NDP’s investment in education includes:

- Meeting the diverse needs of specific groups in society
- Providing opportunities so that all individuals can attain an adequate level of literacy and numeracy skills
- Preventing early school leaving
- Expanding adult and second chance education and training opportunities
- Widening access to third level education
- Facilitating the development of lifelong learning
- Linking training to the labour market needs

Lifelong learning marks a critical departure from the traditional understanding of the role of education in society. The key elements of the concept are: providing learning opportunities over the life span rather than only in the early years; widening recognition to embrace new forms of learning; recognising that learning takes place in a range of settings wider than schools and colleges; developing more flexible forms of provision.

Since 2000, a number of policy documents have emerged, including the White Paper on Adult Education *Learning for Life* (2000) and the *Taskforce on Lifelong Learning* (2002). Regarding greater flexibility in learner mobility, the National Framework of Qualifications was set up in 2002 so that “all learning may be achieved in relation to each other in a coherent way” and to define “the relationship between all education and training awards” (p.3). Within the past number of years the provision of second chance education has increased significantly in Ireland. Second chance education is seen as about catching up on missed opportunity, which may be in reading, writing or some other educational area.

However, with all of these developments it is important that they don't simply provide more schooling. Rather they should provide for a needs led educational approach with the learner at the centre of the education process. Embracing a collaborative approach to education involving the learner and the teacher may be the most productive way forward. It is also important that everyone works in accordance with the goals that are set out and subsequently evaluated to inform continuous development. In addition to this, it is important that such provision does not just mask any defects in the schooling system. Rather tackling educational disadvantage should be a continuum that addresses the needs of all age levels.

Educational disadvantage debilitates one's level of participation in society and therefore infringes on one's rights as a citizen and one's contribution to citizenship. Tackling educational disadvantage is essential for the well being of the individual and for the nation as, "the relationship between education and society is dynamic and interactive. Education not only reflects a society but is an influence in shaping its development" (Primary School Curriculum, 1999).

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# Growing into Greatness

## *A Study of a Local History Group of Active-Retired Learners*

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

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### **Social Change**

Rapid and profound social and structural changes are being experienced in Ireland, as well as in many advanced western societies. Some of these changes include the increasing globalisation of the economy, rapid developments in Information Communications Technology and also changes in family and social structures. Gone are the extended families of a previous generation. Gone are the voluntary carers of older people in their homes and the doers of many voluntary tasks in the community. This has resulted in many older people leading lonely lives, closeted in their homes and lacking the confidence and courage to take the necessary measures to fully participate in society.

Any consideration of the role of the media in Ireland demonstrates the invisibility of older people due to the great emphasis on youth. How often, if ever, do we see pictures of older people in advertisements? When they do appear, it is to promote medications, mobility aids or retirement homes. Is it any wonder then that older people feel pushed to the edge of society, their contribution and sacrifices over the years unacknowledged and no account taken of the vast store of wisdom and skills that they possess? Such treatment by society causes older people to turn inward on themselves, thereby increasing their further marginalisation from mainstream society, arising from their loss of status associated with no longer being economically productive.

While our country is now very prosperous there still exist many serious economic and social divisions. According to AONTAS, “The existence of such divisions is incompatible with active and equal citizenship. The cohesion of society and consequently its stability are at risk if people are unable to participate in the eco-

conomic and social development of that society” (AONTAS, 2000, p.11).

### **Learning Needs of Older People**

Research in Canada on the learning needs of older people looked at such issues as how to cope with changes in society, the need to make a contribution and the need to be influential (Leclerc, 1985). The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) *Learning for Life* notes that strategies for active ageing stress the critical importance of access to learning as a key tool in coping with change. Adult education can play an important role in contributing to active ageing by promoting social integration and enhancing the quality of life. By reason of the profound changes in Irish society in recent years, older people increasingly find themselves socially excluded from leading full lives as citizens of their country.

### **Learning for Citizenship**

In an article entitled *Learning for Citizenship in Ireland: The Role of Adult Education*, Keogh, (2002) notes that, “A key question for adult educators is: Within the range of adult models and locations, which adult education methodologies and topic/subject areas contribute to the development of citizenship?” Various opinions exist in regard to this question. Some contend that anything taught to adults can be seen as a form of citizenship education while others maintain that a liberal education approach which includes literature, history, geography and/or the social sciences is critical to the development of citizenship knowledge, skills and dispositions. However, many claim that the most beneficial learning will take place not through the formal curriculum, but through positive experiences of participation and, therefore, the adult education experience should itself be “an experience of participation, with a view towards enabling learners to develop the skills, insights and confidence to make their own voice heard and take a full and active role as citizens in society” (Crowther, 2001, pp. 69-70).

Keogh (2002) further maintains that the traditional view of education in meritocratic terms with qualifications as the goal, rather than critical capacities and skills of citizenship, also needs to be addressed. This view is supported by the Council of Europe which sees education for economic advancement as having a higher status than citizenship education. (Council of Europe, 2000).

### **A Local History Group**

A practical example of a project which helps to address some of the above issues is a Local History Group of Adult Active Retired Learners. Initially, the group’s plan

was to study the local history of their own area, in this case Drumcondra, Dublin 9 and its environs. The group has been funded under the Community Education section of the City of Dublin VEC with two teaching hours a week. However, the group's love of learning has embraced far more than the study of local history. It has also included all the social interaction, fun and enjoyment which has taken place since this group of fifteen people started meeting regularly on Wednesday mornings in a room in the local parish centre.

One of the students, Kathleen, relates the reason why learning at this stage is so important to her. *"Life begins at forty they say but I disagree, for at forty one is still involved with family, helping one's student offspring with career choices, keeping the peace.....I say life begins at sixty. By then the nest has emptied and a whole new world of enjoyment opens up. One just needs to be reasonably healthy, mobile and have a modest amount of disposable income."*

Unfortunately, those over 55 who do not fit this description, and "who present one or more of the following characteristics: low socio-economic status, limited or no means of transportation, rural place of residence, low self-esteem, physical disability or illness," suffer from a lack of educational provision to a greater extent than younger people. This is one of the conclusions reached in a study done by Scott Boldt (1998), entitled *Age and Opportunity: The educational needs of people over 55 in the Midland and Western Health Board Regions*. Therefore, in implementing and providing services, attention must be given to the issue of equity. Groups and areas must be given priority in order to serve those most in need.

### **The Significance of Later Life**

One's older years are slowly being better recognised as a significant period in life with a variety of titles being used to describe this period, The Golden Age, The Third Age, Active Retirement, Senior Citizens. The term "old folks" has been mostly banished. Apart from the general run of clubs and associations, there are also organisations geared towards the over 60s, "as older people need a safe space in which responsibilities and commitments can be set aside for a while and questions asked about life's concerns" (Boldt, 1998, p.25). "This is the learning environment in which all adults can grow, develop, mature....and build a stronger sense of identity for the later years" (Fleming, 1997, p. 3). Governments are gradually coming to realise that mental stimulation and social interaction make for a healthier and happier older population.

## **Our Research**

During their time together the group compiled two books: one on the Local History of Drumcondra and another on Glasnevin. Phyllis recalls this experience, *"One of our proudest moments was when we produced and launched our first book on Local History, The Royal Way. It tells the story of the famous places and buildings in our area. Later we produced our second book Off the Rails, a short history of the journey of the Number 19 tram from Glasnevin Hill to Nelson's Pillar"*. Maura also recalls her experience of being involved with compiling this book. *"I found that working together as a team was great. Each member played their part in researching areas, sitting in libraries, pouring over reference books, trying to find more information and all coming back to class each week to share it all"*.

