



# ADULT LEARNER 2013

*The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*

# ADULT LEARNER 2013



*The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*

ISSN No. 0790-8040

The views expressed here are those of the authors and  
not necessarily those of AONTAS or the Adult Education  
Officers' Association.

©2013

*Design by Language, [www.language.ie](http://www.language.ie)*

# Contents

7 Editorial comment  
ROB MARK, EDITOR

10 Contributors

## *Section 1 – Perspectives on Community and Lifelong Learning*

15 What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom –  
the limits to the transformative approach to education for  
political citizenship  
MICHAEL J. MURRAY

29 Contemporary adult education philosophies and practices in art  
galleries and museums in Canada and the UK  
DARLENE E. CLOVER & LORRAINE BELL

44 ‘Swimming in the swamp’ – inquiry into accreditation, community  
development, and social change.  
CAMILLA FITZSIMONS & PETER DORMAN

59 Awakening to Recovery and Honneth's Theory of Recognition  
TOM O' BRIEN

75 The War against People: Adult education practice for  
critical democracy  
BRÍD CONNOLLY & PETER HUSSEY

## *Section 2 - Case Studies on Improving Practices*

90 The Learning Festival: Pathway to Sustainable Learning Cities?  
PETER KEARNS, TINA NEYLON, YVONNE LANE & MICHAEL OSBORNE

100 Can we do it better? A case study of how reflection within a  
programme team supports changes and innovations to practice.  
BREDA MCTAGGART & ORLA WALSH

### ***Section 3 – Book Reviews***

- 110     *Going to College as a Mature Student,  
The next step in your Academic Journey*  
Denis Staunton
- 113     *Gender, Masculinities and Lifelong Learning*  
Marion Bowl, Robert Tobias , Jennifer Leahy, Graeme Ferguson  
& Jeffery Gage
- 115     *Feminist Popular Education in Transnational Debates*  
Linzi Manicom & Shirley Walters
- 117     Call for papers 2014 Edition

# Editorial Comment

---

On 20th July 2013, the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, visited the island of Iona as part of celebrations for the 1450th anniversary of Saint Columba's arrival there. The President, who was met by Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in Scotland, noted the importance the island has played as a centre of renewal and learning. Speaking about St Columba, he noted he was perhaps Scotland's most famous immigrant bringing with him the Christian message which has created a strong bond between the two countries.

The island community of Iona forms part of the Inner Hebrides off the western coast of Scotland. It is well known as a centre for Celtic spirituality, culture and learning and has inspired many scholars to write over the years on so many different issues. The island provides a sense of community for those coming from diverse traditions. The message which St Columba brought, sometimes expressed in the image of the dove, has been a great source of inspiration for many working in the field of peace and reconciliation. Whether as learners and teachers, Iona has provided inspiration and challenges for many adult educators, transforming our lives and our hopes for the future. Many of the themes in this issue of the adult learner are closely linked to the messages of Iona through community learning, learning from a shared history, through art or by extending learning 'beyond the walls' through lived experience in a critical democracy.

What we mean by 'adult' and how education is transmitted and made more relevant to the lived experience of every adult has also long been part of the discourse of adult learning. The field of adult education is said to be alive with debate around the meanings and purposes of education and learning with

many tensions existing between theorists and those working in the sector. The role which adult education can play in the development of skills and knowledge, developing the capacity to think critically or dealing with inequalities and in promoting social transformation, permeates many of the articles in this issue of the journal. This collection of articles provides not only reflections based on theoretical perspectives, but new challenges for transforming ourselves and our practices.

In the opening article in Section 1, Michael Murray looks at the issue of adult education for democratic citizenship, discussing the limits of a transformative approach to education for political citizenship. He asks whether in fact adult education enables learners to ask awkward questions and explore alternative futures, and questions the ability of our classrooms to develop critical capabilities which question political power relations. Drawing on the writings of well-known theorists such as Mezirow and Habermas he concludes that we need a more critical examination of political citizenship in the times we live in.

In the next article, Darlene Clover and Lorraine Bell examine the debate about the role of public art galleries and museums in adult learning, reporting on a comparative study of the potential contribution which they can make. The article looks at how adult educators and community outreach and development workers understand their changing role and demonstrates the tension which exists in making these institutions more relevant to the experiences of the communities they serve while addressing social and environmental problems. Camilla Fitzsimons and Peter Dorman then look at the challenge which accreditation of learning brings, reminding us of the benefits and challenges which the process can bring to community development. Promoting adult education in a diverse society is again a theme taken up in Tom O'Brien's article which applies a radical approach of Axel Honneth, a critical theorist, who argues for the development of a person's identity that promotes self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem among those on the edge of society. Finally, Section 1 concludes with an exploration of the role of adult education for critical democracy explored through a dialogue between Bríd Connolly and Peter Hussey. Here the authors successfully engage the reader in examining how one can contribute to a critical democracy in a creative and caring way.

Section 2 presents two case studies for improving practice. The first by Peter Kearns et al; examines the role and importance of learning festivals through a focus on recent festivals in Cork and Limerick. The importance which such

events can play in contributing to sustainability in cities is discussed as are the practical steps needed for promoting learning regions. In the final article, Breda McTaggart and Orla Walsh look at how barriers to participation in lifelong learning, particularly those experienced by women, are overcome through participation in a part-time degree programme.

I would like to express my thanks to every contributor who has shared their thoughts and ideas in this issue and to the reviewers for pointing authors in the right direction. I would also like to express my thanks to all those who submitted articles which we were unfortunately not able to publish on this occasion. Finally I would like to thank the members of the Editorial Board for the skills and expertise which they have contributed to preparing this issue.

We are also grateful to our funders AONTAS and the Department of Education and Skills for their on-going support in publishing this journal. Our ability to make it freely available online is indeed very useful in opening up access to those who can learn from new ideas and ways of doing things across the adult learning sector. As a result of this open access policy, the *Adult Learner* can be easily accessed and is widely read across the different sectors of education. We wish you pleasant reading and look forward to receiving your contributions for future issues.

**ROB MARK, EDITOR**

University of Strathclyde

*Editorial Board*

Berni Brady, AONTAS, Chair

Eileen Condon, Adult Education Officers' Association

Brid Connolly, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Marian Elders, University College Cork

Elaine Keane, National University of Ireland, Galway

Mary Kett, Expert, Adult Learning

Rob Mark, University of Strathclyde, Editor

Rosemary Moreland, University of Ulster, Jordanstown

Luke Murtagh, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Fiona O'Loughlin, Adult Education Officers' Association

Eleonora Peruffo, AONTAS, Secretary

Aideen Quilty, University College Dublin - Book Reviews Editor

Maria Slowey, Dublin City University

## *Contributors*

**LORRAINE BELL** is a doctoral student in Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria, Canada. She is interested in how museums can create spaces for critical adult education and social engagement.

**DARLENE E. CLOVER** is Professor of Leadership Studies and Adult Education at the University of Victoria, Canada. Her teaching and research foci include cultural institutions, and arts-based adult education and research.

**BRÍD CONNOLLY** works in the Department of Adult and Community Education at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, Ireland. She works in the fields of Gender Studies, Groupwork Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy.

**PETER DORMAN** currently works as a community worker with Community Action Network, in the South Inner City of Dublin. He has more than 30 years' experience working in the field of Community and Youth Work and on training trainer's programmes.

**CAMILLA FITZSIMONS** is a community educator with Respond VHA and tutors on a range of programmes at the Department of Adult and Community Education, National University of Ireland, Maynooth. She has worked in community development and community education for more than 15 years.

**PETER HUSSEY** is Artistic Director of Crooked House Theatre Company and Kildare Youth Theatre, and he works at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, as an adult educator. He has developed Community Drama modules and programmes for the Department of Adult and Community Education and Department of Applied Social Studies.

**PETER KEARNS** is Co-director of the PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE). He has had careers as a teacher, Australian public servant, and consultant including serving as a member of the Australian Delegation to OECD in Paris. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2006 for his contribution to education and training.

**YVONNE LANE** has coordinated the Lifelong Learning Festival in Limerick since it began in 2011. As well as facilitating the work of the Limerick City of Learning Steering Group Yvonne supports education-related actions in

support of the Regeneration process in Limerick City, through implementation of the PAUL Partnership Work Plan. Her background is in the education and e-Learning sector.

**MICHAEL J. MURRAY** is a Lecturer in Sociology at the Department of Adult and Community Education, National University of Ireland, Maynooth. His research interests include power and politics, transnational governance, environmental justice and Northern Ireland politics.

**TINA NEYLON** has been Co-ordinator of the Lifelong Learning festival in Cork since it began in 2004. Her background is in journalism and she was literary editor for the Irish Examiner. She has presented a live radio arts programme for RTÉ and has worked as freelance researcher and editor and has taught journalism.

**TOM O' BRIEN** is a teacher on the Certificate in Addiction Studies at the Department of Adult and Community Education at NUI Maynooth. He also manages an addiction service in Dublin called Sankalpa and he has recently qualified as a Master Herbalist. He holds an MA and Doctorate which focusses on adult education and addiction.

**MICHAEL OSBORNE** is Director of the Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning within the Faculty of Education at the University of Glasgow and Co-director of the PASCAL Observatory on Place Management, Social Capital and Lifelong Learning. His research interests include widening participation to higher education, teaching and learning and the development of learning cities and regions.

**BREDA MCTAGGART** holds a PhD and is lecturer in Social Sciences at the Institute of Technology in Sligo, Ireland. Her research interests are in education and its relationship to improved life outcomes. Her doctorate focused on recruitment, retention and attainment of students within higher education.

**ORLA WALSH** is a Lecturer in Psychology in the Department of Social Sciences at the Institute of Technology, Sligo. She is interested in Life Span Developmental Psychology and Education and she has worked on access to third level education and life-long learning for adult learners for many years.



# SECTION ONE

*Perspectives on Community and Lifelong Learning*



# What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom – the limits to the transformative approach to education for political citizenship

MICHAEL J. MURRAY, NUI MAYNOOTH

---

## **Abstract**

*This article offers a critical examination of the transformative approach to education for political citizenship. The argument offered here is that the transformative approaches lacks the capacity to fully acknowledge the asymmetries of political power and as a consequence, it promotes an idealised construct of political citizenship which does not transfer readily to spheres of political activity outside of the learning space. Learning about the ‘ubiquity of power’ should not be construed as indoctrination. Rather, it offers learners the possibility to challenge all aspects of political activity and to explore alternatives to established discourses.*

**Key words:** (transformative learning, power, political citizenship)

## **Introduction**

It can be argued, with some conviction, that the nature of political engagement and citizenship has been transformed in recent times. The recent loss of political sovereignty to transnational and economic institutions, coupled with an ever growing cynicism with elected representatives, has impacted on our understanding of politics in the Irish context. Further afield, the pronounced activism of the Arab Spring and continuing civil unrest in EU countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy asks us to question fundamental notions of political and democratic citizenship. However, other changes in our understanding of political citizenship have been ongoing for decades. The impact of economic globalisation and resultant fears over an emergent democratic deficit has taxed the minds of policymakers and political activists alike, where the promotion of active, participatory citizenship is viewed as a remedy of sorts. Education for political citizenship is identified as an important element in this process and is evident in the Council of Europe initiating the ‘European Year of Citizenship

through Education’ in 2005. More specifically, adult education has been identified as playing an important role in this endeavour - for instance, the Irish government-sponsored Active Citizenship Taskforce acknowledges the uniqueness of adult education in facilitating ‘how people can draw on their own experience of life to enrich learning and make new discoveries.’ (Taskforce on active citizenship, 2007b: p21) Likewise, the nexus of adult education, citizenship and democracy appears as a core theme in the Irish government’s White Paper on Adult and Community Education (2000), where adult education is viewed as ‘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...’ (Department of Education, 2000: p20)

From these various policy initiatives, it can be argued that a particular construction of what it means to be an ‘active’ or ‘responsible’ citizen has emerged. The European Commission-funded ‘Active Citizenship Education Study’ argues that active citizenship is ‘...characterised by tolerance, non-violence and the acknowledgement of the rule of law and of human rights.’ (de Weerd, 2005: 2) Elsewhere, the ‘Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education’, adopted in 2010, stated that -

One of the fundamental goals of all education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

(2010:p4)

[http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display\\_doc.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrea.org%2F2010cmrec7E.pdf&external=N](http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display_doc.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrea.org%2F2010cmrec7E.pdf&external=N)

Unsurprisingly, this policy construction is not to everyone’s taste. Many commentators have been critical of its inception, arguing that political power has shifted greatly over the last number of decades towards highly centralised and unaccountable transnational political bodies. As a consequence, decision-making has been moved further and further away from the general populous. Moreover, the predominance of neoliberal thinking ensures a reconfiguration of citizenship, where citizens are ‘encouraged’ to be ‘...more self-sufficient (and

self-interested) consumers or customers...’ and as a result, ‘...good citizens must, increasingly, look after themselves.’ (Martin, 2003: 599)

Within this highly contested terrain, it is opportune to revisit one of the more established, discourses on education for political citizenship within the discipline of adult education. The transformative approach, most readily identified with the writings of Jack Mezirow, contends that individuals, through transformative, reflective and dialogical processes, are able to contribute to positive social change, which, in turn, will ultimately lead to ongoing, ethical and undistorted democratic processes. It is an approach that favours rational deliberation in the pursuit of authentic political discourse and borrows heavily from the writings of Jürgen Habermas.

The central argument offered here is that the transformative approach fails to address issues of power asymmetries in an adequate way, particularly in relation to issues of conflict and contestation. As a consequence, the deliberative, critical citizen may well thrive in a carefully controlled learning environment, but this does not necessarily translate into any meaningful political engagement outside of the classroom, where political power relations are characterised by domination and marginalisation. In other words, what happens in the classroom invariably stays in the classroom. This article looks at three integral issues in order to illustrate this argument. Firstly, the issue of deliberative democracy is examined with the contention that “the rules of the game” in the adult education context do not manifest themselves in spheres of political activity. This is due to conceptual assumptions made in relation human nature and motivations in the political sphere. Claims towards a universalising notion of rational discourse, respect and mutuality simply do not stand up to scrutiny primarily because the transformative approach fails to acknowledge “context”. This brings us on to the second key point – the transformative approach prioritises individual agency to the detriment of any appreciation of pre-existing structures of power – a key criticism identified by other writers such as Inglis (1997) and Pietrykowski (1996). Again, this has consequences for how power relationships are, or more pertinently, are not considered. Thirdly, it is argued that because individual empowerment occurs within pre-determined processes, the type of citizenship championed by the transformative approach lends itself more to adhering to responsibilities and conformity rather than encouraging critical activism. In this respect, the transformative discourse inadvertently reflects a strong policy discourse which emphasises civic responsibility, respect for the law and voluntarism. Lastly, it is proposed that learning about power inequali-

ties does not necessarily translate as a form of indoctrination of learners, a claim made by Mezirow (1998). Rather, an adequate understanding of power asymmetries allows and encourages creative, critical thoughts and deeds, questions “common sense” assumptions made by policymakers and can facilitate exploring alternatives to the existing status quo. This, it is argued, has always been a key strength of adult education as a discipline.

It must be stated from the outset that the transformative approach is not being equated here merely as intellectual “cover” for policy pronouncements on active citizenship and education. At the same time, there are certainly commonalities and they are alluded to throughout this article where relevant. We begin first with a brief overview of the transformative approach to citizenship education.

### **Adult Education for Democratic Citizenship – the Transformative Approach**

According to Ellis and Scott, ‘...an informed, involved demos (people) is the indispensable foundation without which no truly democratic social system is possible.’ (2003: p253) From this premise, it can be argued that the transformative approach to citizenship education has been incredibly influential within the discipline of adult education. Within the broad context of critical reflection, there is an acknowledgement that as a preliminary, the individual must become aware that she/he is exposed to knowledge distortion, principally through processes of self-reflection. This, it is hoped, produces a state of ‘enlightenment’, which is ‘a necessary precondition for individual freedom and self-determination and eventually, social transformation’ (Ewert, 1991: p346). For Mezirow, it is the individual that takes precedence, where ‘subjective reframing’, is ‘involved in the most significant transformative learning experiences.’ (Mezirow, 1996: p9) Critical reflection and transformative learning, therefore, are integrally involved in developing the skills and capacities necessary for democratic citizenship (Mezirow, 2003: p62), where adult education encourages this development through processes of ‘dialogic learning’ (Ewert, 1991: p366). Reflecting the influence of Habermas, Mezirow claims that this process is based on the key objective of establishing ‘mutual agreement’ between individuals who enter into free, deliberative processes (Mezirow, 2003: p61). It is a process that is premised on the idea that participation requires education for meaningful engagement - ‘Deliberatively filtered political communications are especially dependent on the resources of the lifeworld – on a free and open political culture and an enlightened political socialisation...’ (Habermas, 2002: p252) In this vein, Fleming asserts –

Some people wonder if adult education has a vision. It has....adult learning is participatory, critically reflexive, open to new ideas and changing frames of reference. It has a vision of learners engaged in dialogic participatory discourse, collectively seeking ways changing themselves and society and that all systems, organisations and individuals respond to the needs of others.