The strength of our research is based on peoples' recollections of growing up in the area, thereby providing a richness of reminiscences and primary sources gathered from neighbours, families and friends. Maureen says that, *"Remembering one's childhood can open flood gates of memory and bring back the wonderful times we had growing up in Drumcondra"*. Stories like Maureen's need to be rescued from oblivion and preserved for future generations. Maureen also recalls her first visit to the National Archives while researching information. *"One of the most interesting and moving visits was the day we went to the National Archives off Aungier Street in Dublin to do some research. What a revelation!..... To our utter amazement and delight, we actually succeeded in getting some necessary information, and even found everyone around us very helpful"*.

## **Social Interaction**

The lives of these older people have been greatly enriched not only by their love of learning, but also by the social interaction which this involves. The group is fortunate in having access to a local parish hall one morning a week. Older adults are more likely to attend in places which are accessible and familiar (Price & Lyon, 1982). Frank, a member of the group with a lifelong interest in history says, *"Through this class, I have expanded my knowledge of local history and I am now more aware of many historical places and buildings in Ireland. I also find myself learning without any effort"*.

It is interesting that Frank found himself learning without any effort. This reflects the insights of a talk given by Fleming at an Age and Opportunity seminar in Dublin in 1997:

Cultural elders, like Seamus Heaney, grow into greatness over many years



and reach the height of their powers at a time when the rest of us may be considered 'past it'. No one would (or should) suggest that great artists should retire from productivity, from making their contribution to society, at an arbitrary age of 60 or 65. No one doubts their ability to continue to grow and to reach new heights. Quite rightly, no one notices their age. Likewise, for all our elders, it is time that a new assumption should replace the old myth: that we continue to have the ability to learn and to contribute, and the right to have access to new learning, no matter what our age (p.11).

### **Exploring our Heritage**

Though living all their lives in Dublin, many members of the group had never been to the main heritage sites of the capital city. Therefore, a very significant part of the group's learning took place around the city on visits to places such as: the Book of Kells in Trinity College, the Dáil, St Doulagh's Church, Kinsealy, the Chester Beatty Library, the Jewish Museum, Kilmainham Jail and Wicklow Gaol. Another memorable outing was on the 24th September 2003 when the group visited Áras an Uachtaráin and met President McAleese. This visit was very uplifting for the students.

This class came about because the people themselves expressed an interest in setting up a local history group. Since then, this experience has changed all their lives. Brid joined the class when she retired from paid work *"I enjoy subjects with a historical content, both on television and in books, so the class forms a link between the two. The group is very sociable and we have plenty of laughs"*. As well as building on existing interests, provision of education for older people must be aware of their need "to develop new interests and talents...to use their leisure time well, to socialise and to meet new people" (Boldt, 1998, p. 101).

### **Tutor's Thoughts**

This was my first time to facilitate a group of active-retired learners and to teach Local History. At first I was quite apprehensive and unsure of myself. This experience has enabled me to see that active-retired and Older people have a wealth of talents and opportunities, just waiting to be explored and tapped. Therefore, it is recommended that those who are in positions to advance and to implement policies should endeavour to promote the use of the skills and experiences of older people. They should also be involved in decisions with regard to the facilities and programmes designed to meet their needs.

The group's knowledge of Local History, through very relevant primary and

secondary sources, has also enabled me, as their tutor, to become a learner, while at the same time facilitating the learning of the group, all of which has hugely enriched my life. In sharp contrast to our days at school when learning seemed such a burden, it has now become a source of enlightenment, fun and excitement and given us a sense of real belonging and togetherness. Is this the true wisdom that repays all our efforts?

### **Concluding Comments**

This class has become a welcome and significant part of the weekly schedule of this group of active retired learners. Its significance is best summed up by the remarks of participants themselves:

*"Wednesday is a special day in my week. Participating in this class has hugely enriched my life."*

*"At this class we never seem to stop learning."*

*"This class has opened many doors of learning for me, some I never knew existed."*

*"Older people often feel invisible since we are no longer as active in society as we used to be. These classes have helped me to realise my worth as a senior citizen, continuing to make my voice heard in society."*

*"When I first joined the class, I felt that I knew nothing even though I had raised five children. I gradually came to appreciate the wisdom and skills that I did possess and this helped me to have better self-esteem."*

These comments support the findings from the Age and Opportunity Study which advocated that what counts as education has to be broadened and its value has to be seen in wider terms than its currency in the world of work. People who are no longer economically productive can be sidelined as no longer of value to society. But through adult education initiatives such as the one described here they discover that the true self is based on who they are, not what they do. There is an onus on all members of society to remember the contribution that has been made by senior citizens. A true concept of civil society must embrace everyone from individuals to organisations, and from governments to community, as participants in the celebration. In 1999, the United Nations chose Towards a Society for All Ages as its theme for the year and out-

lined five key principles for older people to include independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity (Green Paper – *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning*, 1998). As can be seen from the above article, most of these principles have found an echo in the experiences of the older people in the Local History class and support a broader concept of citizenship and education for lifelong citizenship. As Fleming suggests:

This search for who we are goes on in this new context and new agendas for our growth and development constantly emerge. The psychological challenge of older age is to address the aspects of who we are in a way and in a context that did not exist before. The knowledge gained in the successful working out of this stage is called wisdom. (1997, p. 2).

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# The Education Equality Initiative and the Citizen Learner

DENISE SHANNON

The Education Equality Initiative (EEI) has been established by the Department of Education and Science in an attempt to address educational disadvantage through the strategic allocation of funding to promote equality of access, treatment and outcomes within a lifelong learning framework for individuals and groups.

The aim of this initiative is to develop and assist women's and men's education projects to address gaps in current provision for educationally disadvantaged adults by: undertaking outreach and pre-development work; building local capacity; developing support structures; accrediting learning; encouraging partnerships; analysing and informing policy; mainstreaming learning processes; enabling progression and supporting participants on programmes to shape their educational futures.

In Phase 1 of the EEI (EEI 1) from 2000 – 2003, seventeen projects were funded while a further ten projects have been funded under Phase 2 (EEI 2). The EEI 2 projects are targeted at the following groups:

- Adults with a learning disability
- Adults with self-experience of mental illness
- Deaf adults
- Marginalised rural men
- Roma community in Ireland
- Traveller and other parents seeking to become actively involved in their children's education

The approach adopted by EEI is to fund a small number of pilot projects which address the learning needs of educationally disadvantaged individuals within a range of specific target groups. The overall goal is to ensure that the learning and good practice in relation to educational disadvantage generated by the projects are identified, documented, analysed and disseminated throughout the adult education community, locally and nationally. The ultimate aim is to embed the lessons in policy and practice, thus improving provision for educationally disadvantaged adults and promoting educational equality.

The EEI 2 funded projects promote educational equality by:

- addressing gaps in the provision of learning opportunities
- promoting partnership between statutory and voluntary agencies
- developing innovative approaches to outreach
- developing innovative approaches to teaching and learning
- developing local learning support structures
- facilitating the progression of the identified target groups

The Initiative, which is funded by the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science through The National Development Plan 2000 – 2006 with support from the European Structural Funds, has a budget of €3.5 million. This article will look at how these adult education projects are contributing to the development of active citizenship for very marginalised groups in our society. Their focus is, through a process of educational engagement, to highlight the needs of specific groups within our communities and to provide the supports necessary for their ongoing participation.