(1996: 52)

Elsewhere, Fleming outlines what he sees as the work of critical political citizens. Citing instances of the Habermasian public sphere, Fleming notes the Enlightenment coffee houses and Salons of Europe as an ideal where ‘...people can discuss matters of mutual concern as peers, and learn about facts events and the opinions, interests, and perspectives of others in an atmosphere free of coercion and of inequalities that would incline individuals to acquiesce to be silent.’ (2000: 304). This is an important point. Undistorted deliberation occurs only in a carefully regulated space, where a number of rules must be adhered to. (Fleming, 2000: 307) Taken together, these political activities contribute to a recalibrated public sphere, where –

...there would be less emphasis on hierarchical authority and more on participatory decision making; the elimination of corporate culture and the nourishing of self-government; a clear priority given to social justice, social analysis, critical reflection, and reconstructing the teacher-student relationship where both become co-investigators of reality.

(Fleming, 2012: 134)

### **Running out of Deliberative Road?**

On the face of it, this approach towards the development of free, open deliberative spaces as a prelude to democratic, political citizenship is appealing. However, I would like to argue that problems quickly arise when attempts are made to transpose this construct outside of the highly regulated environs of the learning space. Firstly, both Habermas and Mezirow make claims to an essentialist, universal construct of human nature which, to say the least, are claims that would be difficult to substantiate. For example, Habermas notion of communicative action is based partially on an Enlightenment hope of ‘using human reason to create a more humane world’ (Brookfield, 2005: 1154), coupled with an adamant belief that communicative rationality is universal (Ewert, 1991 : 359). Secondly, both Habermas and Mezirow have little to say on the power

relational context in which deliberative political processes are meant to occur. Certainly this is Inglis's (1997) main criticism of Mezirow and finds resonance with Giroux's observation that '[t]eaching students how to argue, draw on their own experience or engage in rigorous dialogue says nothing about why they should engage in these actions in the first place.' (2004: 85) Given that the current, dominant discourse on active citizenship invests so heavily in political participation and deliberation, it is vital that these processes are contextualised not as ideals, but within broad, historical, political, economic and cultural power relations. In this respect, there exists much evidence that suggests participatory and deliberative processes such as public consultations or partnership arrangements are exercises in the asymmetries of power, rather than demonstrations of mutual respect and shared values (Murray, 2006; Rui, 2004). This salient point is, at best, underplayed in Mezirow and Habermas conceptual frameworks.

It can be argued, therefore, that Habermasian deliberative democracy is a construct of politics that exists primarily in the realm of an idealised state. Great caution must be taken in assuming that the dynamics of classroom interaction is a replication of other politicised spheres of activity. Deliberative engagement works very well when there is a minimum of disagreement, conflict and division. However, while these conditions could be constructed in the learning space, what occurs in such reified spaces is far from a reflection of political engagement. It is an argument that is made by Welton - himself an advocate of the transformative approach - in his examination of events leading up to war in Iraq in 2003. In attempting to outline a response from critical adult educators to the imperialist expansionism of neo-conservatives, Welton asserts that we must acknowledge that 'we do not live in the best of all Habermasian worlds', and that communicative action 'so valued by deliberative democrats - is far removed from the centres of decision-making powers.' (Welton, 2003: pp. 648-649) He concludes rather soberly that -

...critical adult educators committed to the norms of the 'active citizen', 'communicative power' and a 'mobilized civil society' confronts a world that has moved, and continues to move, far away from these ideals. It is no longer of much help at all for adult education in its present confused and fragmented state to propagate the myth of deliberative democracy without ever engaging the actually existing world of power and ruthlessness.

(Welton, 2003: 649)

### **Moving between Structure and Agency**

One of the key reasons why deliberative approach is distanced from a world of 'power and ruthlessness' is that political engagement happens within existing power relationships – in other words, context is not incidental, it is crucial. The premise that a collection of individuals operating on their own volition who are open to compromise and mutual respect simply does not account for the distinct machinations of structure and agency. For instance, a frequent complaint from those who engage in consultations or partnership processes with the government has been that, all too often, the process of deliberation and engagement is merely a prelude to the actual decision-making and that participation has little impact on final outcomes (Crowley, 1998; Murray, 2006). Instead, for some, participation is characterised by exclusion, marginalisation (Meade, 2005; E-consultation project, 2006) and in some cases, more blatant attempts at coercion (Murphy, 2002).

Commentators have previously argued that the transformative approach lacks an adequate account of structural power (Inglis, 1997; Pietrykowski, 1996). In one sense this is understandable given Mezirow's seemingly unequivocal view that '...a sense of self-empowerment is the cardinal goal of adult education.' (2000: p26). This has implications for the transformative construction of political citizenship - but also reflects a broader process of the individualisation of citizenship in policy terms. One particularly dominant discourse that has emerged in recent times aims to promote the notion that the structures and channels of power in contemporary society are synonymous with the concept of individual choice and individual freedoms. It is '...a citizenship that gives pride of place to the individual and his rights, and relegates to the background the affirmation of collective and partial, in the geographic and cultural sense, identities embodied by States.' (Audigier, 2000: pp. 9-10) Crucially however, Bauman argues that this move towards individualisation should not be construed as increased self-determination and individual freedom. Instead, individualisation is merely an indication of consumption patterns, where choice itself is illusory, where '... individualisation is a fate, not a choice...' (Bauman, 2000: 34) Moreover, this focus on the individual works to the detriment of organised, collective political action, the prerequisite to social change, where Mezirow's approach 'leads to an over-reliance on the individual... and, consequently, to an inadequate and false sense of emancipation.' (Inglis, 1997: 6)

Both Mezirow (1998) and Fleming (2000) flatly reject the charge that the transformative approach fails to acknowledge the 'social' aspects of power with

Mezirow stating that ‘Gaining reflective insight alone is not the terminal objective of transformative learning.’ However, and tellingly he goes on to assert that ‘...if we had to make a choice between changing the world and helping learners to transform their assumptions about their world so that they can change it, I would unhesitatingly choose the latter.’ (1998: 71) This position is consistent with a central tenet of transformative learning where ‘subjective reframing’, is ‘involved in the most significant transformative learning experiences.’ (Mezirow, 1996: 9) It is a view that does not necessarily preclude consideration of social power - it is entirely possible to consider the social from an individualist or agency perspective. This, after all is the basis of Weberian sociology. However, the implications for such an approach can be far reaching where issues of class conflict, gender inequalities and state repression can be reduced to instances of individual perception. Put simply, political actions occur within societies that are marked by structural inequalities, prejudices, preferences and interests where individual transformative experiences are not immune to these contexts - they are actively shaped by them. As Shaw and Martin point out -

...the notion of the citizen as *subject* embodies the classical sociological dualism of agency and structure. It is clear that to be active, citizens must act, but it must always be recognised (and understood) that human action is never in any simple sense ‘free’; it is always embedded within a pre-existing structure of constraint and partial determination. Indeed, it may be said that the first lesson of freedom is to understand the reality of *un*-freedom.

(2005: 89)

### **The Power to Conform**

The core of the argument offered here in relation to the transformative approach to education for political citizenship is that it lacks an adequate acknowledgment of power asymmetries in social and political relationships. This is evident both in the faith placed in deliberative modes of democratic engagement and the overt reliance upon individual activity and endeavour. Yet, advocates of the transformative approach view it not just as a means of political engagement, it is also a pathway to empowerment and emancipation which aims for ‘Effective learners in an emancipatory, participative, democratic society – a learning society...’ that incorporates ‘...a community of cultural critics and social activists...’ (Fleming, 2012: 134)

Given the relative weakness of the transformative approach to power relational

contexts however, a strong argument can be made that conceptualisations of empowerment and emancipation are themselves limited to engagement to pre-determined processes rather than the development of capacities to challenging pre-existing structures and processes of inequality in the first instance. Here, Mezirow's call for self-empowerment translates as instruction for "proper" participation or as a discourse of empowerment which emphasises '...people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and the structures of power...' (Jonsson, 2010: 397) Again, there is commonality with contemporary political/ policy discourses on empowerment, where –

One seems to be 'empowered' to take a share of management responsibility and decision-making, but the contemporary sense of the word does not seem to entail any direct control of resources or scope to join with others at the same level in the structure, to pursue collective bargaining with the centre.

(James, 1999: 14)

Therefore, from the transformative perspective, it is entirely feasible to argue that engagement and participation within existing governance processes can be construed as "empowerment". However, it can also be argued that such a construction of citizenship is more likely to lead to co-opted and conforming citizens rather than critical and resistant ones (Inglis, 1997). The transformative approach constitutes a simultaneously regulatory and self-regulating discourse of citizenship where the desire to engage effectively means agreeing to the rules of the game – even if others do not adhere to these rules. Here, engagement in such processes is removed from outcomes (the actual decision-making) where participation becomes an end in itself and therefore requires a degree of competence from the citizen. There is the temptation, therefore as Inglis (1997) argues, to view the transformative discourse in the light of Foucault's conceptualisation of power. Here the idea of the 'governmentalisation of citizenship' is of particular relevance, where -

...there has been a certain discursive coding of citizenship as a cognitive competence. In this discourse, citizenship is constructed by codes, categories and modes of classification that reflect a governmental strategy into which the individual as citizen is inserted.

(Delanty, 2003: 599)

The result is a self-disciplinary reading of what constitutes an active, conforming, and therefore, worthy citizen. Again, this self-regulating, responsible citizen finds a degree of congruence with corresponding policy-driven discourses. Biesta argues that the current construct of EU notions of active citizenship

...approaches the idea of citizenship very much from the 'needs' of the socio-political order, it specifies the kinds of activities and 'investments' that individuals need to make so that the specific socio-political order can be reproduced. Active citizenship to put it differently, emphasises the duties and responsibilities of individuals that come with their status of citizenship more than it being a discourse about citizen rights.

(2009: 150)

This push towards civic responsibility is illustrated in the Irish context where the Taskforce on Active Citizenship defined active citizenship in terms of '... the voluntary capacity of citizens and communities working directly together or through elected representatives, to exercise economic, social and political power in pursuit of shared goals.' (Task Force on Active Citizenship, 2007a: p. 10) Crucially, this pursuit of shared goals obscures any notion of conflict and marginalisation. Meanwhile, political activism is equated almost exclusively with responsibilities and voluntarism, to the point where Connolly argues that '...active citizenship in Ireland is now reduced to Tidy Towns committees and participation in Neighbourhood Watch'. (2007: pp111-2).

### **Conclusion – Indoctrination and Learning**

This article has presented the argument that what we need is a far more critical examination of political citizenship, particularly given the turbulent times that we live in. The transformative approach lacks the capacity for this, and the key issue here is in relation to the notion of asymmetries of political power. Transformative deliberative processes may well operate in an undistorted fashion within a highly controlled environment, but the reality is that deliberation within more political environs frequently does not. The quest for an undistorted deliberative political space is resplendent with assumptions about human behaviour and as a consequence, will remain largely unattainable. One of the key reasons for this is that the approach resolutely fails to consider the importance of structures in shaping deliberative political processes. Instead, while this approach could be construed as social, the emphasis placed upon individual agency as the fulcrum of political activity effectively limits the scope of political

activity. Conflict, contestation and marginalisation are obscured by the rush towards working within existing processes and the promise of gradual political reform (Fleming, 2000) to the point that it can be argued that the transformative model may well enhance obedience to existing political processes of engagement, rather than facilitating critical capacities to question and challenge political power relations. This, it is argued, mirrors policy discourses on education for political citizenship.

Mezirow states that the transformative approach is more about facilitating ‘... the kind of personal transformative learning that results in each learner making an informed decision to take effective, appropriate action...’, rather than indoctrinating learners into one particular viewpoint of political action. He even claims that Inglis’ call for a ‘pedagogy of power’ amounts to some form of indoctrination - ‘Educators do not try...to get learners to uncritically agree with their viewpoint – even about the ubiquity of power.’ (1998: 71) Apart from anything else, this would appear to be a call to limit what should be explored – or otherwise – within adult learning. An acknowledgement or recognition of the vast and sometimes impenetrable networks of power, both macro and micro, structure and agency, should not be equated with indoctrination. Rather, it suggests a preliminary step, based on an understanding of the workings of structure and agency, to questioning and challenging the nature of political power.

This is an important point for citizenship education and learning. As mentioned in the introduction, the current policy discourse on active citizenship emanating from the EU would appear to take as self-evident that respect for the rule of law is the cornerstone to good political citizenship. Elsewhere, in discussing citizen education in the Irish context, Harris calls for ‘political literacy and a critical understanding of democracy and democratic political institutions’, this premised on developing ‘...respect for law, justice, democracy...’ (2005: 48) Education for political citizenship should be free to question such pronouncements rather than immediately incorporating them as indisputable facts. For instance, even a cursory knowledge of political history would suggest that “the rule of law” is not always a good thing and has been used as a justification for discrimination, marginalisation and repression. Likewise, it cannot and should be taken for granted that some universal definition of democracy exists. A useful line of inquiry instead might be to interrogate exactly how democratic our current system of governance is rather than perceiving “democracy” as a self-evident virtue. Such questions may appear trivial, even awkward, but one of the key strengths of adult education as a discipline has always been its ability to ask awkward questions and, crucially, to imagine and explore alterna-

tive futures. Ultimately, as Shaw and Martin suggest - 'Democracy is sustained by the agency of the critical and creative citizen, not the conformist citizen.' (2005: 85)

### References

- Audigier, F. (2000) Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) Project "Education for Democratic Citizenship" – Basic Concepts and Core Competencies for Education for Democratic Citizenship. Strasbourg : Council of Europe
- Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge : Polity
- Biesta, G. (2009) 'What kind of citizenship for European higher Education? *Beyond the competent active citizen*' in *European Educational Research journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2 :pp146-158
- Brookfield, S. (2005) 'Learning Democratic Reason : The Adult Education Project of Jurgen Habermas' in *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 107, No. 6 : pp1127-1168
- Connolly, B. (2007) 'Beyond the Third Way : New Challenges for Critical adult and Community Education' in Connolly, B (eds) *Radical Learning for Liberation 2*. Maynooth : MACE
- Council of Europe. (2000) Project "Education for democratic citizenship" – Basic concepts and core competencies for education for democratic citizenship. DGIV/EDU/CIT (2000) 23, Strasbourg
- Crowley, N. (1998) 'Partnership 2000: Empowerment or co-option?' in Kirby, P & Jacobson, D. (eds) *In the Shadow of the Tiger*. Dublin : Dublin City University Press
- Delanty, G. (2003) 'Citizenship as a Learning Process : Disciplinary Citizenship Versus Cultural Citizenship' in *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. Vol. 22, No. 6 : pp. 597-605
- Department of Education. (2000) *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Government publications : Dublin
- de Weerd, M et al. 2005. Indicators for monitoring active citizenship and citizenship education. Amsterdam : European Commission
- E-Consultation Research Project. (2006) E-Consultation: evaluating appropriate technologies and processes for citizens' participation in public policy. Available at <http://www.nuim.ie/nirsa/econsult/index.html>
- Ellis, L. & Scott, S. (2003) 'Community education as citizen organising for democratic accountability' in *Studies in Continuing Education*, v.25, no.2 : pp253-268
- Ewert, G. (1991) 'Habermas and Education : A Comprehensive Overview of the Influence of Habermas in Educational Literature' in *Review of Educational Research*. Vol. 61, No. 3 : pp345-378
- Fleming, T. (1996) 'The Future of Adult Education: Learning towards a new democracy.' in *Radical learning for Liberation*. Maynooth, MACE, Centre for Adult and Community