### **The Citizen Learner**

While citizenship as a concept has many different connotations it does seem to resonate closely with adult education processes such as the promotion of participation, capacity building and self-direction in learning. Citizenship as a concept manifests itself in adult education in the ‘active citizenship’ model which according to Chanan “taken broadly, can mean any form of productive contribution to society” (1999, p.2). More specifically, the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) *Learning for Life* defines the process of adult education and its relation to citizenship as “enabling individual members of society to take an active role in shaping the overall direction of society – culturally, socially and economically and environmentally.....and to engage proactively in community and societal decision making” ( p.7).

Adult education must offer the individual accessing it a learning process which has an 'adult' approach. It must be voluntary, relevant and have a potential outcome that is pertinent to the individual undertaking it. Therefore, to engage the individual voluntarily in adult education, the service must be creative in how it promotes access, the process must be viewed as something that is worth spending time on and the outcomes must be worthwhile for the individual.

The theme of citizenship is evident across the projects funded under EEI Phase 2, in that adults are being engaged in such a way that it affects their lives as individuals and empowers them to challenge the inequalities facing them. While this does not mean that every individual in every project will suddenly become an active citizen in the conventional sense, it does mean that they are developing the capacity to become more active citizens and to challenge the society in which they live.

The projects funded under this initiative are unique in that they have a dual mandate, firstly to deliver on objectives relating to their respective participants and secondly to deliver on the national objectives of providing information to influence policy and practice. The work of all the projects is to engage adults in an educational experience which enables them shape their own education and progression.

For the purpose of this paper the context in which we are speaking about citizenship is the nexus where adult education and citizenship converge, where the individual is engaged in her/his own transformative learning, thereby learning to reason and reflect critically on the society in which he/she lives as well as acquiring skills and knowledge.

The projects operating under the EEI are diverse in terms of their activities and the groups being worked with. However, the common themes emerging include: empowering people to engage with and challenge the system which serves them or their children; identifying gaps in provision for those on the margins; and making the needs of people more visible to the service providers and policy makers. It is clearly evident across the projects that innovative approaches are engaging people and they are being empowered through the process.

### **Marginalised Men as Citizens**

There is a clear sense emerging from this phase of EEI that something is happening in men's community education. There are two projects working with isolated rural men, Mevagh Resource Centre in Donegal and Nexus Europe Ltd, which is overseeing work with men in Dingle and East Mayo. These projects are working to engage men who are significantly isolated, who have had negative experiences of education and who have limited participation in the communities in which they live. Both the projects initial contact work has been on an outreach basis. This has involved either informing the men about their social welfare rights and entitlements or just talking to them about their issues and listening to what they have to say. The process, while slow, has been successful in voluntarily engaging men in learning programmes.

The Mevagh Resource Centre in Donegal now has a core group of about 15 men who meet on a weekly basis. The weekly discussions cover a variety of topics including politics, history, community issues and health. These group discussions have not only helped the men reflect on and analyse issues but have also helped to build lasting friendships between them.

In looking at this experience of men's community education projects one can see their potential for affecting change. It is now known that despite the overwhelming success of the model of engagement used by projects to engage women, this model has not worked as well for isolated men. Involving men, particularly isolated rural or urban men, in the process of learning takes a lot more time and requires a different type of approach or combination of approaches at the outreach and pre-development stage.

It is hoped that the work of the projects in Donegal, Dingle and East Mayo will highlight the needs of men to policy makers, provide lessons for other agencies working with men and ultimately shed light on the potential for men's community education to not only facilitate men's individual development but to also facilitate their participation as citizens in the communities in which they live.

### **Deaf Citizens**

There are two projects currently funded by the EEI which are tackling issues facing the Deaf Community. The Irish Deaf Society is addressing the literacy needs of its own community by developing a CD Rom which teaches English

through the first language of Deaf people, Irish Sign Language (ISL). This CD Rom is being developed and tested by Deaf people to ensure it meets their needs effectively and it is hoped that this will in turn enable Deaf adults to address their own literacy needs through self-directed learning.

The Kerry Deaf Resource Centre, through the Kerry Deaf Adult Learning Programme, is addressing the educational inequality experienced by deaf people as manifested by the gaps in the provision of education and training opportunities for Deaf Irish Sign Language users in Kerry. To do this the project is building the capacity of local deaf people by delivering an accredited programme in Deaf Studies to 18 Deaf adults. The skills of the participants will also be developed for their future role as Deaf Adult Tutors so that they can then provide this accredited programme to other local Deaf people, their families and to statutory and non-statutory organisations in the area. Additional training is being undertaken by the participants in community studies, committee skills, and conflict management to build the capacity of the participants to work as representatives of the Deaf community. The project has appointed five participants to sit on the management committee of the project so they can shape the direction of the project and gain the experience of engaging with relevant local agencies about their issues. Through this process it is hoped to sustain the impact of the project by enabling participants to work for and represent their own community following project completion. Lynch states that “capacity building individuals to address their own inequality is a key element of the adult education for community action paradigm” (1991, p.7). She also argues that:

unequal outcomes can be addressed in some way by adult education, adult education is about empowerment and resistance especially among those who have been disempowered by the social, economic and education systems. It is a subtle process, whereby people become aware of their oppression and they build the capacity to overcome the oppression (1991, p.7).

### **Parents as Citizens**

The experience of parents with their children’s education and their relationship with the education system is a strong theme across a number of the projects in the current phase of EEI. Interestingly, similar issues regarding levels of disempowerment and lack of confidence in relating to and dealing with the education system are evident from the EEI projects working with both settled and Traveller parents.



The Ballyfermot Partnership project 'Next Steps' is responding to parents in the community who feel disempowered around issues of education. This project is focusing on supporting parents to acquire the skills and confidence to become 'equal' partners in their children's education. It is hoped that the project will empower its participants to have a real and effective voice as community stakeholders in such structures as the Home School Community Liaison and School Completion Programmes.

The Ennis Community Development Project entitled Traveller Homework Club and Parent Support, is developing a traveller homework parent support programme to capacity build parents to work as volunteers assisting the tutors and running the homework club in St. Joseph's Senior Training Centre. The programme also incorporates elements of personal development, intercultural awareness and equality which it is hoped will assist parents to in turn look at their own education. Two participants will sit on the Management Committee to direct the project and build their capacity and experience of working with key local agencies represented on the committee.

At a national level Pavee Point's Parents and Traveller Education Project is focusing on the involvement of Traveller parents in their own children's educational provision by addressing the needs of parents to in turn participate in national fora, so that they can effect change. The project has set up a National Traveller Parents' Forum to assist parents to discuss issues in relation to the provision of education for their children. A video is being developed to be used as a resource for training with Traveller parents on the education system and their role within it. Seminars involving Traveller parents have been held nationally and the recommendations arising from these seminars have been communicated to the joint working group of the Traveller Education Strategy. In this way, Traveller parents now have the opportunity to directly influence the development of Traveller Education Policy and how education is accessed by their community.

### **Supporting Learners with Self-Experience of Mental Illness**

Schizophrenia and other forms of mental illness are realities for a significant number of Irish people. Research has shown that 1% of the population has schizophrenia and between 4%-8% develop some other forms of mental illness during their lifetime. The stigma surrounding mental illness and the legacy of institutionalisation has negatively impacted on the chances of people

with self experience of mental illness to gain access to appropriate and relevant education and training. Schizophrenia Ireland are running a project entitled 'Mental Health in Education' which is driven by the need to include people with mental illness in mainstream education as part of their recovery and to foster equality in education for people with disabilities.

The project is being piloted in the Liberties College, Dublin and seeks to facilitate the integration of students with self experience of mental illness into mainstream education, addresses awareness issues amongst staff and supports the involvement of participants in the existing structures within the college. The project has also developed and delivered an education and awareness programme for educators, administrators and other professionals.

### **The Roma Community**

The City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee have conducted a study involving Roma men, women and children/young people entitled, *Meeting the needs of the Roma Community in Ireland*. A key element of the project was to develop effective ways of communicating, building trust and consulting with the Roma community regarding processes of participation, service development and delivery. The report found that the most successful education programmes and models of working are those in which service providers have some knowledge and understanding of Roma history, culture and traditions and where the Roma community represent themselves as active citizens and are consulted in the evaluation of such programmes.

### **Supporting Learners with Intellectual Disabilities**

Dun Laoghaire VEC runs a project called 'Exploring our Potential' which is supporting learners with intellectual disabilities to develop a profile of their skills, achievements and interests to facilitate their progression into mainstream education. This is being done through the delivery of an accredited programme in the arts. The emphasis in these modules is to link daily art practice in the classroom to the community through art workshops with existing arts' practitioners and through visits to local and regional exhibitions. It is hoped that the link between class activities and activities in the community will assist the learners in establishing their own creative identity.

Contemporary theory would suggest that active citizenship is necessary for a legitimate democracy. But this legitimate democracy is only possible through

the equal participation of all citizens. It is important that people with intellectual disabilities are given the support to be full and active members of society, to be active, visible citizens. Ultimately, the work of this project will endeavour to facilitate real access for adults with intellectual disabilities to mainstream education and employment which will build their capacity to live and work in the community as equal citizens.

### **Conclusion**

What is common across the projects funded under EEI is that their work is not just about addressing educational inequality, it is about building the capacity of adults to return to further education or training for employment. The key role for each project in engaging with the learner is to facilitate individuals in identifying their own needs so they can in turn address these needs more effectively within society.

One cannot view the experience of the adult learner or any learner for that matter and their relationship with education in an isolated sense. It is, as the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) *Learning for Life* states, a process of “enabling individual members of society to take an active role in society” (p.29). What must be recognised and valued here is the experience of ALL adult learners within these different learning contexts and the impact that adult education in its different forms can have in engaging individuals as both learners and citizens and the ultimate contribution which this can make to creating a more equal and participative society.

*Denise Shannon is EEI Co-ordinator with Léargas. Léargas have been appointed by the Department of Education and Science to provide the Support Service for EEI Phase 2.*

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# Why Positive Access Policies in Higher Education can Contribute to Active Citizenship

MICHAEL LANIGAN

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## **Introduction**

This article deals with the role of Irish Higher Education (HE) in the context of the promotion of citizenship. It examines the circumstances in which Irish Higher Education currently operates in terms of access and participation with particular reference to the recent OECD Report (2004), *Review of Higher Education in Ireland*. The article will also highlight the efforts of the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) to promote access to Higher Education and the benefits which accrue to mature students from engaging with such a process in terms of their self-confidence, consciousness-raising and sense of citizenship.

## **Citizenship and Higher Education**

The year 2005 has been designated the European Year of Citizenship through Education. The Government White Paper on Adult Education (2000), *Learning For Life*, refers to citizenship as follows:

Citizenship refers to the role of adult education in enabling individual members of the society to grow in self-confidence, social awareness and social responsibility and to take an active role in shaping the overall direction of the society – culturally, socially and economically and environmentally and to engage proactively in community and societal decision-making (p. 29).

On looking more closely at this reference one notices that this definition of citizenship hinges upon one precept, namely, that individual self-confidence can be brought about through the adult education process. One would imagine, therefore, that anything society could do to promote or instil such a sense of

self-confidence in the individual would be one of its key priorities. Adult education has, according to the State, an integral part to play in promoting citizenship.

In the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000), the Government undertook to increase mature student participation in Higher Education to 15% of total student intake by the year 2005 and to maintain this level of intake in each subsequent year. However, this target has not been reached. It is against this background that adult education in the Higher Education sector operates. Recent changes in Government policy in the area of access to Higher Education for mature students since 2000 have severely impacted on potential mature student access. I would suggest that the current circumstances have made it more difficult for mature students to gain access to higher education. The WIT experience would suggest that the lack of finance is one of the main reasons for adult learners failing to access and dropping out of Higher Education. In addition, Social Welfare initiatives designed to encourage participation, such as the Back To Education Initiative (BTEI) (formerly the Back To Education Allowance), and the Third Level Allowance (TLA) have been tinkered with to such an extent that potential students are finding it even more difficult to go to college. This situation is further exacerbated by the continuing difficulties in relation to childcare. One wonders how these practical realities for mature students can be reconciled with the aspirations and targets set out in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.

According to the OECD *Education at a Glance: Policy Report*, (1997), one of the reasons why Ireland has amongst the lowest mature student participation rates in the industrialised world is due to our traditional systems of access to Higher Education. The Irish system is sequential and offers limited alternative access for adults. The report shows that in 1995 Ireland had just 2% mature student participation compared to 19% in all other OECD countries. Having been a mature student myself, I understand only too well the difficulties faced by adults returning to education and embarking on a college course. I was fortunate enough to be eligible for the financial supports available and I am one of a group of staff in WIT attempting to address the needs of mature students in our Institute. Over the last four years I have been closely involved with the WIT Certificate in Foundation Studies, a one-year course designed to help adult learners assess their own suitability for entry into Higher Education.

### **WIT Foundation Course**

The Foundation Course, as it is commonly known, began as a result of work carried out with a number of community groups in the nearby working class city council housing estates in Ballybeg. Although the setting and venue have changed, the aim of the programme is to equip adult learners for life in higher education and to promote their personal development through a process of self-discovery and empowerment. The course is offered on both a full-time and part-time basis with the adult learner choosing from a number of elective subjects from a Science/Technology, Business/Humanities or Art/Design stream. These electives are designed to introduce learners to the rigours of their chosen discipline and to impress upon them the standards required of graduates within industry.

The students are given credit for prior experiential learning and the student support services available include guidance support, counselling and pastoral care, mentoring through a 'study buddy' system which includes previous graduates and ongoing assistance from the Foundation Course Leader while undertaking the first year of their undergraduate programme in WIT. The adult learners are integrated into all aspects of college life and encouraged to become involved with other student groups in the college. Each year the adult learners also organise a number of social events. The organisation of these events helps to develop the self-confidence of the students giving them a sense of accomplishment. This ultimately contributes to their development as active citizens in the wider community.

### **Current Difficulties**

While the *Report of the Commission on the Points System*, (1999), states that "The State has a responsibility to provide third-level places for adults who did not have access to third-level when they left school", the subsequent *Skilbeck Report* (2001) reinforced this thinking by suggesting that one issue is the provision of third level places for mature students while the other is the issue of how to finance mature student participation in higher education, particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds. By its own admission, the State is failing to address the issue of increasing the level of participation of mature students in higher education in Ireland. Remarkably, it is in relation to support services for disadvantaged students that one observes a notable contradiction in Government policy. It relates specifically to the Student Assistance Fund (formerly the Hardship Fund) which is available for students in WIT.

WIT is very fortunate to have a Centre for Helping Access Retention and Teaching (CHART). CHART is a student support unit whose resources are used to assist full-time students in WIT. Under the Department of Education and Science Student Assistance Fund, CHART provides financial support for students, like consultations with educational psychologists, dyslexia diagnosis and treatment and any emergency financial assistance which students may need during their time at the Institute. Traditionally, the beneficiaries of the fund have been those students who are disadvantaged, amongst them, mature students.