- Education: pp. 45-56.
- Fleming, T. (2000). 'Habermas, democracy and civil society: Unearthing the social in transformative learning.' in Wiessner, C et al (Eds.), *Challenges of practice: Transformative learning in action*, New York: Columbia University.
- Fleming, T. (2012) 'Fromm and Habermas: Allies for Adult Education and Democracy' in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32 (2): pp 123-136
- Habermas, J. (2002) *The Inclusion of the Other – Studies in Political Theory*. Cambridge : polity
- Harris, C. (2005) 'Democratic Citizenship Education in Ireland' in *The Adult Learner*, 2005 : pp47-53
- Giroux, H. (2004) 'Cultural Studies and the Politics of Public Pedagogy: Making the Political more Pedagogical' in *Parallax*. Vol. 10, No. 2 : pp.73-89
- Inglis, T. (1997) 'Empowerment and Emancipation' in *Adult Education Quarterly*. Vol. 48. Issue 1 : pp. 1-15
- Jonsson, J. (2010) 'Beyond empowerment: Changing local communities' in *International Social Work*, 53(3) : pp 393-406
- Martin, I. (2003) 'Adult Education, Lifelong Learning and Citizenship : Some ifs and buts' in *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. Vol. 22, No. 6 : pp. 566-579
- Mezirow, J. (1996) 'Adult Education and Empowerment for Individual and Community Development' in Connolly, B. et al (eds) *Radical Learning for Liberation*. Maynooth : MACE
- Mezirow, J. (1998) 'Transformative learning and social action: A response to Inglis' in *Adult Education Quarterly*, 49(1) : pp70-71
- Mezirow, J. (2000) 'Learning to think like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory' in Mezirow, J (ed) *Learning as Transformation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc
- Mezirow, J. (2003) 'Transformative Learning as Discourse' in *Journal of Transformative Education*. Vol. 1, No. 1 : pp58-63
- Meade, R. (2005) 'We hate it here, please let us stay! Irish social partnership and the community/voluntary sector's conflicted experiences of recognition' in *Critical Social Policy*, Vol. 25 (3) : 349-373
- Murphy, M. (2002) 'Social partnership – is it 'the only game in town'? in *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 1 : 80-90
- Murray, M. (2006) 'Transnational and Local Politics of Waste Management' in *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3 : pp 447-465
- Pietrykowski, P. (1996) 'Knowledge and power in Adult Education: Beyond Freire and Habermas' in *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46(2) : pp82-97
- Rui, S. (2004) 'Transport Policy and Public Involvement – Concertation between Mobilization and Frustration' in *Innovation*, Vol. 17, No 2 : pp129-144

- Shaw, M & Martin, I. (2005) 'Translating the art of citizenship' in *Convergence*, 38, No. 4 : pp85-100
- Taskforce on Active Citizenship. (2007a) *The Concept of Active Citizenship*. Dublin : Secretariat of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship
- Taskforce on Active Citizenship. (2007b) *Taskforce Report to Government*. Dublin : Secretariat of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship
- Welton, M. (2003) 'No Escape from the Hard Things of the World : Learning the Lessons of Empire' in *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. Vol. 22, No. 6 : pp. 635-651

# Contemporary adult education philosophies and practices in art galleries and museums in Canada and the UK

DARLENE E. CLOVER, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

LORRAINE BELL, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

---

## **Abstract**

*Public art galleries and museums have been mandated to become more relevant and useful to the lived experiences of the broad communities they claim to serve. Adult education has long been part of the work of these institutions, although historically the relationship has been uneasy, and they seldom feature in the adult education literature. To fill this knowledge gap, we developed a cross-national comparative study that employed individual interviews, focus groups and observations to explore the adult education perspectives and activities of adult educators in art galleries and museums in Canada, England and Scotland. Findings show inconsistencies in understandings around education and learning, disconnections between internal and external activities and lack of institutional support. However, a plethora of socially responsive activities to tackle racial and religious intolerance, or explore power and identity, illustrate that despite tradition and other constraints, these adult educators are making valuable contributions to social justice and change.*

## **Introduction**

Public art galleries and museums are ubiquitous features of the cultural landscape in Europe, North America and much of the world (Alexander and Alexander, 2008). Conceived in elitist provenance, they have been charged with everything from social exclusion to sanitising history, from legitimising what counts as knowledge and has cultural and aesthetic value to reinforcing existing power structures (e.g. Janes, 2009; Hooper-Greenhill, 2001; Mayo, 2012; O'Neill, 2011). Yet there are scholars and practitioners who argue that a paradigmatic change is afoot. These institutions are now mandated to become more relevant to the experiences of the communities they serve and to play a more active educational role in addressing our social and environmental problems

(Janes, 2009, p.166; see also Taylor & Parrish, 2010).

Adult education has been part of the mandate of public art galleries and museums since their inception, although the relationship has been uneasy and the practice ill-defined (e.g. Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011). Equally problematic, the importance of art galleries and museums to adult education is rarely considered (Mayo, 2012). But Taylor and Parrish (2010, p.5) remind us that these institutions are 'complex sites of adult learning and teaching' with tremendous and often untapped potential to promote community engagement and social change.

This paper will discuss findings from a cross-national comparative study of adult education perspectives and practices in museums and galleries in Canada, England and Scotland. Our study identifies major differences in how gallery and museum education is perceived, as well as a general sense of marginalisation from the wider institution. It also uncovers a plethora of critical aesthetic educational responses to pressing social problems and several interesting approaches to critical social engagement.

### **Literature Review**

Some of today's most pressing social issues include racism, homophobia and other social and religious intolerances. Recent decades have seen increases in socio-economic inequality, environmental deterioration, violence and social isolation. The primary aim of adult education is to provide opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge to navigate effectively and purposefully in the world (English & Mayo, 2012). Wilson (2010, p.4) refers to this as gaining knowledge power, or the capacity to think critically and 'tackle the most difficult problems.' Public arts and cultural institutions are increasingly under pressure both from governments and internally to rekindle their social mission as a way of remaining relevant and economically viable (O'Neill, 2011). These aesthetic sites now utilise their resources and institutional spaces to facilitate various social agendas such as neighbourhood renewal, social cohesion, citizenship, deliberative democracy and social change (Crooke, 2007; Taylor & Parrish, 2010). While many museums and galleries are embracing this paradigm shift, concerns have been raised around their capacity to deliver on these new demands (e.g. Janes, 2009).

Historically, museums and galleries have often taken an elitist and exclusionary approach to the collection and representation of material culture (e.g. Borg &

Mayo, 2010). Far from engaging with the everyday stories, artefacts and challenges of the world, they have persisted as ‘traditional sites where knowledge and truth are displayed by the socially powerful and consumed by the powerless’ (Golding, 2005, p.51). In 1956 Bigman found the ‘museum-going group consisted largely of professionals, white-collar workers and students with very few workers’ (p.28). Little has changed, and many museum and gallery educators remain oriented towards an elite who they believe prefer more traditional pedagogical practice (Borg & Mayo, 2010; Author, 2010; Golding, 2005). Further, although education departments were formalized in the 1970s, their place within the institution has been complex and often, marginal (Chobot & Chobot, 1990; Hooper-Greenfield, 2004). Perhaps as consequence, most museums still make little provision for adult education, as Anderson, Gray and Chadwick found in their 2003 large-scale quantitative study of Europe. Historically, the role of the educator was ill defined, leading Burnham & Kai-Kee (2011) to refer to the work as ‘without design...the result not of conscious long-term planning or theory, but of ad hoc, step-by-step responses to public demand’ (p.25). Anderson et al (2003) add there continue to be few opportunities for training in museum and gallery education.

Grenier (2009), however, argues that better supporting and expanding visitors’ learning has been the impetus behind the growth and diversity of activities found in art galleries and museums today. Indeed, these institutions are reaching out to diverse audiences, creating new programmes and transforming their educational practice towards learning with an emphasis on developing the adults’ self-direction (Clover, Sanford & Jayme, 2010). Hooper-Greenhill (2007) applauds this movement away from earlier controlling, aesthetic pedagogical practices. Roberts (1997, p.8) concurs: ‘education has become too restrictive and misleading for the museum setting....There has been a conscious shift toward “learning” (emphasising the learner), “experience” (emphasising the open-endedness of the outcome) and “meaning-making” (emphasising the act of interpretation).’

Yet other scholars caution what they see as the neoliberal creep behind the concept of learning (English & Mayo, 2012; Martin, 2003). Lahav (2003) challenges ‘personalised’ interpretations of the arts. She believes that releasing the ‘shackles of elitism associated with the traditional one line story of art [and creating] new more people-centred, transparent and pluralistic understandings’ has led to a fragmented learning experience. In her view, learning in museums has become like a trip to the supermarket – ‘we are invited to choose which story or

theme we fancy [which often] leaves people feeling increasingly insecure and undirected' (Lahav, 2003, page). But Grek (2004, p.85) theorises an education that includes a 'sensitivity to accessibility and interpretation and a staunch critique of elitism and tradition which provide adults with 'the aptitudes ... for the symbolic re-appropriation of their resources.' Given the range of views in the literature, our research aimed to explore the adult education perspectives and practices of contemporary museum and gallery educators.

### **Methodology and methods**

This study explored the education perspectives and practices of adult educators in arts and cultural institutions in Canada, Scotland and England (Britain). Canada and Britain have a history of welfare practice with relatively robust social policies and publicly funded institutions. Both are racially and ethnically diverse, with large numbers of immigrant populations. Both currently have conservative governments aggressively implementing deep, ideologically driven changes which in many ways are accelerating social, economic, environmental and cultural problems and inequities.

The primary question that guided the study concerned how adult educators (and community outreach or development workers) understood and enacted their educational work. We were also interested in which social issues were being addressed, the nature and composition of target audiences, the educational backgrounds of the educators, the relationship between internal and external activities, and the nature of institutional support for adult education programming. The study employed a cross-national, comparative approach to allow the researcher to gather and analyse in-depth data, apply theory and draw comparisons of similarity and difference between the countries studied (Hantrais, 2009; Harris, 2007).

The criteria used to identify the 21 institutions were that they were public, medium or large-scale, urban, servicing diverse audiences, and had an adult education/learning mandate or programme. Twenty one interviews were conducted in Britain and twelve in Canada which has far fewer public museums and art galleries. Of these, although not by design, thirty-one were female and only one was male. Gender composition of the educators was identified as an issue, but is beyond the scope of this short paper. Participants' work experience ranged from one to 25 years. While most were located in 'learning' departments, others were drawn from community outreach/programming units.

Three data collection strategies were used. The first was individual interviews with participants in which understandings and practices of adult education were discussed. Focus groups were used when the adult educators chose to be interviewed in pairs or as a group. The third strategy was to observe workshops, seminars, organised talks, training programmes and special educational events (e.g. Human Library Project). All interviews and focus groups were audiotaped, fully transcribed and returned to interviewees for input and revision. Field notes were taken, along with photographic records of educational activities. The data from these sources were categorised in relation to the research questions. All names in this paper are pseudonyms and no institutions are identified although if it is relevant we identify the country.

### **Findings**

*[We are] not just putting lipstick on the elephant.* (Mira, UK)

In this paper we will discuss the tensions between the terms ‘education and learning’, the place and role of education in the institution and beyond, the educational backgrounds and training of the museum and gallery educators, and examples of socially responsive practice. Before moving to these areas, we discuss some similarities and differences between the two countries and help explain some of the findings.

### **Learning and the laissez faire**

The field of adult education is alive with debate around the meanings and purposes of ‘education’ and ‘learning’ (e.g. English & Mayo, 2012; Kilgore, 1999) so it is not surprising to also find this tension in public arts and cultural institutions. In both Canada and the UK educators spoke of a major shift in the gallery and museum sector from ‘education’ to ‘learning’. The websites of these institutions also reflect this shift. Learning is by far the most common label used for adult programming (Canada) or community outreach work (Britain) (Clover, Sanford & Jayme, 2010). This shift in terminology coincides in the UK with government strategies for creating cohesive, active and sustainable communities. By extension these strategies manifest in cultural policy to re-shape the work of art galleries and museums (Crooke, 2007). What is interesting is that no Canadian participants could link this shift in their institutions to any specific government policy. We however, attribute it to the global march of the life-long learning discourse and its impact on all areas of adult education (English & Mayo, 2012).

Adult educators have adopted this shift in terminology as Janice in the UK illustrates: 'We agree with this change because education is more formal and top-down whereas if we are looking at learning it is self-motivated, self-driven, and there is no kind of *particular standard* (emphasis hers).' In Canada, Andrea expressed it like this: 'education is something that happens to people, learning is something that happens inside you.' While at first glance this discourse may look empowering, we need to be mindful of conceptualisations that can be a semiotic camouflage for individualism. Nina accepted this shift not so much because it was government mandated, but as a means to challenge normative pedagogical practice that she, like many scholars (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill, 2007), found both disrespectful and useless:

"when you look at what accounted for education, you saw how it was always somebody [in the gallery] who set the expectations...the process and outcomes. No one [the visitors/learners] spoke or asked questions. They went away numbed by someone else's interpretation, numbed by information, lulled in to complacency and acceptance."

One of the participants expressed an understanding of 'learning' that was troubling, as this conversation with the interviewer after a training session illustrates:

**Interviewer:** I would like to follow-up on something you said in your talk earlier about government mandates and learning.

**Kayla:** In this Gallery we challenge the social cohesion, integration and empowerment discourse of the government, as well as the notion of 'learning outcomes'.

**I:** So what does that look like in practice?

**K:** As you can see, the façade of this building is not welcoming. We used to be a more ad-hoc group of artists but now we are more professional. We are a public but working gallery so we do not want people just dropping in. Our workshops have no aims, no goals, no purposes. I just like to bring a group together with no intentions at all and just watch what they do. I asked to have my title changed from Education and Outreach Coordinator because I don't 'educate' anyone. So I'm now the Participation Coordinator as I encourage participation, not education.

I: So what does participation look like?

K: Well, people just creating.

I: Just creating. Was that clear?

K: In the first set of workshops, people did ask what we were doing and why - what this was all about. But I think not just feeding them answers is important and they should just figure it out. Everyone is so outcomes and purpose-oriented.

I: How well did that work?

K: Well, quite a few did not come back for the second session and finally, there was only one artist left. So I organised a celebration of the programme and I put up posters all around the community but no one actually showed up.

I: Do you think that is because they do not feel welcome and perhaps questioned the purpose?

K: But I think process is all that matters. It is important to just have creative spaces where people can learn without any intentions – ‘thinking through making art’ is what I call it.

I: Do you think the community understands this?

K: No, I mean yes, I mean I guess they just don’t understand what I am doing. The focus is on ‘process’ so there is no ‘point’. We challenge government discourse. Do you think I need to think about this more?

While Kayla sees herself as combating the neoliberal education impositions of ‘learning outcomes’, something critical educators applaud (e.g. Martin, 2003), this laissez faire arts ‘facilitation’ approach does not engage people in any kind of constructive, collective interrogation of problematic state mandates, nor does it encourage dialogue and action around issues affecting people’s lives in the low income neighbourhood where the museum is situated. Even more disconcerting is the fact that this woman was a guest speaker at a training institute

and situated as an ‘authority.’

### *Internal and external tensions*

We also uncovered an interesting dimension to the terminology in conversations around the internal and external work of the institution. To illustrate, we begin with this comment by Wilma: ‘inside the institution we host *education* (our emphasis) events and these are lectures and seminars and courses. Community learning and programming is done outside.’ What she is implying, and others concurred, is that while they do ‘education,’ it is ‘formal, organised, content driven and takes place inside this institution.’ She explains that they found in many cases, ‘a chasm between the ‘educators’ and the ‘community programmers.’ This chasm was recognised by informants in the U.K. and in Canada, but different explanations were presented. One explanation was the lack of collegiality between departments, As Teresa in the U.K. explains: ‘we have no staff canteen [space to come together] so it separates people [in different departments]. We don’t have the ideal space for informal chatter and a way to really understand people’s ways of working. We are all a series of separate units separated by area.’ In many cases the education or learning department was in one area of the building, and community outreach in another. In Canada education specialists in the larger institutions also noted a physical and ideological division between education and community programming. The reason most cited was because of the monopoly ‘school’ had on the term education. Dana captures it quite well in this comment: ‘in this institution, the education department runs the school visits so our work is not seen as education.’ Further, many participants in both Canada and the UK defaulted to talk about their school-focussed activities during the interviews even though we made it very clear our focus was on adult education.