In 2002 the Student Assistance Fund was reviewed by the Department of Education and Science and now only students pursuing undergraduate qualifications are eligible for funding support. Students pursuing Foundation Courses are no longer eligible for support. It is ironic that an initiative designed to assist those experiencing disadvantage should exclude mature students who have been identified in successive reports as a particularly marginalised group in higher education. While Local Area Partnerships have been assisting a small number of mature students through the Millennium Fund, no other grants are available to them. Since WIT does not charge a fee for the Foundation Course, funding for the course comes from the capitation fees paid for full-time students in the college. Without specific financial support for this initiative it is difficult to see how it can continue to provide the much needed support required by mature students returning to higher education.

### **Wider Issues**

The 2004, OECD *Review of Higher Education in Ireland* indicated that the Institutes of Technology and WIT in particular should return to their original vocational focus, catering for the needs of those requiring technician level qualifications, while the Universities should pursue research and provide higher level qualifications. In addition, the report also recommended greater autonomy for the sector with less involvement from the Department of Education and Science in the day to day running of the Institutes of Technology and in particular in relation to the design and roll-out of new courses. If implemented these recommendations have the potential to change the way in which adults are supported on their return to higher education in WIT.

There is within the college the willingness and the expertise to provide access to modularised programmes through flexible delivery methods which could



include online and distance learning provision as well as increased outreach work through the setting up of off-campus centres. One such initiative is the Trinity Access Programme (TAP) run by Trinity College, Dublin and the City of Dublin VEC. Closer ties between the Universities, Institutes of Technology and local education providers like VECs must be developed to support greater participation by mature students in Higher Education. Currently the WIT is attempting to deal with the prevailing educational climate by developing a new model for the Foundation Course which will lead to an accredited undergraduate qualification. It will be of three years duration and will lead to a higher certificate. The first year will incorporate the current foundation year and participants will have the option to progress on or leave at the end of that year. Those who choose to leave will be awarded a foundation certificate from WIT while those who progress on will attain a higher certificate in their chosen discipline. By structuring the course as an undergraduate level programme students will become eligible for financial supports under the Student Assistance Fund. The current moves towards modularisation and semesterisation will create a more flexible learning environment and should suit the needs of mature students.

### **Conclusion**

While at a broader level government policy sees adult education as a means through which active citizenship can be promoted, its lack of support policies makes this difficult to achieve. I would suggest that national policy in relation to this needs to be revised so that access for mature students to higher education can be made easier. The access model developed in WIT is an example of an initiative which should be supported and yet its continuation each year is very precarious. The benefits to adults returning to learning must not only be measured by increased participation rates but by the sense of fulfilment, accomplishment and empowerment which such an educational encounter can bring with it. This kind of positive engagement helps individuals to step beyond what they perceive as their own limitations giving them the self-confidence to contribute actively to society.

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# Book Reviews

## *The Power of Critical Theory for Adult Learning and Teaching*

STEPHEN BROOKFIELD

*(Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, £24.99, pp. 440, 2005)*

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Is adult education socialist? Yes, according to Brookfield and because of this it involves a critical investigation of reality with the practical intent of changing the world. This leads to the exciting prospect of opening for scrutiny the assumptions under which we operate. That which is taken for granted can be brought to the fore and examined. But critical theory goes even further. It unearths the ways in which an unjust society utilises a set of ideas to convince people that this unjust situation is normal. Critical theory is a way of reading this situation so as both to understand and change it. A socialist adult education facilitates the learning required to do this.

If this is of interest to you this book is essential reading.

Brookfield is an eloquent advocate for the idea that creating a just and caring society is a learning project and he sets out a series of learning tasks. Each task becomes a chapter. The tasks are challenging ideology; contesting hegemony; unmasking power; overcome alienation; learning liberation; reclaiming reason; learning democracy; and racializing criticality. Each chapter introduces a key informant(s) for that task.

Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno and Louis Althusser are the key informants for chapter three. Though not the first port of call for most adult educators they are placed here as foundational for an understanding of a critical adult education.

They alert us to ways in which our usual thinking in society is distanced from questions about how we should treat each other. They saw us as enslaved by the myth of economic success and illustrate how the economy impacts on everything. This, like every chapter, includes a section that specifically makes the connections between the theorist, the task and adult education.

Readers of chapter four will recognise Antonio Gramsci as the lead thinker on contesting hegemony. Hegemony is the process by which we learn to embrace with commitment and enthusiasm a set of ideas and beliefs that in fact are to our detriment and which work to support the interests of those in power. Gramsci is a challenging read. Brookfield is a short cut. The understanding of hegemony as more subtle and encompassing than ideology is well made as is the way he explains such powerful ideas as “every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship.” How then can adult educators respond? By becoming, as Gramsci suggested, organic intellectuals. Though this may go against the grain (who wants to be an intellectual?) Brookfield challenges adult educators to become organic intellectuals.

Unmasking power is the fascinating domain of Michel Foucault, the subject of chapter five. The forward jump to Foucault at this stage provides one of the few uneven moments in this book but the importance of Foucault is well argued. Few contemporary adult educators can, with such clarity, identify and explain in simple English the complex ideas of Foucault. An analysis of power, the idea that power is knowledge, the importance of disciplinary power, the centrality of the subject and surveillance are expertly presented not just as Foucault’s ideas but as ideas of central concern to adult education. Many current buzz-words in adult education lend themselves to such analysis. Are continuous assessment, learning journals, e-learning, discussion groups and quality reviews other ‘legitimised’ ways of increasing surveillance of our actions and of our students? The provocative analysis of learning journals where the judges of normality exercise their power is a good example of the way Brookfield constantly turns the critical theory he is explaining onto the practices and ideas of adult education. Anyone who has taught by e-learning will know that it is difficult to find spaces for discussion online that are not subject to scrutiny and observation by the system and the tutor. Big brother is indeed watching. The implications are huge. But there are also opportunities for resistance. The promise of resistance and its encouragement is the interesting agenda for educators. Students are agents of power too and possess the capacity to subvert and resist.

Erich Fromm is the informant in chapter six on overcoming alienation. Many will know Fromm's work (*The Art of Loving*) outlining the connection between the ability (or inability) to love and the capitalist system. Fromm is accessible and a widely read face of critical theory and this re-reading of Fromm is well deserving of our attention. He speaks of what people know about, but adds a potent mix of radical Marxist analysis. Alienation, objectification of labour, rampant consumerism and commodification are all borrowed from Marx and reworked by Fromm. In turn, Brookfield reworks them for the adult educator. Fromm helps articulate the case for an adult education that has the task of promoting a critical literacy project. Automaton conformity (being exactly the same as one imagines the majority to be) is a hugely useful idea. In line with the theme of the book, which is to articulate a critical theory grounding for democracy, Brookfield proposes here the move toward a participatory democracy.

Learning liberation as a task takes us to Herbert Marcuse in chapter seven where a number of controversial ideas are outlined by Brookfield. It will not take anyone by surprise to know that art, according to Marcuse, has the power to trigger revolutionary estrangement from everyday reality and sow the seeds of political critique. 'Rebellious subjectivity' and appreciation of individual isolation is contrary to the political inclination of critical theorists in general and of many adult educators also.

With its emphasis on the empirical and concrete the modern world kills abstract conceptual thought. The challenge that Marcuse offers is to re-engage in abstract, theoretical thinking and reject the current preoccupation with the avoidance of intellectual debate and theoretical thinking. The contemporary anti-intellectual mistrust of theorizing serves the interests of the powers that be. Marcuse is certainly worth re-reading.

The fundamental task of adult education is to provide students with the conceptual instruments for a radical and thorough critique of the material and intellectual culture, according to Marcuse. This flies challengingly in the face of the current dominant adult education ideology of experiential learning, starting where the student is at and other student centred ideas. The task is to develop a new language undistorted by the establishment. Of course, our best language is always co-opted and colonised and lifelong learning is a good example of an idea that bears little resemblance to its potential and radical possibilities when it is processed and homogenised by the system. But Marcuse does raise critical questions about our approaches to working with adults.

Who will help reclaim reason? Habermas of course. This should be no surprise to adult educators who have read Brookfield and Mezirow reinterpret Habermas for our field. The decline of the public sphere (and so of democracy); the threat to civil society; the colonization of the lifeworld are all made understandable here. Few accounts of Habermas are as accessible as these two chapters.

An increasingly important subject in Ireland is discussed in chapter ten – racialising criticality. We do need in Ireland some key insights about the way our thinking is European centred. An appreciation of Afro-centred thinking would help us understand better the increasing number of immigrants. We look forward to the development of an Afro-Irish literature of critical thought and analysis that would critique the white-centred Irish mind set as well as the Euro-centric nature of our legal, political and educational system. An Afro-centric paradigm would make an interesting alternative discourse in Irish adult education thinking, policy and practice.

The chapter on a gendered critique of critical theory is interesting but a rather conventional one. It gathers together in competent fashion the well-known ideas of bell hooks, Angela Davis and Mary Belenky. It is toward the end that this book is weak. To outline a critical theory for adult education and then engage in a gendered critique is interesting but the absence of the admittedly few women critical theorists is significant. Why not focus on Rosa Luxembourg? She is surely a key informant on radical action in Europe. And if Foucault is considered a critical theorist so should Nancy Chodorow, a radical Marxist feminist with a psychoanalytic understanding – exactly the combination that defines the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.

There is a chapter on how to teach critically or how a critical theorist would teach.

A critical comment may be in order. There is a distinction between teaching about critical theory and teaching people to be critical theorists. This is not a trivial difference. I think this book has made a major contribution to the former and its weakness is in addressing how to do the latter. Maybe another work will focus on the ways in which one can actively as an educator engage learners on the liberating journey towards becoming critical theorists.

But the strength of this work, I hope, is that it will encourage adult educators to mine the rich veins of ideas at first hand by engaging in the challenging and really useful literature of critical theory. There is nothing less than democracy at stake.

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## *Unsettling the Horses – Interrogating Adult Education Perspectives*

EDITED BY ANNE RYAN AND TONY WALSH

(MACE: *Maynooth Adult and Community Education*, NUI Maynooth, €20, pp. 180, 2004)

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“Some people see things as they are and ask: Why?  
Others dream of things that never were and ask: Why not?”

These words of Martin Luther King find resonance for me in the chapters of this book. Just as King devoted his life to bringing black people in from the margins of society, so too the articles here deal with educational sites at the margins of mainstream educational activity. The potential of these sites should not be ignored as they point to new and exciting directions, hitherto unexplored. While the various contributors are all immersed in change within their particular specialisms, they all dream of things that at present do not exist but which, if they did, would afford more equitable access to education with all its benefits.

But why such a strange title? The authors wanted to capture that sense of expectation or perturbation associated with horses in the old cowboy movies. These animals were always the first to know when something was about to happen. A sense of nervous expectation spread among the horses and this was always a sign that something was afoot. So, too, the contributors in this book seek to highlight that portent of disturbance as a herald of change and a challenge to the status quo. Unsettling the horses, then, is a metaphor for the process needed to counter the natural homeostasis of systems which are by nature conservative.

This book should serve as an inspiration and motivation to adult education practitioners who concern themselves with issues of exclusion and its contributing factors. Radical adult education should be an agent of social change, enabling inclusion and promoting individual and community empowerment. This is the basic rationale of *Unsettling the Horses*, which consists of ten chapters by various authors.



I have often been disturbed by the increasing development of segregated pockets of knowledge and the so-called “experts” emerging in their various fields. This book has gladdened my heart in its emphasis on the interconnectedness of social, environmental and economic realities, in contrast to the unhelpful compartmentalisation of international and local development into insulated spheres of activity.

We can begin to see how this interconnectedness can be addressed by looking at the notion of sustainability in community education and development work. The ten contributors all argue for a balance to be struck between social, economic and environmental well-being. How is this to be done? By way of an engagement characterised by continual responsiveness in a reflective and recursive process. They argue for the need to sharpen our ability to engage creatively in the necessary and inevitable process of change, while paying attention to subjectivity, resistance, agency and the sustainability of politicised identities.

Each of the ten contributors to *Unsettling the Horses* works within a different discipline, e.g. the theatre, nursing, personal development, theology, psychotherapy. But each one presents a critical analysis of the cogent issues in their specialist topic area and critiques the dominant discourses of the systems in which they operate.

Peter Hussey discusses the benefits of liberating theatre in the context of education, community development and social justice. He proposes the novel idea of performances that are created by the audience in order to liberate the collective imagination and thereby define and shape our society and our concept of justice.

The experience of displacement is explored by Sahr Yambasu and Esther Edeko and how this effects a refugee’s sense of identity. They demonstrate how important it is for the refugee to be given the opportunity to tell her or his story as a means of escaping the potential tyranny of the past and forging a new future. With the great increase of asylum-seekers in Ireland, these insights are particularly valuable for a radical adult education agenda that utilises “narrative-rich educational interventions”.

Continuing on the theme of narrative Dorothy Butler Scally argues for its importance in the authoring of identity. She makes her case persuasively in the context

of facilitating personal development courses and clearly shows “that early childhood sexual and gender learning is largely inadequate for the demands of holistic adult education”. There is a need to pay attention to the psycho-social development of the person, and this in turn requires the training of educators to engage appropriately with learners’ personal development narratives.

Margaret McAdam describes ways of assisting nurse education to move beyond its present impasse, caught as it is between “optimistic ideas for empowerment and the pessimistic reality of oppressive hegemonic systems in which nursing continues to be situated”. A crucial shift has taken place in the last decade in the transfer of nurse training from the hospital to the university, with its aspirations of producing more empowered, reflective and responsible nurse practitioners, capable of critical analysis. While there is considerable perturbation in the health service, McAdam acknowledges a fundamental difficulty in moving beyond the apparent deadlock.

A reflection of the problems discussed by McAdam can be found in the next chapter, *Creating New Knowledge* by Ann Ryan and Tony Walsh. They were involved in delivering a course where the expectations of the participants created difficulties for the authors. Both groups of people were caught between two large systems embodying different agendas. What could have been a near catastrophe, the authors managed to turn into a learning opportunity. They faced up to the root of the difficulties and geared their response accordingly, thereby creating new and purposeful knowledge.

In the chapter, *Development and the Uniform School*, Ann Ryan draws on her work in the developing world to critique the one-model-fits-all approach to education throughout the world, reproducing the same school design irrespective of the prevailing local conditions. She gives the example of an educational initiative in Bangladesh that breaks the mould by adapting to the needs of the children instead of forcing them to fit into a pre-existing model. Unfortunately, it only generated a half-hearted response from those whose business is development, possibly due to their unquestioning loyalty to a more conventional model of education. They failed to see the merits of an alternative approach that proved capable of reaching children who would not have been reached otherwise and who are failed by the conventional delivery system. Unless we get away from the uniform school and develop more tailor-made approaches, millions of children will forfeit their right to an education.