### **Educational backgrounds and training**

The majority of participants lacked any type of training, certificate or degree in adult education, which may also account for some of the confusion around terminology and the internal-external split. If you have never seen community outreach/development through the lens of adult education and learning, you would be unlikely to be able to define it as such. Educational backgrounds were primarily as art historians or archaeologists, although Sarah felt she was hired ‘because I have a background in working with community, using theatre and film.’ Not surprisingly, many had educational backgrounds as teachers. Meena argued this could be a challenge in terms of promoting and organising new forms of adult learning:

My concern is that a lot of museums actually tend to employ teachers or ex-teachers, and I think that can narrow down the opportunities for the organisation, because they will only work with what they know. If you bring in a primary teacher, essentially they'll know the school curriculum, they'll know that age group, they'll know the links with the schools. They don't have the broad experience of other things [different groups of adults and learning]. If you've been in schools for years and make a shift to museums, you are still institutionalised and you are used to prescriptive working methods. Sometimes I think that is not the best way because if you've got a more creative framing you can think outside the box. I'm not saying teachers can't, but my concern is that they forget that there are other people with a lot to offer.

When we asked how the adult educators had learned to do their job, the majority spoke of preferring to work with the public, rather than collections and being willing to take chances and risks. Others did, however, have adult education certificates and even strongly politically oriented training: 'I did nonformal training at the [popular education] centre when I was at the [gallery]...we all share an interest and background in popular education.' It is to this risk and social responsiveness we now turn.

### **The aesthetic of social purpose**

'There are a lot of educational programmes out there. The arts is what differentiates us, it is our strength.' Although spoken by Carla, this was a sentiment that wove its way through all the conversations, whether the emphasis was on education, learning or community outreach. However, nowhere were the arts more intensely and critically employed than in the 'education' of community within a vision of social change and transformation. As our study progressed we began to encounter a very different dimension to the work: a determination to make change, both within and outside the institutions.

Dana describes their work in Canada like this: 'This work is about a 'social issue' – educating and reaching out to the general public – and not just a community outreach project [although that is the department]. In other words, the purpose is different in the way you describe it – as education and not engagement although I hope it will be 'engaging'. Dana and others described their work explicitly as educational, arguing that intentionality was missing in the 'laissez faire discourse of learning' (Geena). That intentionality was towards social justice and social change. For example, Ingrid's work focuses on 'getting people from the [social housing] estates to open their eyes to what they have and put

forward their own opinions and views.’ This work is in fact ‘a political act, a threat to the existing...relations’ (English & Mayo, 2010, p.52). Laurie talks about grassroots control and the value of creating partnership spaces:

the sex worker rights organisation [runs from] this base [the popular education department]. In that room they...run language classes for and by migrant sex workers, and... campaigns... specifically around the self-representation of sex workers. Our campaign on the Olympics was around the right of sex workers to define the discourse of trafficking because the government uses that discourse to close down sites of sex workers....That partnership involves artists because I am an artist...but it’s very much led by the community and they develop posters and reports.

Across the three countries and in almost all the institutions – and this was most often even aside from the contradictions around the terms education and learning - were a plethora of collective, critical adult education activities, ranging from workshops to train women to become activists or learn to develop their own videos to tell community stories, to tackling religious intolerance. This work was not easy:

I have had moments [during the workshops] where...I felt like I [was] in over my head, it has been quite intense. I don’t know really what’s happening here. I’m sitting in the fire [of debate], but it’s not my argument – the ashes are not mine....I’ve learned a lot about [how to handle] religious people [laughs]....But you’ve got to step in to the fire (Hilda)

Like Hilda, others described their approach as risk-taking, and often based on trial and error. Perhaps due to the new ground they were covering, they sometimes expressed concern about their own abilities and skill levels. And yet we saw numerous creative projects with marginalised groups such as asylum seekers, people with disabilities, and women prisoners. Some, however, were concerned with the number and variety of activities, concerned by what they termed ‘mission drift’, trying to be something for everyone. For others, the concern focused on sustainability, trust and long-term commitment:

We work with a lot of communities but it is more important to stick with one and not say, well, now I can check off that box with such and such a community....It is important people...feel that no matter what background they

come from, they are working with the staff members in this museum who care that they actually tell the stories, because their stories are rich and vast.

This has less to do with fluctuations in institutional mandates than with government policy.

We also took part in workshops in the UK where notions of power were deconstructed using the artworks. We sat in lectures with audiences composed of the most privileged members of society and watched how the educators used the 'masters' paintings to highlight racism and the creation of an 'other'. We heard how the arts could comfortably bring artists and 'migrant rights folks together to think about how [they] could perform [to] activate political spaces in a different way.' In this case art was used to bond the group together and to facilitate constructive social relationships; in each case, the 'objet d'art is at centre of the experience' and functioned to 'bring the poetic and political together to disrupt' (Wilma).

### **Institutional support**

We conclude with a look at institutional support in terms of adult education. While some institutions were extremely supportive, 'Our whole mission is to do with education' (Carla), the majority of interviewees talked about a disconnection between the mission and the actual support they received, making reference what Burnham and Kai-Kee (2011) call the 'uneasy' relationship. One example of this was exclusion from new exhibitions: 'we are still not invited in when the curators are designing a new exhibition. We are not asked how this could be done for the best learning opportunities, we are just to get on with it once the exhibition is mounted.' (Laua). Perhaps the most creative exemplar of the 'low' status of adult education in the institution was this metaphoric comparison: 'Well you can look at it like this. The Chief of the gallery is the Prime Minister, the administrators are the cabinet and the curators are the House of Lords. And education, well, we are the House of Commons!'

Although Mastai (2007, p.174) believes the conflict between 'curators and the new cadre of museum educators who claimed the visitor's view as their own point of view', has given way in various institutions, the power struggle was still very much in place in others. In one case an attempt to have community artefacts and works put on display was met with suspicion by curators because, 'is (was) seen as taking away their power and they are no longer the experts they are used to being' (Maria).

Hilda had quite a different take on the relationship between curators and educators, calling for reciprocity:

Right now, we are all just educators because our subject specialist left and they never filled the position. The positives are that we've got more people and groups coming to us than we can possibly cope with just ... The downside is that we work with what we know, but we can't really get any further into the objects without a subject curator....My knowledge is how to work with communities, how to work with educational institutions... I am an educator not a content specialist. Yet as noted earlier, every single educator had a background in a traditional subject which should enable them to work with the collections and stand them in better stead with curators. Such are the vagaries of institutions.

### **Discussion**

On one hand, what is clear from these and other statements about 'learning' is what English and Mayo (2012) and Martin (2003) describe as individualistic notions of learning – self-directed learning that assumes a freedom to choose, a freedom to act, a freedom to have one's own interpretations and understandings. Problematically, this lens comes from government policies and adult educators are concerned that it allows governments and by extension institutions to abdicate responsibility to provide quality, collective, critical education. In addition, while Kayla's anarchist challenge to lifelong learning's learning outcomes is admirable, it equates all intentionality with 'control' and inadvertently suggests a neutrality in facilitation that, as Freire argued, does not exist. Kilgore (1999), along with other educators in this study, argues the need for a values-based emphasis, an education aimed specifically at raising critical consciousness, providing opportunities for dialogue, debate and action for a "vision of social justice" (p. 200). It is alarming when an authority on art gallery education can present a view of education entirely void of social responsibility and not be questioned by any of the students in the programme. What does this say about how gallery and museum educators are being trained? There is a gap in the literature on the content and practice of formal and non-formal training programmes that needs to be filled. Having said this, the learning discourse in these institutions poses a challenge to traditional deeply engrained, didactic, and expert driven practices that continue in these institutions.

The tension between the educators and the curators, although much less active in some institutions, is very much based on content expert versus process/com-

munity voice expert. Curators are the long-standing voice of authority in the museum hierarchy (Janes, 2009). In her comments about requiring a balance of curators and educators, Hilda reflects the need for what Freire and Horton (1990) called knowledge authority on the part of both content and education specialists. These institutions are made up of both content/collections and education/engagement, and our findings suggest that an imbalance of emphasis either way can create problems for renewal and change.

Despite confusion around terminology, all of the institutions are responding in some way to the diverse needs and interests of the communities they serve. The myriad critical and provocative, even courageous, educational activities illuminate a willingness to take the creative risks necessary to make a difference in communities. Janes (2009, p.17) reminds us that something worth doing 'is worth doing poorly until you do it well.' But while these educators are committed and socially responsive, unless the institutions incorporate the need for this work into their mission, the activities will end when the individual(s) retires or is made redundant under budget cuts. Further, although we only mentioned this, the vast majority of educators in arts and cultural institutions are women, which raises the problematic issue of 'feminisation of work and its accompanying low status (Cooke-Reynolds & Zucweck, 2004). Whether or how training programmes provide much by way of interrogating gender is something that requires further investigation.

Observations of the educational work inside museums and galleries indicate audiences are predominantly middle and upper class. This means that in spite of many efforts to be more open and accessible, diverse representation in museum visits and program participation has not been achieved. However, this can also be seen as an asset. Sitting in a lecture theatre, watching speakers use the masters' artworks to tell a group of 80-100 very privileged individuals that racism was socially and artistically constructed, and how people like them perpetuate the problem, opened our eyes to an educational potential. Far from simply remaining 'remote from the... disorder of daily life' (Janes, 2009, p.3), these educators are using their elite status to educate a population often beyond often reaching, challenging stereotypes, and tackling some of society's most pressing issues. They are digging where they stand, and beyond.

## References

- Anderson, D, Gray, D and Chadwick, A (2003). Museums, keyworkers and lifelong learning: A European survey. *International Review of Education*, 49(3/4), 343-362.
- Bigman, S. (1956). Evaluating exhibit effectiveness: selected findings on who comes? Why? and what effects? *Adult Education Quarterly*, 7, 26-34.
- Burnham, R. and Kai-Kee, E. (2011). *Teaching in the art museum: Interpretation and experience*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Borg & Mayo, (2010). Museums: Adult education as cultural politics. In E. Taylor & M Parrish (Eds), *Adult education in cultural institutions: Aquariums, libraries, museums, parks and zoos*. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 27, 35-44.
- Chobot, M. and Chobot, R. (1990). Museums as educational institutions. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 47, 55-62.
- Clover, D.E., Sanford, K. & Oliviera de Jayme, B. (2010). Adult education, museums and libraries: A content analysis of journals and proceedings in the field. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 16(2), 5-19.
- Cooke-Reyonds, M & Zukeich, N. (2004). The feminization of work. *Canadian Social Trends*, 72, 24-29.
- Crooke, E. (2007). *Museums and community*. London: Routledge.
- English, L. & Mayo, P. (2012). *Learning with adults, a critical pedagogical introduction*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishing.
- Golding, V. (2005). *The museum clearing: A metaphor for new Museum practice*. Stirling, UK: Trentham Books Ltd.
- Grek, S. (2004). Whose story do museums tell? In C. Hunt (Ed) *Whose story now? (re) generating research in adult learning and teaching, Proceedings of the 34th Annual SCUTREA Conference* (pp.101-108). Sheffield: University of Sheffield.
- Grenier, R. (2009). The role of learning in the development of expertise in museum docents. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(2), 142-57.
- Hantrais, L. (2009). *International comparative research: Theory, methods and practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harris, N. (2007). Comparative, Feminist, and Qualitative: An Uncommon Perspective on Cross-National Social Policy Research, *Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6 (1): 1-6.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2007) *Museums and education: Purpose, pedagogy and education*. London: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2001). *Museums and the shaping of knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Horton, M. & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Janes, R. (2009). *Museums in a troubled world*. Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Lahav, S. (2003). Buy one get one free: Shopping for meaning at the “malls” of the museum.

SCUTREA Peer Reviewed e-journal. Retrieved May 30, 2010 from <http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=scutrea+ejournal&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>

- Kilgore, D. (1999). Understanding learning in social movements: A theory of collective learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18(3), 191-202.
- Martin, I. (2003). Adult education, lifelong learning and citizenship: Some ifs and buts. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(6), 566-579.
- Mastai, J. (2007). There is no such thing as a visitor. In G. Pollock & J. Zemans (Eds), *Museums after modernism: Strategies for Engagement*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Roberts, L. (1997). *From knowledge to narrative: Educators and the changing museum*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Taylor, E. & Parrish, M. (Eds), Adult education in cultural institutions: Aquariums, libraries, museums, parks and zoos. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 27.
- Wilson, A. (2010). *Knowledge power*. London: Routledge.

# ‘Swimming in the swamp’ – inquiry into accreditation, community development, and social change.

CAMILLA FITZSIMONS, RESPOND! VHA & NUI MAYNOOTH  
PETER DORMAN, THE COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK (CAN)

---

## **Abstract**

*Drawing from extensive experience as community educators, this paper discusses accreditation and its relationship to community development as informed by a cooperative inquiry conducted by tutors. Beginning with our rationale for undertaking the inquiry, it details our approach to community development and the centrality of education within this. It offers a review of some literature pertinent to both concepts before presenting findings from the inquiry itself. It concludes by emphasising the positive features of the awarding of credits for set-learning periods but expresses concern about difficulties with contemporary models of practice including a degree of discordance between accreditation and education for social change.*

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between accreditation and a particular approach to community development. It is informed by participation in a co-operative inquiry (2011-2012), a project that began with conversations between us and Frank Naughton from Partners Training for Transformation (TfT). The idea of co-operative inquiry is based partly on the ideas of Heron (1996: 1) who defines it as ‘two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience, and reflecting together on it’. This notion of action, and reflection upon action, is familiar to those of us involved in community development and who see education as a central process within this. At its core is the idea of praxis, that we reflect on our responses to inequalities and recalibrate actions in light of these. This process will throw up questions which trouble us - where we feel stuck rather than certain, and need to inquire deeper. A good question is one that matters, and to which we genuinely do not have the answer. We do not approach inquiry with a view we wish to defend at all costs. This is not to deny that we hold positions, but rather to acknowledge our positions in themselves do not enable us to move beyond our “stuckness”.

So what is the question here? We named our inquiry, Accreditation, debit or credit for social change? Understanding accreditation as the allocation of recognisable, measurable credits for learning, we wondered how this relates to what we see as the primary purpose of community development; the emancipation of groups of people who live with inequalities? Our question had grown out of experiences. We knew how following a pre-set curriculum contradicts the process-centred learning we believe in (hooks, 1994: 70) where questions emerge from participants and we follow them rather than shelve them to serve the curriculum. This way we uncover rather than cover content. We were familiar with how introducing written assignments affects participants, causing some to abandon dialogic learning to concentrate on the technical requirements of producing a standard piece of work. On the other hand we have seen confidence grow in people who overcome fears and produce that assignment, facing demons often engendered in unhappy school experiences. Some have described this process as life changing. We see how developing an argument to be tested by scrutiny sharpens participants' thinking and how pennies drop when feedback is given.

Aside from the impact on individuals, what about the impact on the project of social change; on addressing the structures that perpetuate inequalities? From a previous inquiry, some of us had devised a framework for capturing ideas called the "Four Ps" (CAN & Partners TfT, 2005). Each "P" refers to a level of interest in the subject.

- Practical. Our interest is technical. Can we structure accreditation to be more participant-friendly? Can we build assignments more easily into a process-centred learning programme?
- Psycho-social. This relates to the effect of accreditation on the emotions and relationships of a person. We are interested in the psychological experience of being accredited: feelings about status, being judged, acknowledged and so on.
- Political. This relates to the dimension of power, from the relationship between student and teacher, to the politics of accrediting bodies and universities. Who is entitled to accredit another person's work and why? At the heart of this is the notion of accreditation as currency and how credits by one body may have more societal currency than another.
- Philosophical. This relates to the meaning of accreditation and its fundamen-

tal purpose. Why accredit? What is its meaning within social change movements?

In our inquiry all levels are relevant. Indeed, in light of the 4 Ps, our question can be broken into four overlapping queries.

1. What is the meaning of accreditation in social change work?
2. What is the psychological impact of accreditation on groups who live with inequality?
3. Who has power in accreditation and how is it used in challenging inequalities?
4. If we chose to, how can we practice accreditation in a way more congruent with social change work?