Anne B. Ryan, in her chapter on *Subjectivity and Consumption*, points to the dangers in assigning status to people based solely on their material possessions. Such an approach threatens the sustainability of the world and also diminishes the quality of life of those who unreflectingly consume. The personal choices we all make are never neutral but have their source and meaning in societal discourses, which mostly prop up the power of the elite. She goes on to argue for a radical adult education approach in which knowledge is characterised by its ability to challenge the status quo as opposed to adaptive knowledge which accepts the status quo. Attention to these issues is essential if adult education is to retain its critical edge and become an agent of social change.

In the final chapter *Protecting and Developing Local Economies*, Richard Douthwaith shows how an unsustainable pattern of development arises from the traditional approach that relies on the external economy for community economic development. He shows how the global community is neither equitable, sustainable nor reliable. But it is not going to disappear overnight and it has a role to play, e.g. in the production of aircraft and computers. But we do need to get a better balance between local and global economies which he sees as complementary. Since the global economy is currently the dominant player, it is time to give more weight to local alternatives, to dream of things that never were and ask: Why not?

My only criticism of this book is the effort involved in trying to understand the concepts behind some of the terminology involved, which is very academic. While I appreciate the research underpinning the articles, and the many references and bibliographies, it would benefit and be more accessible to a wider audience if it were written in a simpler, more reader friendly format, while keeping its essential truths. However, it is well worth the effort and makes a significant contribution to the central role that radical adult education should play in the emergence of new knowledge and thus in social change itself.

As an Adult Education Organiser for the past twenty five years, I am convinced that the various insights in this book should help to re-energise all of us adult education practitioners, as well as motivating us towards a more radical approach to our work. At first, I was sceptical about the different disciplines from which the contributors were writing. But as I read through the chapters, I began to see links and connections between the various systems which turned out to be more complementary than I had imagined. These articles also present

a challenge to all of us educators to constantly examine what we are doing, how we are doing it and, most importantly, why we are doing it. At times we get so busy responding to immediate demands, that we don't give ourselves the opportunity to sit back and reflect on our practice, critique it and ponder the road ahead further than tomorrow.

This collection has succeeded in Unsettling the Horses for me and bringing me back to my opening comments - Some dream of things that never were and ask: Why not?

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## *The Politics of Community Development*

FRED POWELL AND MARTIN GEORGHEGAN

(A&A Farmar, €20, pp. 289, 2004)

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Community development, although widely practiced, is rarely the focus of scholarly research. This book, therefore, is a most welcome publication. This is not a book about *how to* develop communities or how to access funding, rather it is about revealing the often hidden agendas that make development an invariably complex activity. It deals with the big questions to do with the purpose and political positionings of community development as practised in Ireland today. Everyone with an involvement in community development should find something here that will both inform their approach and provoke a great deal of reflection.

In compiling the book a survey was conducted among almost two hundred community activists. Their responses, which are presented in easily accessible tables, make for interesting reading. Some, if not all of, the questions posed in the survey would provide a useful template that community developers could use in their specific contexts to reveal their own attitudes and opinions.

The tone of the book is seriously academic. However, because the issues raised for discussion are grounded in the current situation, the book is as relevant to practitioners as it is to policy-makers or scholars. There are ample references throughout the text to assist readers who want to delve further into the theories drawn on by the writers in the course of their deliberations.

In the introduction the authors indicate that their intention is to reveal the human and institutional forces that have shaped and are currently determining the impact of community development within the Irish political landscape. By way of providing a context for their investigation they sketch the history of community activism in the twentieth century and provide commentary on the major contemporary reports and policy documents that inform community development practices today. What is most compelling is that the authors do not shy away from the many thorny questions to do with the purposes of community development; the difficulties facing those within the sector who seek to

challenge the dominant neo-liberal global development agenda; and the ways in which community / government partnerships are shaping current thinking and practices on the ground.

Each chapter of the book looks at a different aspect of community with a view to illuminating the contexts in which community development happens; the conditions that enable and curtail it; and the factors that motivate individuals and groups to get involved. The titles of the chapters are indicative of the scope of this publication.

*Chapter 1: Reclaiming Civil Society.* This chapter begins by teasing out the meaning of civil society and the importance of the concept in our appreciation of the political nature and global context of all community development initiatives. It looks at three models of development – market-led, state-led and community-led – and it discusses the purposes of community development within each model. This chapter provides a really useful insight for activists or community groups who want to locate their beliefs and work practices within broader theoretical and political frameworks. The chapter also provides a comprehensive overview of the writings of key thinkers in the community development field.

*Chapter 2: The Seduction of Place* looks at the history of community initiatives in Ireland particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. The chapter explores the political and cultural conditions that favoured initiatives that sought to create and sustain a homogenised, mono-cultural society in which difference was something to be minimised rather than celebrated. Unfortunately, the chapter does not give space to the work of women's organisations during this period. Reading this chapter, one would assume there was no resistance to the dominant ideologies propounded in harmony by church and state, neither would the reader get a sense of the overtly gendered nature of those community initiatives that are covered. Although gender is referred to later in chapter four it is a somewhat cursory discussion that fails to compensate for its omission in this chapter.

*Chapter 3: The Politics of Poverty* traces the emergence of poverty reduction as a focus for state sponsored and voluntary community development over the past 40 years. It assesses the work of agencies such as the CPA and the impacts on community development of initiatives such as NESF, and reports such as

NAPS. It looks at the growing reliance on the state for funding during this period and consequently, how the explicit modernisation agenda that shaped the country's economic vision impacted on community development. This chapter also includes responses to thirteen of the questions posed to those surveyed as part of the research for this book.

*Chapter 4: Active Citizenship: Reality or Myth.* This chapter explores the extent to which community development (i) is a force for enabling greater participation in society on the part of those who are economically excluded or (ii) is integral to ensuring the success of the modernisation agenda. The chapter also investigates the impact of professionalisation within the sector in terms of what is done, by whom, and with what ends in mind. Gender inequalities are also considered within this context. The findings from seventeen of the survey questions are presented in this chapter.

*Chapter 5: The Dimensions of Community Development* explores the scope and purpose of community development and, most intriguingly, the values and beliefs that inspire those who participate. The responses to a further twenty survey questions are presented in here. These responses alone make for compelling reading.

*Chapter 6: Community Development, Social Exclusion and the State* presents the opinions of those surveyed to a range of twenty six questions pertaining to (i) the success of various state initiatives designed to promote social inclusion and (ii) the quality of their relationship with the state. These findings are at times unexpected. The chapter concludes by comparing the experience of community activism among excluded sectors of the population in Ireland and France.

*Chapter 7: Social Partnership: A New Narrative of Governance?* This chapter gives the views of community activists on social partnership. They responded to twenty one questions relating to the benefits and difficulties of working within a partnership approach.

*Chapter 8: Reinventing Governance* draws conclusions about the potential of community development to be a force for change considering the forces that constrain and work against this possibility. The closing words of the book capture the difficulties inherent in resisting these forces and they emphasise the importance of such resistance:

The goal of community development is to ‘democratise democracy’ in a genuinely socially inclusive form. In a globalised society, dominated by the market, that is a task of Herculean proportions. Yet there is ample evidence of citizens willing to try. That must be the hope of our civilisation (p.272).