*Understanding and contextualising Community Development for social change*

For the inquiry we accepted a certain understanding of community development and the educational processes within. There are a number of assumptions in our model. Firstly, that there is significant inequality in society and that this is systemic rather than the result of individual inadequacies. Secondly, that sustainable change requires a movement driven by those who experience inequality, supported by allies in solidarity. Thirdly, that while we can see patterns in social change processes, each example is unique and activists must develop their own pathways. This requires the aforementioned process of praxis, which underpins Freirean approaches to community work creating a synthesis with community education (Ledwith, 2005).

We see that the experience of living with inequality has an emotional affect. People can feel angry, despairing, hopeless, humiliated or shamed. Emotion however, is linked to motivation (Hope & Timmel, 1995a: 8) so this can be the genesis of change. When people collectively share experiences they move beyond self-blame realising they are not alone. If facilitated to do so, a group can critically examine the cultural, political and economic realities that shape their lives. This creates a foundation for organised collective action on systems that generate inequality. The resultant engagement is both confrontational and dialogical. Through confrontation, protagonists use protest to force engagement by power-holders. This may yield some concessions, but if the system is to be re-shaped, dialogue is necessary. Both protagonists and power holders come

to realise that maintaining the system as it is, is intolerable given the conflict generated. They also realise neither side alone can create a new system but that it must be co-created by those who run the system working with those who have been its victims (Hope & Timmel, 1995, CAN, 2012).

There can be a range of responses by power holders to this community development process. Beyond indifference, which the level of collective action may make impossible, we identify three. The first is to co-opt the movement. Power holders admit there is a problem and offer resources and a level of authority to help ameliorate the inequality closest to their particular situation. Community based projects are established to address housing conditions, drugs, unemployment, youth development and so on. Over time, the community activists become so engrossed in managing the delivery of local services, engaging in systems-change becomes less of a priority. The groups become part of the system rather than critical opponents of it. A second response is to react systemically. Decision making, resource allocation and attitudes are overhauled and a new way of doing business is instituted. However, radical change may be limited to one part of the system or localised to one particular community. It becomes a shining example of how things should be; a well-studied pilot project that remains an isolated exception but change does not penetrate the main system. Thirdly, there can be a genuine creation of something new, where equality is bedded down in the practice of the system. In any one particular case, there can be elements of all three responses and any such struggle will typically become a combination of co-option, isolated success, and elements of change affecting the main system. Whatever the example, learning runs through it. People learn to voice their experience, collectively analyse it, build local leadership, organise, plan, strategise and review, understand the systems with which they engage, and to dialogue.

Developing relevant learning programmes accessible to community activists (a group among which are a high number of early school leavers) was, from early in the life of the modern movement, an objective of community activists. Much of this was developed intentionally outside of existing educational structures, enabling participatory and experiential methodologies. These differed from more dominant banking approaches (described by hooks (1994: 5) as 'based on the assumption that memorizing information and regurgitating it represented gaining knowledge that could be deposited, stored and used at a later date'). These programmes, sometimes supported by allies within universities, challenged the elitist and alienating nature of much formal education. From

the outset, pedagogues and learners advocated for formal recognition to compensate for the absence of school certification, and to honour achievements and status of locally devised and managed programmes (Kelleher & Whelan, 1992, Kelly, 1994, Quilty, 2003). Others worked to encourage pathways to university for activists building their capacity to pursue social justice. Accredited opportunities began to co-exist alongside non-accredited programmes where learning remained informal, on-going, in the moment and on-the-job.

However, there has been increasing structural constraints on community development as the movement has become depoliticised over the last two decades (Lloyd, 2010, Byrne, 2012). The clustering of community activism under State-funded projects such as The Community Development Programme, Local Drugs Task Force and Family Resource Structures brought welcome funding to areas previously ignored by successive governments, but also led to an influx of community workers motivated by a range of sometimes competing ideologies. Research by Powell & Geoghegan (2004: 156) reveals less than quarter of those surveyed articulating radicalism congruent with the model proposed here. The primary purpose of community development has also been reframed by the State as it steers practice towards service delivery. This most notably began when O’Cuiv, (during his office as Minister for Rural & Community Affairs) described community development as ‘a seamless delivery of state services’ in a circular to all funded Community Development Projects (CDPs). There has also been a State eulogising of less politically charged concepts of volunteerism and active citizenship (Lloyd, 2010) thus undermining radical intentions to reverse inequality.

Local Area Partnership Companies, originally established to administer ring-fenced development aid for business start-ups and re-entry to the workforce (Teague & Murphy, 2004) have been moved centre stage in the organisation, administration and funding of community development. All CDPs are now absorbed into Partnerships as part of the *Local Development Social Inclusion Programme* (LDSIP). This allows for little independence with LDSIP projects directed to dedicate 80% of their time to training and employment, 10% to accessing services, and only 10% to influencing government policy. The Report of the Local Government/Local Development Alignment Steering Group (2012) copper-fastens funded community development as a mechanism for service-delivery and the harvesting of entrepreneurialism; functions that are to be integrated into Local Government Structures (DEC&LG, 2012: 7).

### *Untangling accreditation*

There have also been profound changes in accreditation, a word now used to describe systems of quality assessment that approve an institution, a programme, or both (Harvey, 2004, Saarinen & Ala-Va`ha` la`, 2007). What is quality-assessed includes 1) the environment and learner supports, 2) resources including appropriate teaching staff, 3) curriculum design and content, 4) fair and consistent assessment, 5) programme accessibility and progression, 6) management and 7) governance. Although initially peer review mechanisms to monitor standards, (Harvey, 2004, Brittingham, 2009), more recent practice has been linked to the global commercialisation of education (Scheele, 2004). This former function characterised Ireland's history initiated by OECD dissatisfaction with standards in the 1960s (OECD, 2006) and leading to the establishment of the Higher Education Authority (1971). The less coordinated, Further Education (FE) sector developed, in the main, through Vocational Education Committees (VECs). Accreditation, when present, was ad-hoc, and by an assortment of bodies often alongside attendance certification from the Department of Education (DOE).

Whilst community education programmes connected to community development were historically designed with universities, an important juncture was the creation of the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) in 1991. Included in its brief was the development of programmes 'within adult education and community education... offered in various formal and non-formal adult education settings and which might not have previously attracted certification' (in Kelly, 1994: xxiii). In partnership with community organisations, the NCVA began offering accreditation opportunities in the late 1990s joining others such as the private British City & Guilds, aforementioned extra-mural university accreditation, and the DOE through Intermediate and Leaving certification (ibid: xxi-xxiv). This non-HE landscape changed dramatically with the establishment of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in 1999. Existing awarding FE bodies were brought together under this structure, a merger that will be complete in 2014 when all original accreditor-conceived awards are migrated into a *Common Awards System*. Also important are changes at a European level. Ireland's participation in the Bologna and lesser known Copenhagen processes contributed to the development of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) into which our 10 tier National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) fits. While many governments signing the Bologna Declaration (1999) chose direct intervention models, Ireland delegated responsibility to existing providers, reflecting our wider culture of consensus and

partnership (Killeavy, 2005). This opened up exciting possibilities for community education through increased, more affordable pathways and community groups themselves became Quality Assured, delivering existing programmes and devising modules many of which were approved within FETAC mechanisms.

These changes, although broadly welcomed, were not uncritically accepted. Before the emergence of FETAC, research by Kelly (1994) advocated for accreditation but voiced concern about the possible individualisation and therefore liberalisation of practice that conceives education as a way out of a community, rather than a challenge to structural inequality. She also cautioned about lack of clarity within EU policy on the relationship between accreditation and non-vocational community courses and suggested the only way accreditation can support community development processes is through a partnership of practitioners, accreditors and the State. A decade later, Keyes (2004) discusses conflict between student-led and subject-led methods suggesting that the accreditation adopted, favour the latter encouraging a passive, consumer-led approach that creates tension with ideological tendencies of many tutors involved. Keyes also comments on the way in which formulaic curricula can affect power dynamics in a classroom, a sentiment shared by Shor & Freire (1997). They challenge this at two levels, power over tutors by external, often non-teaching personnel with responsibility for implementing set curricula, and power within the classroom where it becomes difficult to employ dialogic, problem-posing approaches.

### **The role of Learning Outcomes**

What has emerged is a system controlled by a prescribed set of learning outcomes (LOs), defined by the ECTS as ‘verifiable statements of what learners who have obtained a particular qualification, or completed a programme or its components, are expected to know, understand and be able to do’ (European Communities, 2009: 13). These are conceived of before a group comes together and are measured within the NFQ across sub-differentials of Knowledge, Skills and Competencies (KSCs) (NFQ, 2003: 16-17). Whilst LOs are to be supported for their student-centredness over teacher-centredness they are open to question, not least because there is no agreed definition of learning. For Entwistle (2005) their standard application across wide ranging disciplines is illogical; can we really use similar benchmarks when measuring such different concepts as activism and arithmetic? Hussey & Smith (2008) are also skeptical presenting LOs as a management device for developing performance indicators, a marketing tool in the commodification of education and, in practice, little more

than an administrative chore for course designers.

Perhaps most hazardous is how, in community education, assessment of LOs is sometimes linked to an adoption of Bloom's taxonomy, a proposition that there is a logical progression in skills and knowledge as learners advance. First proposed in 1954, Bloom et al (1984) categorise learning as cognitive, affective and psychomotor, proposing a 6-tiered hierarchy ranging from *knowledge* (the ability to recall), at its lowest level, to synthesis and evaluation at its peak (where new knowledge is constructed and judgments are made on the validity of certain claims). When applied to a ladder framework of qualifications such as the NFQ, this taxonomy encourages behaviourist practices at the lower rungs, measured through repetition and reinforcement of set-knowledge. Although effective in encouraging recall, behaviourism can be criticised for its lack of creativity and critical thinking and its failure to acknowledge constructivist beliefs – where knowledge is created through the lens of our experiences. Behaviourism also encourages assessment of, rather than assessment for learning. More broadly, the adoption of progression pathways fuel perceptions that it is only those at the upper echelons that are capable of high level thinking.

### **The Inquiry**

We approached our qualitative inquiry as critical theorists revealing our social and economic assumptions about reality. This research paradigm allows us to draw from a range of theoretical influences and to collapse sometimes dichotomized objective-subjective boundaries (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Our epistemological stance is to centralise personal accounts believing each of us scaffold our reality dependent on our experiences. However, these accounts are shaped by political, social, cultural, ethnic and gender values that have been established over time (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Rather than believing these remaining relative, we offer a subjective-objective collapse that assumes that whilst personalised accounts reveal subjective truths, the sharing and validating of this knowledge generates evidence of an objective reality.

After some informal conversations, we decided to invite others to consider the following.

What impact are current accreditation processes having on education/ learning for social change and on the work of social change? [and], if we are uneasy with current accreditation processes but believe that social change work needs people who are “qualified” or credible, then can we begin to

think what another way of “accrediting” would look like?

We circulated this to around twenty purposefully selected participants. The majority showed interest and some who were unable to commit to the full inquiry made contact to share their thinking. The final group numbered eleven across six community sector organisations, enabling ease of conversation as we sought to break the subject open collectively. All of us had experience working on accredited (FETAC and university sector) and non-accredited programmes.

We met on three occasions with original inquirers acting as facilitators. Between sessions, literature was circulated and individuals took on independent pieces of work. This included desk research and an evaluative survey questionnaire with a group of ten, eight of which were returned. Another kept a journal on the active use of accreditation and its influence on their practice, some explored alternative models, and a video-recorded discussion with graduates from a FETAC accredited Certificate in Community Development was facilitated.

### **Inquiry findings**

As much as possible, we framed our discussions within the 4 Ps of practical, psycho-social, political and philosophical. The breadth of our research question became clear early on and, although some investigations were made into international examples of alternatives, pursuing this in any depth became too big a task for this inquiry. We also discussed domestic alternative possibilities prompted by a review of an international case-study where State endorsed accreditation was dropped in favour of self-validation. Also influential was a presentation by one inquirer on how we might more recognisably align some of our own non-accredited critical education with levels 8 & 9 of the NFQ without the involvement of a HEI. However, it is a limitation of this research that this line of inquiry was not pursued in greater depth and has not been considered as part of the overall analysis offered in this paper. We did achieve some analysis of psycho-social, political and philosophical dimensions, summarising findings into the following themes.

### ***An Emotive Issue***

There was the depth of emotion surrounding the issue and its intersection with socio-economic conditions. Some of us carried a sense of discrimination because we attended particular schools and some brought feelings of failure for not performing well at school. Some carried residue from being in the minority not to progress from school to 3<sup>rd</sup> level, while others remembered the impact

of being in the minority to progress. Common to all was a strong desire to learn, reflect and explore as adults, though those with experience of structural inequality felt this was not always reciprocated by the university sector.

### ***Pros and Cons***

Nonetheless, we all felt accreditation has some role, differing somewhat on the extent of this. We believe it builds personal confidence, gives credibility to community research, develops critical capacities, documents practice, and enhances the status of community development work. Regarding the effectiveness of current accreditation systems, most felt things are unsatisfactory. One participant described how decisions are driven, not by groups, but by funders and asked ‘as tutors are we colluding and what does it do to us and the group?’ Others felt the overly prescriptive nature of LOs within FETAC descriptors negated the importance of unanticipated LOs, delayed LOs and, perhaps most important to our work, the ability for groups themselves to determine what they wish to achieve. Also voiced was a potential ‘tyranny of writing’ with set academic methods encroaching on more spontaneous, unstructured narratives. There was concern about the future of short, non-accredited courses and about a hierarchy of esteem awarded accredited over non-accredited learning regardless of which NFQ level it could be benchmarked against.

### ***Credibility and credentials***

To discuss the complexities of validation and credibility we asked ourselves what makes us credible in our roles. We adopted the Partners TtT model Three Sources of Authority: - *authority from above* - conferred by a role we occupy or designation from a higher authority, - *authority from below or around*- conferred from those we work with in the respect or recognition they have for us, and *authority from within* - that which we give ourselves through self-confidence in the validity of our position. Sources of credibility uncovered include having lived with oppression, having experience working in this area, having acted as ally, having made mistakes, and having qualifications. Also shared were incidences where credibility conferred from those we work with (around and below) and that which we held within, was undermined by accreditors and others in positions of authority.

### ***Matching accreditation with community development***

Another important discussion emerged when we mapped the Irish accreditation system alongside the work of community development. As with Bloom’s model of learning, we found our accreditation system also assumes progression

from basic technical knowledge, measured in ability to repeat what is taught, to formulating and engaging with open inquiry, measured in capacity to synthesise, evaluate and argue. This revealed a system of highly scrutinised technical learning at lower levels, accredited by FETAC at levels 1-5/6, and more student-directed learning at degree and master's levels awarded credits from HEIs at levels 6/7-10. West (2006) helped us see an important difference between FE and HE with the latter positioned as generator of new knowledge, a privilege protected by academic freedom. Diversely, FE accentuates the reproduction of knowledge produced and validated by those within HEs, people whose socio-economic and cultural contexts usually differ greatly from FE attendees.

### ***Confronting contradictions***

There were also some paradoxes within our inquiry. Some of us had benefited both financially and intellectually from accredited periods of learning. When we conferred with groups, we noted their desire to enjoy these benefits too with many naming a desire to compensate for school experiences. If we chose not to accredit out of concerns about reinforcement of inequalities, are we disadvantaging those we work with whilst we carry the currency of educational credits? When contemplating alternatives such as locally based culture circles carrying the analytical and critical weightings usually reserved for accredited masters programmes, the dilemma was the loss of structured systems of critical feedback protected through internal and external examination processes. We also shared positive stories of accreditation reassured by personal benefits expressed by recipients and of its successful adaption to praxis oriented approaches. These problems we posed infused the inquiry and continue to exercise our thoughts. As one journal entry remarks,

There are serious limitations to the accreditation we use – but it has great strengths also. We see it as a resource which is there for the community sector to utilise rather than an alienating system. We know that it can reinforce inequalities and discrimination but we are excited by the possibilities which it has to enable and empower individuals and communities.

### **Conclusions**

Accreditation carries strong emotional resonances from our experiences of being accredited and consequent ambiguities about accrediting others. Given the centrality of learning and range of competencies required for community development, we believe accreditation can support this work in three specific ways. Firstly, it can generate significant affirmation. Many activists have not

progressed in formal education and the inquiry uncovered our own experiences in terms of status and dignity. Being accredited, especially on a subject relevant to personal life struggle, can lay a great foundation in personal confidence. Secondly, accreditation enhances the rigor of learning. Through writing analysis and reflections and submitting them for scrutiny, we test our assumptions and sharpen thinking. Thirdly, accreditation provides a guide to standards of competency. Given the demanding nature of the work, we cannot rely on voluntary effort, and must pay people to work in the field. Accreditation can assist in choosing who to employ.