There is no question that this book makes a significant and most worthwhile contribution to our understanding of the place and importance of community development within the national and global arenas. On the down side, the book does not treat gender and cultural diversity as sites for serious investigation. Other than four pages in Chapter Four, gender is largely an invisible variable. The impact of immigration on the practice of community development is limited to a discussion that focuses on those organisations working directly with refugees and asylum seekers. These omissions are noteworthy given that the explicit purpose of this book was “to provide a social scientific interpretation of community development” (p.2). They are also to be regretted in a publication that otherwise has so much to offer. In terms of style and presentation the book is not an easy read. The text is dense and calls for sustained concentration. Paragraphs and headed sections are long. More subheadings would have made it easier to dip into the book in order to access specific information. However, despite these shortcomings practitioners and academics alike will find much to hold their interest.

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*Looking at the Economy through Women's Eyes:  
A facilitator's guide for economic literacy*

MAEVE TAYLOR

*(Dublin: Banúlacht Publications, €25, pp. 126, 2004)*

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Of all modern omnipotent discourses surely the rhetoric of economic neo-liberalism tops the league of power and of the powerful. Thus those unfamiliar with its language and concepts would be well advised not to enter public debate unless willing to risk emasculation by the practitioners of the discipline. Those without the required acquiescence to the commands of the doctrine will find it hard to hold onto their focus as the 'logic' of utilitarianism is pitted mercilessly against 'emotive' ideas about social justice and fairness or against attempts to redefine what we actually mean by 'success', 'wealth' and 'the economy' itself.

How brave then for an Irish women's NGO to take on the provision of a handbook for training in economic literacy which directly challenges neo-liberalism to its core values and, moreover, bring a feminist dimension to that challenge. This handbook, published by Banúlacht, the development education organisation, is no less than that. And it succeeds extremely well.

This is a handbook on globalisation and on international capitalist economics generally which could be used by facilitators or instructors in any adult education or gender training context. It is a powerful tool in that it will enable any learner to enter into the discourse of neo-liberalisation with confidence. It is a powerful tool also in that it can be used for lobbying and advocacy work by women's groups and by economically marginalised groups to advance the cause of arguing for an economy which serves actual and complex human needs and reflects the reality of our lives today. At the very least, any learner who has come through a training or a course based on this book will have experienced a demystification of economics and its commanding position.

At a political level and, indeed, in terms of how we view the world, the handbook (and presumably the training that it will lead to) achieves one important goal: it renders women visible in our understanding of economic production and exchange and allows us "see the economy through women's eyes" (p.21).

To engender a structure and rhetoric which pertains to principles of neutrality and genderlessness is no small feat. To do this according to adult education principles of accessibility to all and inclusivity to learners is no smaller one.

The manual is divided into two parts. Part One, in some ways the weightiest, is an overview of the guide, its methodology, and sets out the basic concepts and analytical positions upon which the whole project is founded. From page one the politics are clear: the reader knows that this is a feminist document, committed to advancing women's issues in a context of socio-economic justice on a global scale. As a feminist development education organisation, the global linkages are foregrounded by Banúlacht and the feminist emancipatory goals are threaded throughout.

It's important to note here also that the handbook has come about subsequent to practice and extensive training experience on the ground. The guide is a compilation of materials and activities that have already been tried and tested in workshops on economic literacy carried out by the organisation. Furthermore, the manual is informed by Banúlacht's international collaborations with WIDE (Women in Development Europe) and also pulls in existing critiques and materials provided by African, Asian and Caribbean women's networks. Like the scope of the manual and the training that it will lead to, the manual itself is truly internationalised.

The instructions to the book, carried in Part One, are as crisp as lettuce – encouraging and clearly spelt out. But, for this reader, there was one small question: would it have been possible to reduce the introductory text or the explanatory text as, despite its very encouraging tone, there is a lot to wade through? Some less brave souls might falter here. In mitigation, however, it has to be acknowledged that in seeking to break through and provide an alternative critique to economic norms, much ground has to be cleared and in fairness Banúlacht manages to avoid extensive definitions of what constitutes a 'feminist' position, or what defines the limits of 'the economy'. It may be that in the training of trainers stage (which apparently may follow) working through the introductory stages would be made easier in a group process.

Part Two of the manual is set out in five modules which are discrete but are best, pedagogically, if followed in a sequence. Each of the topics is followed by activities based on ice-breakers, group activities and discussion topics organ-

ised to bring the learners from their own experience into a more sustained critique to include a critique of abstract and analytical notions. Each activity (except one) comes to a close with some form of ‘action’ agenda which could take a group outwards into activism, lobbying or organisational work. In this sense, the learning structure on which the handbook is based conforms to the ‘spiral’ notion of much emancipatory educational paradigms. The five topics are:

- Gender care and the economy
- Economic growth
- Gender budgeting
- Globalisation and trade
- A human right challenge to neo-liberalism

The notion of gender and the care economy is central to any feminist critique of both economics and the structure of western societies and this is a good place for Banúlacht to start. This module immediately brings us to a critique of profound sexist assumptions in contemporary society: that women’s work as carers or love-labourers is natural, inevitable and outside the sphere of the ‘economy’. It introduces the dependence of ‘the economy’ on social and interpersonal mores which are culturally bound and on the reality that the economy is highly gendered. This is a good place from which learners can then go on to look at the remaining four topics.

Throughout the topics, pedagogy is based on the assumption that the learner herself will provide the knowledge and ideas (although she may not be equipped with the linguistic currency) and that these can be brought to bear on the wider critique. Thus, in the long module on trade liberalisation and its impact on women in the South, learners are asked to step into the shoes of fictional women but to draw on their own wisdom and knowing to figure out the impact of privatisation of health care or currency devaluation on their immediate family and community needs. Similarly, in the topic of gender budgeting, learners are asked to look around at local organisations and national organisations (through budget statements, project proposals and so on) and develop a critique of the invisibility of gender in the budgeting process. Here, as in most modules, options are provided for the activities in recognition that learners will be coming with different experiences and from different political and organisational locations.

As the first module was required to unmask deeply ingrained ideas about women's invisibility in economic production, the last module is required to link economic literacy to a global arena. The focus here on a human rights approach to neo-liberalism provides one of the few discourses which can mount a sustained challenge to the laws of supply and demand. Here we also get a very clear introduction to the idea of women's human rights and to what it means to talk about human rights in the first place. Additionally, we are given a quick and easy guide to the UN human rights system including the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the usefulness of these international regimes in advancing women's cause on the ground. Again this is, of itself, no small feat. As government shrinks in the face of neo-globalised norms and as we are all increasingly being rendered consumers in a global economy, we need to reinvigorate (or perhaps, in an Irish context, invigorate) the language of universality and of core, collective humanity which international human rights norms provide.

Given training and/or experience of adult education on the part of the trainers, this manual can be widely used within many different contexts. It can be unreservedly recommended.

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“The European Year of Citizenship through Education 2005... provides Irish educators with a timely opportunity to put issues such as the future of citizenship and democratic citizenship education in Ireland, ‘public values’ and the ‘common good’ on the national agenda”.

“Adult education has the potential to offer the participants the tools to participate actively in the discussions on the redefinition of ‘Irishness’”.

“Citizenship refers to more than a legal status; being an active citizen entails a level of continuous and meaningful engagement in the public sphere”.

“To understand the voicelessness that so many citizens feel, we perhaps need to look more deeply at the discourse around social exclusion”.

“Every single human being that walks this planet has the potential to make a positive contribution to life...The challenge for all of us as citizens is to ensure that we create just, meaningful and relevant ways in which this contribution can be harnessed for the public good”.