However there are tensions. The first of these relates to method and the way in which accreditation demands a certain level of standardisation. In general, candidates must compete for credits on an equal basis broadly following the same curriculum organised into set hours. This does not sit easily with process-centered learning which follows the energy and interests of learners as they arise, rather than a set curriculum. Standardisation also casts the person allocating credits as the expert assuming the teacher knows best and can judge the extent to which learning is happening. In our work it is the participants who are deemed experts as they know their experience of inequality best. The role of tutor is to provide the processes and frameworks through which this can be examined, including introducing theories, research and case-studies from other sources as led by the generative themes of a group (Freire, 1972).

Another tension arises because accreditation is a currency strong or weak depending on how valued it is in the marketplace; the higher the profile of accreditor, the greater the value. This enhances opportunities for holders to personally advance in society and translates into greater currency for HE graduates than FE. It also gives accrediting institutions a powerful role in determining what is to be learnt even if they are far removed from the context in which the learning is taking place.

Furthermore the demands of professionalisation; that accredited certification in community development is a pre-requisite to employment may, as acknowledged, indicate a standard in terms of the competence of the candidate, but it may say nothing in terms of their commitment to the values inherent in community development. It also over-emphasises *authority from above*; the powerful accrediting body, potentially ignoring credibility gained from appreciation by peers and the inner credibility derived from personal experiences, confidence and commitment. It could be argued these are more relevant for com-

munity leaders.

There is also a discord in relation to beliefs assumed about the capacity of learners. Whilst community activists may have limited experience in formal education, our experience is that, given appropriate supports, they have significant capacity in synthesising meaning, collectively analysing and proposing alternative ways of organising society. The assimilation of much community education into FE slots learners and learning at the lower, technical levels of the NFQ and away from critical constructionist potentials it has more historically aligned itself with.

We wonder however if these tensions can be managed through creative application by those utilising accredited learning processes. Our concern is that this is increasingly difficult given the power of accrediting bodies to direct from afar, and government policy melding community development learning into training for employment instead of appreciating it as a civic, democratic social change process. For accrediting bodies there is a need to re-examine systems appreciating the need for open inquiry and analysis by those who live with inequalities instead of assuming a staged process of learning as the NFQ encourages. For community educators, ours is the challenge to push from below, to critique the role of accreditation in judging the competence, confidence and commitment of those wishing to take up leadership roles in the community development process. It is for us to propose alternative methods and methodologies and ensure the experiential, participatory, emancipatory features of our movement are not lost.

### *References*

- Bloom, S., Krathwohl, D., Masia, B. (1984) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and the classification of educational goals*. University of Michigan: Longman.
- Brittingham, B. (2009) 'Accreditation in the United States: How did we get to where we are?' *New Directions for Higher Education*, 145:7-27.
- Byrne, D. (2012) 'Investigating the De-Politicisation of Community Development: What Happened? Where do we go Now?' in Jackson, A. & O'Doherty, C. (Eds.) *Community Development in Ireland, Theory, Policy & Practice*. Dublin: Gill & MacMillan.
- CAN & Partners TtT (2005) *Reclaiming Economics, a Cooperative inquiry*. Dublin: CAN publications.
- CAN (2012) *Community Development for Positive Systemic Change, Strategic Plan 2010-2015*. Dublin: CAN publications.
- DEC&LG (2012) *Final Report of the Local Government/Local Development Alignment*

- Steering Group*. <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/LocalGovernment/Administration/FileDownload,31308,en.pdf> retrieved Jan, 2013.
- Entwistle, N. (2005) 'Learning outcomes and ways of thinking across contrasting disciplines and settings in higher education' *The curriculum Journal*, 16(1):67-82.
- European Communities (2009) *ECTS Users Guide, Education and Training*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Middlesex: Penguin Education.
- Harvey, L. (2004) 'The Power of Accreditation: Views of Academics' *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 26(2):207-223.
- Heron, J. (1994) *Cooperative inquiry, Research into the Human Condition*. London: Sage.
- Hooks, B. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress, Education as the practice of freedom*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hope S. & Timmel, A. (1995a) *Training for Transformation, Book 1 revised*. London: ITDG publishing.
- Hope S. & Timmel, A. (1995) *Training for Transformation, Book 4 revised*. London: ITDG publishing.
- Hussey, T. & Smith, P. (2008) 'Learning Outcomes: A Conceptual Analysis' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(1):107-115.
- Kelleher, P. & Whelan, M. (1992) *Dublin Communities in Action*. Dublin: CAN & CPA.
- Kelly, M. (1994) *Can you credit it? Implications of Accreditation for Learners and Groups in the Community Sector*, Dublin: CPA.
- Killeavy, M. (2005) 'The Irish Education System, a comparative approach' in Mitter, W., Doebert, H., Horner, W. & Von Kopp, B. (Eds.) *Education Systems of Europe. The Netherlands: Springer Science + Business Media*.
- Kincheloe, J. & McLaren, P. (2005) 'Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research' in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Keyes, D. (2004) 'Accreditation within Adult Education, reflections and views from local tutors', *The Adult Learner, the Journal of Adult & Community Education in Ireland*, 68-77.
- Ledwith, M (2005) *Community Development; A Critical Approach*. Bristol: The Polity Press.
- Lloyd, A. (2010) 'The will of the state and the resilience of the community sector in a time of crisis: compliance or an opportunity for renewal?' *Working for Change: The Irish Journal of Community Work*.
- NFQ (2003) *A Framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in Ireland*, Dublin: NQAI.
- OECD (2006) *Higher Education in Ireland*. OECD.

- Powell, G. & Geoghegan M. (2004) *The Politics of Community Development, Reclaiming civil society or reinventing governance?* Dublin: A & A Falmer.
- Quilty, A. (2003) 'Towards a pedagogy of demystification', *The Adult Learner, the Irish Journal of Adult & Community Education*, 57-66.
- Teague, P., Murphy, M.C. (2004) *Social partnership and local development in Ireland: The limits to deliberation*, Geneva: International Labour Organization (International Institute for Labour Studies).
- Saarinen, T. & Ala-Va "ha" la", T. (2007) 'Accreditation, the Bologna Process and National Reactions: Accreditation as Concept and Action' *Higher Education in Europe*, 32(4):333-345.
- Scheele, K., 2004, 'Licence to kill: about accreditation issues and James Bond' *Quality in Higher Education*, 10(3):285-293.
- Shor, I. & Freire, P. (1987) *A Pedagogy for Liberation, Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Westport: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.
- West, J. (2006) 'Patrolling the borders: accreditation in Further and Higher education in England' *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30(1):12-26.

# Awakening to Recovery and Honneth's Theory of Recognition

TOM O' BRIEN, NUI MAYNOOTH

---

## **Abstract**

*Heroin users are a stigmatized group of learners on the edge of society, whose struggle for recognition remains largely ignored. Drug treatment in the form of methadone and prescription drugs has only served to further stigmatize and disrespect their rights. Adult education aspires to be a discourse of resistance and a social movement for the creation of a diverse and just society. The work of Axel Honneth and his 'Theory of Recognition' can help to advance those aspirations and radically shift our understanding of the drug user and the recovery process.*

## **Introduction**

Drug addiction continues to deepen its grip on Irish society. Heroin users now typically use a multitude of drugs, including cannabis, cocaine, benzodiazepines, anti-depressants, hypnotics, methadone and alcohol. Over the last twenty years the Irish State has responded with the development of a wide range of policies and services for drug users (Butler et al., 2005). Yet the drug problem continues to grow in size, complexity and cost. New drugs emerge with each generation. Addiction to prescription drugs is becoming a serious problem as increasing numbers of people are being medicated for their symptoms. Being on some form of medication is being increasingly normalized as the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession gain more control and influence over our understanding of health. However after nearly twenty years of methadone treatment for heroin addiction, the evidence on the ground is clear, that 'The Drugs Don't Work. The only make you worse' (Ashcroft, 1997).

Longitudinal studies have shown that most people on methadone treatment are unable to abstain from heroin use for sustained periods, either switching

from treatment to regular heroin use or continuing to use heroin while in treatment (Bell et al., 2006; Dobler-Mikola et al., 2005). Treatment outcomes are not encouraging if we examine them from an abstinence perspective. Fewer than four percent of addicts emerge from treatment free from dependency (Gyngell, 2011). The methadone clinic has become a dead-end for many drug users, who reluctantly reconcile themselves to a life on methadone (O'Brien, 2007). In the UK the National Treatment Agency have expressed concerns with the number of people who are being parked on methadone (National Treatment Agency, 2012). The average length of a methadone treatment is getting longer with many exceeding fifteen years on the substitute. The longer an individual is 'in treatment' the less likely they are to be motivated to utilize their potential to become drug-free.

Drug deaths have continued to rise, with 2,015 drug related deaths in Ireland in the six-year period between 2004 and 2009. Methadone was implicated in 345 of these deaths during the same period. That is an average of one death per week involving methadone over the six-year period (Health Research Board, 2011). In a 2007 Danish study methadone was the main intoxicant accounting for 51 percent of drug related deaths (Wiese Simonsen et al., 2010). In a study carried out in Norway into methadone related deaths, methadone was implicated in 85 percent of poisonings, with an average of one death per week over a six-year period (Bernard et al., 2012). In Scotland in 2011 methadone was a factor along with other drugs in causing 275 deaths – nearly half (47 percent) of the 2011 fatalities and up 58 percent on the 2010 figure of 174 (National Records of Scotland, 2012). Methadone was introduced to help stop drug related deaths, however now it's increasingly being implicated in many drug related deaths. Illich (1975) referred to this as the iatrogenic effect, where health interventions lead to more widespread health problems.

Treatment policy has not achieved what it set out to do. It has not saved lives. It has not reduced crime. It has not got people better.

(Gyngell, 2011:14)

### **A Prescribed Drug Epidemic**

The World Drug Report (2011) has highlighted the non-medical use of prescription drugs as a growing problem in a number of developed countries. In the US prescription drug abuse is becoming the fastest growing drug problem. Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that one-third

of people aged 12 and over who used drugs for the first time in 2009 began by using a prescription drug non-medically (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2011). Data from an Irish study covering the period 1998–2008, benzodiazepines accounted for 31% of all deaths by poisoning, antidepressants were implicated in 23% and the other prescription drugs in 18% of these drug-related deaths (Alcohol and Drug Research Unit, 2011).

The medical monopoly over addiction is fueling the problem (Dalrymple, 2007). Behind the drug related statistics are real people who were not recognized as valuable in their lifetime. Before that final overdose, they most likely would have been homeless, ex-prisoners, educationally disadvantaged, socially and culturally excluded, suffering from depression, suicidal and lonely. They are a whole generation of brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, father and mothers and sons and daughters. With so many drug users stuck on methadone and the high number of drug related deaths, it's time to reflect, question and rethink our approach to the drug problem in Ireland and listen to the dissenting voices.

### **In search of grass roots**

'What do we want? Pushers out! When do we want it? Now!' chanted the protestors as we walked down Gardiner Street in the North Inner City of Dublin in 1995. As we marched an experienced community worker with a strong socialist and community development background, said to me '... we need more methadone'. Although I was a lot younger and inexperienced, I was still surprised by his narrow focus on methadone. As a student at the time, I had immersed myself in the writings of Paulo Freire author of 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1972) and Augusto Boal, creator of 'The Theatre of the Oppressed' (1979). I had also studied with Boal in London who told me that he and Freire were friends. I had come to understand heroin addiction as a form of internalized oppression (Boal, 1995) and I was in search of ways to break the oppression of addiction by drawing on the philosophy and principles of Adult Education. Initially I was drawn to the work of both Freire and Boal, who had developed systems in my view to decrypt the code of oppression through the mediums of education and theatre. Boal developed the concept of spec-actors to infuse his theatre with the possibility of breaking the oppression and transforming the stage, in contrast to the more passive form of spectators, looking without the power to change. In a similar way, I thought if drug users could be infused with the power to act, to become the spec-actors in their own recovery drama, it might be possible to shift their positioning from victim to active citizen.

It was that comment, 'we need more methadone' that sent me on a journey researching the place of Adult Education within drug treatment (O'Brien, 2004). As an Adult Educator I have struggled to claim my space on the addiction stage, in a play dominated by the professions of medicine and psychology. At the margins of this stage, I sit as an observer, participating in the dialogue, deeply aware of the limitations of my own ontological position. From the edge of this drama my observations form part of a naturalistic inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) and provide a valuable reflection on addiction from the inside. Convinced there was another way I studied herbal medicine and found a tradition of healing that dates back thousands of years. From this additional perspective I found it even more difficult to understand why we allow medicine to dominate the conversation of drug treatment and why we accept Adult Education being relegated to an ancillary service and something to keep the clients occupied between prescriptions. I could understand the disciplines of psychology and psychotherapy negotiating their place on the treatment hierarchy, but couldn't accept Adult Educators being cast as the clowns who entertained the spectators between the main acts of medicine and psychology (O'Brien, 2004).

This was the context in which we allowed methadone to dominate the development of addiction services for heroin users in Ireland. Methadone treatment had the sociological effect of silencing the protests and the marches. The grassroots were cut off and made redundant after funding flowed into the sector between 1997 and 2007. The solution to the drug problem became professionalized and a new career pathway opened up for those traditionally drawn to adult education and community development. As the community drugs sector became legitimized and dependent on Government funding, its influence weakened, as did its ability to think critically and independently. Yes, we needed methadone to replace the short-term withdrawals of heroin addiction, but not as a cheap social substitute in place of the social structures required for full human flourishing.

### **Adult Education – a discourse of resistance**

Heroin users are of interest to Adult Educators as they represent a group of stigmatized learners struggling for recognition and respect (Honneth, 1996). The identity of the heroin user is one that is constructed through a series of oppressive discourses, which dominate, control, disempower, oppress and sedate the cognitive, emotional and biological systems of the person (Keane, 2008). Adult Education with its roots in critical social theory and the struggle for emancipation and social justice is well positioned to offer an alternative reflection on

addiction and the recovery process.

Adult Education understands knowledge as emancipation (Santos, 1999) and so provides a useful frame of reference for exploring issues like addiction. Mezirow explored learning as transformation (2000) a process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference and habits of mind. He suggested that the human condition could be best understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings. Kegan (1994) argues that by transforming our epistemologies, we can learn to liberate ourselves from that in which we are embedded. Brookfield (2005) suggests that when ideologies become dominant we dispense with actual thinking and leave it to the experts to tell us how and what to think.

However this is not the dominant view of adult education in Ireland today according to Grummell (2007) who suggests that the more radical and critical perspectives on Adult Education have been largely ignored and even marginalized within the education debate. Others have also expressed concerns, as in Connolly (2007) on the need for critical learners and Finnegan (2008) on the impact of neo-liberalism on University education. Still the most common view of Adult Education is the functionalist perspective, which is associated with second chance education for adults and focuses on training for employment and the maintenance of the existing social order. As a result Adult Education is at risk of being absorbed by the neo-liberal discourse of individualism and consumerism, where the needs of the economy are allowed to dominate (Fleming et al., 2010).

Such was the world of the Celtic Tiger, a neo-liberal economy, which intoxicated us into believing that economics would realize all our aspirations and raise all boats equally. Now that this illusion has passed and the economy has fallen, as suddenly as did the city of Pompey and now we are left to pick up the pieces. In this new landscape Adult Education needs to assert its position and influence the reconstruction of our a people, independent, resourceful and unwilling to accept more offers that only seek to maintain relations of domination. A world where we can't reflect critically and question, is an unsafe world. You have to fit in. Be one of the crowd. Don't question or shout against your team. Swallow your medicine. Take 'a pill for every ill'. Hide your difference. Comply, follow, agree, nod, wink, pat on the back, turn a blind eye and look after number one. A world where nobody is thinking, reflecting or questioning is a dangerous world.

This paper adopts a radical approach to Adult Education, one that is rooted in the tradition of Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School of Philosophy. Critical theories aim to dig beneath the surface of social life and uncover the assumptions that keep us from a full and true understanding of how the world works (Johnson, 1995). Axel Honneth a German political and social philosopher from the critical theory tradition is of interest to Adult Educators, because of his efforts to develop a comprehensive theory of society and social action. His theories provide us with a framework for assessing forms of social organization and analyzing relations of domination and oppression (Petherbridge, 2011:1). His political philosophy builds on Hegel's work on recognition, which they both agree is fundamental to identity formation and self-realization. We grow and develop in relation to each other inter-subjectively and are highly dependent on our mutual social connection. Honneth stresses the importance of social relationships to the development and maintenance of a person's identity. To develop as human beings we are dependent on specific sorts of relationships that promote the development of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem (Meehan, 2011).

### **Honneth's Theory of Recognition**

There are three different types of recognition that are central to developing an autonomous identity; self-confidence, self respect and self esteem (Honneth, 1996). An individual's *self-confidence* is established within the relations of friendship and love. Love and friendship are the forms of recognition by which family members and friends create basic trust. Individuals learn to express themselves without fear of abandonment. The self emerges and recognizes its right to exist. This is the starting point of one's existential self-recognition, the right to exist, to stand out from the crowd and exist in your own unique skin. Lack of recognition affects the individuals' integrity. When recognition is absent at this stage and there is a greater risk, that a negative self-concept will find expression through negative emotional responses e.g., addiction (Honneth, 1996).

*Self Respect* is the second form of recognition required to achieve full recognition as a citizen and member of society. The individual is accepted as an autonomous person with legal rights to participate in the shaping of the world around them. Self-respect is established by a person's position as a legal subject with civil, political and social rights. Civil society is the domain where self-respect is achieved. Civil society offers wider possibilities for individual self-realization than the family domain. Civil, political and social rights required for every

individual to achieve recognition in the form of self-respect. The absence of self-respect leads to the denial of people’s civil, social and political rights. Their autonomy as a person can be undermined and they risk being stigmatized and isolated within society.

The third form of recognition is *self-esteem*, which is confirmed by being valued in a social community. According to Honneth (1996) self-esteem is realized in social solidarity where values are shared and valued by others. Here he links the notion of solidarity and the sphere of social esteem. Solidarity is shared esteem that creates social stability. Social esteem is dependent on collectively shared values and goals.

Each form of recognition has a reciprocal relationship with the other. The three areas of recognition represent different ways that the individual employs to develop personal and social relations.

### Honneth’s Theory of Recognition

<b>Mode of recognition</b>	Emotional Support	Cognitive Respect	Social Esteem
<b>Dimensions of personality</b>	Needs and emotions	Moral responsibility	Traits and abilities
<b>Form of recognition</b>	Love and friendship	Legal relations/ rights	Community and Solidarit
<b>Practical relations to self</b>	Self-Confidence	Self-Respect	Self-Esteem
<b>Forms of disrespect</b>	Abuse/rape	Denial of rights and exclusion	Condemnation
<b>Threatened component of personality</b>	Physical integrity	Social integrity	Honour and dignity

Honneth (1996:129)

Honneth (1996) articulates a theory of recognition in which social justice can be achieved through the relationships we have with each other, subject to sub-

ject. He argues that our unique human interdependence is inter-subjective recognition, has been institutionalized in society, in the sphere of family, civil society and the state. Recognition is fundamental to our sense of self, our well-being and our ability to function freely (Taylor, 1994). Recognition theorists argue that empowerment and social change is best achieved inter-subjectively, by being recognized by others (Murphy et al., 2012).

The philosophy of recognition is resonating with a wider audience interested in social change. This shift is taking place in the context in which more people are becoming dissatisfied with theories of redistribution that have not shifted the scales of justice or brought about a more equitable society as speculated e.g., 'from North to South, from the rich to the poor, and from owners to the workers' (Fraser & Honneth, 2003:7). Recognition enables us examine justice claims for same-sex marriage, struggles over religion, nationality and gender. Equally it can be applied to claims for recognition among drug users, seeking recovery and an identity beyond one constructed in the context of drug use and addiction.

Honneth (1996) describes struggles for recognition as social processes in which certain groups resist forms of unequal treatment, and demeaning labels ascribed to them (e.g., Junkies, Scumbags) by dominant and powerful elite groups. Disrespect can occur when recognition is denied at either stage of personal or social development within family/friends, civil society or by the state. These correspond to the experience of physical/emotional abuse, denial of rights and the denial of social value. Entering treatment should be the starting point on a journey into becoming and being, into existence and recognition. Treatment for addiction is imagined as a place where pain and suffering is recognized and hope of recovery is realized. However in the case of treatment for heroin addiction this is not always the case and recognition becomes misrecognition as interventions become overshadowed by a treatment, that predominately provides more drugs.

### **The struggle to exist**

The first form of recognition required to awaken recovery is being recognized in a relationship of support, care, compassion and solidarity. The first steps in recovery are often motivated by love for someone or by the experience of support. Love and support provides a secure base for the development of the self, a unique identity that allows us to express ourselves with confidence. Love in the form of a secure attachment is the basic requirement for the develop-

ment confidence in myself. We know that we are interdependent on each other for survival. No one will survive outside of a relationship, neither infants nor children. Parental care of some kind is required. Winnicott (1960) suggests the idea of the 'good enough mother' who provides 'a holding environment' where the 'true self' can emerge without fear of abandonment. In the absence of the 'good enough mother' the child develops what he calls the 'false self' as a mask of protection to gain acceptance and recognition from others. Bowlby (1969) also emphasized the importance of attachment between mother and child describing it as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (Bowlby, 1969:194). He understood the significance of having a central caregiver, to create a secure base for the child to explore the world. Bowlby suggests that failure to form secure attachments early in life can have a negative impact on behavior in later childhood and through out life. If someone experiences abuse their self-confidence is undermined and there is an increase risk of developing depression, addiction or illness.

Taylor (1994) suggests that misrecognition or disrespect is a form of oppression because it imprisons someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being. Recognition aims to repair the 'internal self dislocation' by contesting the dominant cultures demeaning picture of oppressed groups (Morrison, 2010:10). Recognition is not just for children, but also for all people. Recognition is fundamental to everyone's identity formation. The denial of opportunities for identity formation and self-realization are central to the experience and process becoming addicted.

Many drug users who become addicted have been victims of abuse and neglect, with their basic needs for security, belonging, esteem and self-actualization often being unrealized (Maslow, 1943). How do we create the conditions for confidence to develop as a drug user enters treatment? How do we nurture confidence to reduce drug use; to detoxify off methadone; to say no to old friends; to learn how to read and write as an adult; to believe in the future and to overcome unforeseen challenges along the way? Honneth helps us address these questions and understand why the development of self-confidence is central to overcoming addiction.

### **The struggle for respect**

The second form of recognition required to awaken recovery is respect. This is the respect that comes with being recognized as an autonomous person, with rights to participate in the institutions of civil society. However the rights of

heroin users in particular are often disrespected under the guise of harm reduction and evidence based medicine. As citizens we are all morally and legally responsible to recognize the rights of drug users in treatment. As methadone forms part of a public health policy, the rights of drug users are sometimes sacrificed to protect the public good. Psychiatry plays the lead role in the treatment of addiction and as a self-regulated profession with a close relationship to the pharmaceutical industry there is a risk that the rights of drug users are being compromised.

Psychiatry carries a lot of status and influence and dominates the way we talk about addiction and its treatment. It alone carries the power to diagnose, label and even brand the person. Psychiatry has transformed everyday behaviors into symptoms of mental illness (Kirsch, 2009). Drug users are constantly constructed as diseased, genetically flawed, addicted personalities, lacking in self-control or the desire to want or conceive alternative choices (Mayock, 2000). The social context of their choices is ignored (Filc, 2004) and addiction becomes medicalized through a process of interpreting social problems purely in medical terms (Zola, 1972).

As a result the medical encounter is often experienced as a site for misrecognition of the drug user, who is turned into an object, classified, diagnosed, and scripted accordingly. The labels ascribed to the drug user seal their faith and legitimize the opposing positions in the social structure. The drug user, becomes patient and client, where they are required to be passive spectators of a treatment that promises to make them well, 'a least do no harm'. The drug user agrees to swap their illegal and dangerous drugs for the prescribed legal and safe drugs. They consent passively with the hope that the promise of a 'normal life' will be the end result of the treatment. The drugs don't work and more are sought and procured.

Psychiatry plays a central role in maintaining a culture of misrecognition of people who experience drug problems. As part of the biomedical discourse psychiatry has achieved a dominant position or hegemony over our thinking about addiction, treatment and recovery. Psychiatry has achieved a powerful status as lead profession in defining and treating addiction. Psychiatry has gained control over the production of addiction knowledge, through its grip on addiction research sites, data, analysis and outcomes. Only psychiatry decides what are valid research proposals and who gains access to the key research sites. A study by Bekelman et al., (2003) reviewing the prevalence of financial conflicts

of interest in academic research found that a quarter of university researchers receive funding from the pharmaceutical industry. Healy et al., (2003) estimated that as many as seventy five percent of papers documenting randomized controlled trials of therapeutic agents were written by ghostwriters.

How do we ensure the rights of drug users are respected? How do we ensure that the conditions within the methadone clinic, respects their rights, their choices, their needs, their options for detoxification or alternative treatments? How do we ensure their right to confidentiality and consent to treatment is respected? How do we change from a position of disrespect to one of respect? How do we live the values of equality in practice rather than in theory? These questions need to be explored if we are to improve the protections for drug users in treatment. The risks are too high to allow anyone profession to have such powers over vulnerable adults. The role of psychiatry in addiction needs to be examined and new protections for drug users in treatment need to be put in place to ensure their rights are recognized.

### **The struggle to be valued**

The third form of recognition required to awaken recovery is self-esteem, which we develop when we experience social recognition for our abilities and skills. Social recognition exists when we experience ourselves as part of a community of solidarity that recognizes our value and contribution. Misrecognition here comes in the form of social condemnation and stigma. Heroin users are a highly stigmatized group of individuals.

When we are mistreated we are denied recognition and our positive understanding of ourselves is damaged. Misrecognition leads to certain groups being stigmatized. Drug users are one of the most stigmatized groups in society. The word 'stigma' stems from a practice in ancient Greece, of branding slaves with a pointed stick to ensure universal recognition of their status and to prevent them from absconding. Ritsher et al., (2004) found that high levels of internalized stigma and alienation was associated with depression and low self-esteem, respectively. The stigma of addiction is associated with disgrace, shame, low self-esteem and confidence and social exclusion and even condemnation. The stigma can override all other aspects of the drug users identity. As a result they can become devalued as individuals and marginalized as a group. Negative views of drug users are common throughout society, including among some of the professions that work with drug users (Llyod, 2010).

The drug addict is generally perceived as a passive and helpless victim. They are regularly labeled as 'Junkies' and socially stigmatized (Lloyd, 2010). They are often misrepresented in the media (Taylor, 2008), thus proving a '...platform from which politicians and other moral entrepreneurs are able to launch and wage drug 'wars' (Murji, 1998:69). Drug users provide data for researchers and in most cases have no control over how it is analysed or finally represented. They are assessed, diagnosed, pathologised and treated by psychologists, therapists, doctors and psychiatrists.

When someone's way of life is not recognized or respected e.g., heroin users, then damage is done to their self-esteem and sense of social value. We need to start by removing the stigma and the process of stigmatisation of drug users, and provide them with opportunities for social recognition and respect.

Honneth sees the good relationship as central to resolving social conflict and reducing relations of disrespect. When we recognize others it nurtures self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Recognition provides a powerful source of personal, civic and social validation that is required for the creation of a just and equal society. When we recognize drug users as people, as subjects rather than objects, as agents of change capable of making new choices, we realize the power of recognition.

### **Conclusion**

The phrase '*you're a lifer*' is often used to describe someone who has been written off and destined to be on methadone for life. It's a phrase that sadly reflects the reality of methadone for many who feel bound to the clinic because of their addiction. The methadone clinics were set up to support people to reduce their dependence on drugs, but have become places where drug users are trapped under an increasing burden of medications and their negative side effects. The clinic is no longer just a building, but a mindset, visible on *the street, the Luas, the Bus* and *the Boardwalk*, anywhere you can see prescriptions being bought and sold to ease our social pain.

Axel Honneth provides a way of thinking about the struggle to leave the clinic and ultimately to recovery from addiction. His work on 'Recognition' provides a framework for understanding all social struggles as struggles for identity formation or identity healing. He suggests that all humans are seeking recognition and that a lack of recognition creates the conditions for what he refers to as misrecognition or disrespect (Honneth, 2007). Addiction treatment acts to

further stigmatize drug users by locking them into deeper patterns of chemical addiction in the form of prescription medicine. Honneth's theory enables us to examine addiction treatment and its effect on the development of *self-confidence*, *self-respect* and *self-esteem*. These three relations to the self and its development form the basis of normal identity formation. Any injury or disrespect to one aspect of relations to self damages the others and restricts our freedom and development. By creating the conditions for the full flourishing of all three relations to self, we will create a community of solidarity that will reduce the risk of addiction, and also have a positive effect on other social struggles linked to addiction like depression and suicide.

### References

- Alcohol and Drug Research Unit (2011). Drug-related deaths and deaths among drug users in Ireland: 2008 figures from the *National Drug-Related Deaths Index HRB Trends Series 9*. Dublin: Health Research Board.
- Ashcroft, R. (1997). 'The Drugs Don't Work' in Urban Hymns. London: HUT.
- Bekelman, J.E., Li, Y., Gross, C.P., (2003). *Scope and impact of financial conflicts of interest in biomedical research; a systematic review*. Journal of the American Medical Association, 289(4) 454-65.
- Bell, J., Burrell, T., Indig, D. & Gilmour, S. (2006). *Cycling in and out of treatment; participation in methadone treatment in NSW, 1990-2002*. Drug and Alcohol Dependence 81; 55-61.
- Bernard, J.P., Havnes, I., Slodal, L., Waal, H., Morland, J. (2012). *Methadone related deaths in Norway*. Forensic Science International, 224, 111-116.
- Boal, A. (1992). *The Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press.
- Boal, A. (1995). *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal method of theatre and therapy*. London: Routledge.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss*, Vol. 1: Attachment. New York: Basic Books.
- Brookfield, S. (2005). *The Power of Critical Theory: Liberating Adult Learning and Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Butler, S & Mayock, P. (2005). 'An Irish Solution to an Irish Problem': *Harm reduction and ambiguity in the drug policy of the Republic of Ireland*. International Journal of Drug Policy, 16, 415-422.
- Connolly, B. (2007). *Beyond the third way: New challenges for critical adult and community education*. In B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack, D. & A.Ryan, (Eds.), *Radical learning for liberation 2*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Dalrymple, T. (2007). *Junk Medicine: Doctors, Lies, and the Addiction Bureaucracy*. Hampshire: Harriman House.
- Dobler-Mikola, A., Hättenschwiler, J., Meili, D., Beck, T., Böni, E., Modestin, J. (2005).

- Patterns of heroin, cocaine, and alcohol abuse during long-term methadone maintenance treatment.* Journal of Substance Misuse Treatment 29, 259-265.
- Filc, D., (2004). *The medical text: between biomedicine and hegemony.* Social Science & Medicine, 59, 1275-1285.
- Finnegan, F. (2008). *Neoliberalism, Irish Society and Adult Education.* The Adult Learner. Dublin: Aontas.
- Fleming, T., Murphy, M. (2010). *Taking aim at the heart of education : critical theory and the future of learning.* In Mark Murphy & Ted Fleming (eds.), *Habermas, Critical Theory and Education.* London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). *Rethinking recognition.* New Left review, 3, 107-120.
- Fraser, N & Honneth, A. (2003). *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange.* London: Verso.
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Guba, E.G & Lincoln, Y.S., (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* London: Sage.
- Grummell, B. (2007). *The 'Second Chance' Myth: Equality of Opportunity in Irish Adult Education Policies,* British Journal of Educational Studies, 55(2), pp. 182- 201.
- Gyngell, K. (2011). *Breaking the habit.* Centre for Policy Studies: Surrey.
- Health Research Board. (2011). *Drug-related deaths and deaths among drug users in Ireland: Revised 2009 figures from the National Drug-Related Deaths Index.* Dublin: The Health Research Board.
- Healy, D., Cattell, D., (2003). *Interface between authorship, industry and science in the domain of therapeutics.* British Journal of Psychiatry, 183, 22-27.
- Honneth, A (1996). *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts.* Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Honneth, A (2007). *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory.* Cambridge: Polity.
- Honneth, A. (2009). *The Pathologies of Reason.* London: Verso.
- Illich, I. (1976). *Medical nemesis: The exploration of health.* London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd.
- Johnson, A. (1995). *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology.* Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.
- Keane, H. (2008). *Foucault on Methadone: Beyond bio-power.* International Journal of Drug Policy; 20 (5), 450-452.
- Kegan, R. (1994). *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kirsch, I., (2009). *The Emperor's New Drugs. Exploding the Antidepressant Myth.* London: The Bodley Head.
- Llyod, C. (2010). *Sinning and Sinned Against: The Stigmatisation of Problem Drug Users.*

- London; The UK Policy Commission.
- Maslow, A.H. (1943). *A theory of human motivation*. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–96.  
Retrieved from <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>
- Mayock, P. (2000). *Choosers or Losers?* Dublin: The Children’s Research Centre.
- Meehan, J. (2011) *Recognition and the Dynamics of Intersubjectivity*. In Petherbridge, D. (Ed.) (2011). *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a reply by Axel Honneth*. Boston: Brill.
- Mezirow, J. (1996) ‘*Adult Education and Empowerment for Individual and Community Development*’. In *Radical Learning for Liberation*. Maynooth Adult and Community Education Occasional Series Number 1. Connolly, B., Fleming, T., McCormack, D., & Ryan, A. (Eds). Maynooth: MACE.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as Transformation. Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morrison, Z. (2010). *On Dignity. Social Inclusion and the Politics of Recognition*. Melbourne: Centre for Public Policy.
- Murji, K. (1998) ‘*The Agony and the Ecstasy: Drugs, Media and Morality*’, in R. Coomber (ed.) *The Control of Drugs and Drug Users: Reason or Reaction?*, pp. 69–85. London: Harwood.
- Murphy, M & Brown, T. (2012). *Learning as relational: intersubjectivity and pedagogy in higher education*, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 31:5, 643-654
- National Records of Scotland. (2012). *Drug related deaths in Scotland in 2011*. Scotland: National Records of Scotland.
- National Treatment Agency (2012). *Medications in Recovery: Re-orientating Drug Dependence Treatment*. London: The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse.
- O’Brien, T. (2004). *Discourses in Drug Treatment*. Doctoral Thesis. Maynooth: Unpublished.
- O’Brien, T. (2007). *Is There a Way Out of this Clinic? An Adult and Community Education Perspective on Methadone and the Absence of Rehabilitation*. The Adult Learner. Dublin: Aontas.
- Petherbridge, D. (Ed.) (2011). *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a reply by Axel Honneth*. Boston: Brill.
- Ritsher, J. B., Otilingham, P. G. & Grajales, M. (2003). *Internalised stigma of mental illness: psychometric properties of a new measure*. *Psychiatry Research*, 121, 31-49.
- Rogers, Carl. (1951). *Client-centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory*. London: Constable.
- Santos, B. (1999) ‘*On Oppositional Postmodernism*’ in R. Munck, and D. O’Hearn, (Eds) *Critical Development Theory: Contributions to a New Paradigm*, London: Zed.

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2011). *Results from the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings*, NSDUH Series H-41, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 11-4658. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Taylor, Charles. (1994) 'The Politics of Recognition'. Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition. Ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 25-73
- Taylor, S. (2008). *Outside the outsiders: Media representations of drug use*. The Journal of Community and Criminal Justice, 55(4): 369-387.
- The World Drug Report (2011). *The World Drug Report 2011*. New York: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
- Wiese Simonsen, K., Normann, P.T., Ceder, G., Vuori, E., Thordardottir, S., Thelander, G., Hansen, A.C., Teige, B., Rollmann, D. (2011). *Fatal Poisonings in drug addicts in the Nordic countries in 2007*. Forensic Science International, 207, 170-176.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1960). "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self," in *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. New York: International UP Inc., 1965, pp. 140-152.
- Zola, I.K., (1972). *Medicine as an institution of Social Control*. The Sociological Review, 20(4), 487-501.

# The War against People: Adult education practice for critical democracy

BRÍD CONNOLLY, NUI MAYNOOTH  
PETER HUSSEY, NUI MAYNOOTH

---

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore the role of adult education for critical democracy, in order to address the social suffering (Bourdieu, 1999) that we encounter in our work as critical adult community educators. We explore this through dialogue, as a process of education and research. Dialogue is the moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it (Shor, Freire, 1987: 13). The purpose of dialogue is to transform social relations, in the learning environment and in our community of practice, a key way of creating new knowledge. Also, we contend that dialogue is a process of joint autoethnographic research that examines experience, in order to understand cultural practices, (Ellis, *et al*, 2011). Further, congruent with our pedagogies, autoethnography treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams and Holman Jones, 2008). This article developed out of dialogue that we have had for years, but which we formalised only recently. We consider dialogue as a pivot, based on Freire's contention that education is a conversation rather than a curriculum (1972). Further, our dialogue is underpinned by reflexivity, particularly using ourselves in research and practice (Etherington, 2004). Reflexivity remains in the domain of the academic if we are not mindful that our purpose is to change the world, echoing Marx and Engles' thesis that:

*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is, however, to change it..*

(Thesis 11, 1845)

Further, Shor and Freire (1987) use dialogue to profile their conceptual construction, resulting in an accessible account of liberatory pedagogy. A central tenet of this dialogue is that critical educators are both activists and artists, with attention to both liberation and creativity. In our identities as educators and researchers, we regard the creative dimension of adult and community education as crucial. It is possible to talk about creativity in education as meaning a critical discussion on art, culture and nature but, more interestingly, an appreciation of the joy of generating meaning, creating paradigms, and stimulating ideas. We believe that the point of education is to build the capacity of our students to challenge the forces which maintain the unequal *status quo*: adult education for critical democracy. Critical democracy is embedded in collective action for building an equal and just society, significantly more than representative democracy, and more than active citizenship, which remains located in the personal and individual non-transformative activism. This capacity is nourished with *really useful knowledge*, (Thompson, 2007) but also with what we term *really useful practice*. Really useful practice as the exercise of really useful knowledge is the manifestation of praxis (Freire, 1972) and we wish to explore this at a deeper level in this article. We will look at the scope of our work, the use of the personal to articulate the political and social, and finally, the dangers of co-option and colonisation of really useful practice.

### *The Practice*

My work falls equally into both the academic and the community-based. The common theme that runs through it all is *the way* that I work. So I would use the same method with all of the groups, whether they are a group of Traveller men, or a group of MA students. And the aim of that work is to try and bring some critical awareness to what it is that the individual learner sees himself or herself doing. This is done with a view to looking at themselves in the context of wider society.

Peter: The *methods* I use are inspired by Freire (1972) and drawn from Boal (1998). If I'm working with MA or Doctoral students the focus of the work will be on the practitioners as theorists. If I'm working with community groups the focus will be on the groups' concerns, but I will use Freirean and Boalian *methods*, emphasising the practice and not the theory.

Brid: I work with people returning to education for the first time, right across to the doctoral level. The biggest single group I work with are people studying to be adult and further educators, but I work with other groups like

the MA students, and I work with the non-formal sector, for example, community education facilitators.

For me, adult and community education is different to the scope of work in all other education sectors. It is contingent on pedagogical expertise rather than in teaching subjects. Adult educators do have a knowledge base, appropriate to the level of accreditation, but *really useful practice* is transferable across this entire spectrum (Connolly, 2008).

Peter: I came from both theatre and education. My first experience of adult and community education was participating as a young student on the Higher Diploma in Adult Education. I just knew that the other education courses were not what I was looking for and I knew from conversations with other students that the ideas, approaches of adult education would engage me more. The HDip allowed me to merge theatre and education into a useful practice.

Learning, for me, involved engaging multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). And so, adult and community education offered me opportunities to explore, using physical activity, discussion, reflection, emotion, imagination and thinking as tools for learning. It is the overlap of theatre and education that interests me. In theatre I have divided my time between community-based participatory practice and artist-led projects. I have always viewed theatre as a learning space, in which people co-create meaning and generate models of being human. In the theatre space, practitioners and audience are *imagers* – each group is engaged in the exercise of their imagination and in the discovery of what it means to be free. Similarly, in the classroom or community hall, groups of individuals come together to create meaning, using a different set of tools perhaps, but also aiming to understand themselves and their world better so that they can be liberated within it. I agree completely with Edward Bond (2000), who maintains that imagination and its use is the key tool in the work for social justice.

Brid: When I started in adult education first I started from a very political position, teaching Women's Studies. Even though I was a gormless eejit when I started, the scope was from the personal to the political. Women's studies came about in the late 1960s in the USA, along with the emergence of political activism, such as the civil rights movement (Pilcher, Whelehan,

2008: 176). When I studied adult education theory, I saw that it was parallel to the Freirean literacy movement and civil rights education. Women's studies emerged in Ireland in the late seventies and early 80s, supported by daytime education, (Inglis and Basset, 1988). There were also feminist radio programmes and feminist support agencies like the Rape Crisis Centres and Women's Aid.

However, the anti-feminist backlash emerged in the eighties. Many women and men in Ireland were deeply traumatised by the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign and the Anti-Divorce Campaign (O'Reilly, 1992). The new trend, which became known as women's community education (AONTAS, 2011, Connolly, 2003, etc) responded to the needs of the learners, managing to work around the backlash. The new programmes, from creative writing to social studies, were underpinned with the feminist agenda of liberation. This was affirmed by the White Paper (2000) and subsequently, with new writing (AONTAS, 2003) and new research, (AONTAS, 2011).

I saw the personal in social contexts. Each year since I started, I met with people who have had appalling suffering in their lives. Just look at the extent of rape, domestic violence, murder, men assaulting other men, child abuse, the exploitation of domestic workers in the private domain, sub-human housing; all those trafficked in the sex industry; the violence of organised crime; intimidation at community levels; the survivors of institutions such as Magdalene laundries; survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse. Bourdieu (1999) argues that everyday lives are submerged in social suffering, caused by social institutions of work, housing, education, the family and community. It is like a war against people.

Peter: Who do you think is winning the war?

Brid: I thought that the war was so huge that it *was* unwinnable, but now I believe that adult community education is helping to tip the balance in the other direction. Community education provides the space for people to explore the causes of social suffering, because is active and analytical.

### **Social and Personal Analysis**

Peter: The analysis of society must first begin with an analysis of the personal?

Brid: Some people think that it's more important to start with the social rather than with the personal. It is to do with the process. For some groups, we start with the social, but for others, the personal. If a woman is in the throes of an abusive relationship, it is not helpful to explain this is patriarchal power. That woman's experience of violence is so *visceral*, that we start with where she's at.

Peter: She needs a deep understanding of patriarchal power systems, but not an academic one. The older the groups are that I work with, the more aware they are of systems that are in place, policies that impact on them, political movements, and history and culture, and various other factors in society that effect them. My job is about trying to encourage learners in finding a way to position themselves, their learning, their history, and what it is they want to do, *in* that wider context. I'm not interested, for example, in the kind of critical reflection which focuses only on the question: *who am I as a person?* I'm not interested in therapy, in the formation of one's personality. The sessions I do never go down that road, nor do they ever look at the individual as a person shaped by intimate things. We look at the individual shaped by social and cultural factors as opposed to shaped by concerns such as '*What was my position in my family?*' Or '*Did I get enough food growing up?*' Or, you know, '*Was I loved enough by my family?*' So it's not a therapeutic type of education, that's not the goal. It's much more about looking at social systems, for example, '*How did I relate to the school system? How did I feel about the way society wanted me to become a man, or what images presented themselves to me culturally about being a woman? How are the messages being portrayed to me and my family about being a Traveller? How are these messages constructed?*' So, in my workshops we are moving the focus away from the idea that social suffering is an individual's fault. We're trying to look at it in a wider, systemic way. I believe they need to focus on structures of power so that learners can begin to influence systems; articulate their political point of view; and try and change the culture, as opposed to changing themselves.

As opposed to what I do, the focus of the personal-based work - which I would call drama therapy or therapeutic education - is about changing *yourself*. I'm trying to get people to look at themselves and assess how *systems* have met - or failed to meet - their needs as learners. If they are *in charge* of systems, for example, at doctoral level, then we are looking at how they

perpetuate oppressive power structures. We might also explore how they can *open up* systems to suit learners' needs.

Brid: Recently, a PhD student spoke about an interview that she conducted. The interviewee revealed a lot of personal stuff, but the student was very concerned that it would sound like therapy if she listened to somebody talking about her life: *Is this therapy or education?* As adult educators, our work is to help them to see experience in the context of wider systems. If a person is a victim of something appalling, such as domestic violence, we should see that in terms of power structures in society. I realised that we are setting ourselves up as critics of psychotherapy (Morrell, 2008). However, we don't aim to diminish therapy, because people have benefited hugely from psychotherapeutic interventions, especially feminist psychotherapy, which goes far beyond *what did I do that brought this on?* We have to help people to see the *systemic* reasons for their condition.

### **Critical Facilitation**

Peter: Is there an adult education theory that proposes a psychotherapeutic type of work?

Brid: No, but it's easy to interpret the process as therapeutic because we start where people are at. Some influential theories come from psychotherapy, for example, cognitive behaviourism, which takes the view that evidence of learning is the change in behaviour (Skinner, 1974). Communication is one of these ones, which is underpinned by the idea that we change our mode of communication; we change our relationships (Dickson, 2002). But it does not always hold true. If our rights are abused, it's not good enough to say that all we can change is ourselves. We can work to change society, so that *everyone's* rights are respected.

Also, a humanistic approach (Rogers, 1969) has been significantly influential in all of education. The person-centred approach is part of the language of adult education, as well as in primary and early childhood education. What is problematic is that it stays in the personal. We don't all have the same understanding of the social. For example, when we as adult educators work with groups, I see those groups made up of people coming with their social identities; they bring their gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and status with them. Other educators might see them as bringing their childhood trauma.

mas, ego, unconscious desires and need for attention, into the group. These include facilitators coming from a psychodynamic approach (Bion, 1961). This psychodynamic approach can be really useful in adult education, when we are trying to uncover what is *really* going on in the group. For example, the concept of *projection* helps learners to reveal their real inner struggles. The crucial concept is *transference*, where people bring their earlier experience of education into the adult learning environment, seeing the facilitator as a figure of power.

Peter: They see the facilitator as a solver of problems?

Brid: What we have to realize, is that this *isn't* an unconscious *personal* attribute. Authoritarian figures absolutely *demand* that kind of reverence and respect. If anything is hidden, it's the hidden agenda in society.

In the case of domestic violence, the psychotherapeutic approach might say that a woman is trying to redress issues of her childhood. The adult education approach will say that domestic violence is not just because one woman, or indeed, child or man, has childhood issues. It is the exercise of power.

Peter: I would see the exploration of power as unquestionably the focus of adult education. As I mentioned earlier, much of my work is about exploring who has access to power, how are decisions of importance made, who is seen as powerful etc. In addition, as adult educators we have to explore the methods we use with our learners to understand how we ourselves use power and status in our teaching. Is there a danger, for example, that I assist learners to become dependent on me for their own learning? Or am I the only source of the knowledge? Do I control and shape the learning that goes on? Do I micro-manage the process of learning for others? One of the essential considerations, as an adult educator, is to look at your own behaviour in a room: where you are coming in and colonizing the room or taking charge unconsciously out of a desire to care. I've written about this in the *Jesus of Rio Syndrome* (2000). And you know that notion of cosseting the group or over-minding them? And solving all the problems of the group? It's very difficult to resist that temptation; particularly if the pressure comes from groups who want you to solve their problems ... they have a lot of powerful arguments for you to do that. For example, '*We have paid for you do this. We have paid to be taught. So, teach us. You know, otherwise we can go off and do something else.*'

So they exert a quiet pressure on you to *take charge, to manage and to make decisions* about the learning the group makes. Another persuasive argument from learners is *'You are responsible under health and safety for our safety and our welfare, and for our environment in this group. So solve any problems that arise which affect us.'* These arguments are very powerful and they are hard to resist. Another, more personal challenge to the facilitator is responding to the desire to be liked. The threat can be made: *'We won't like you anymore if you don't keep us happy. We'll rate you as a bad facilitator.'*

I encountered that very recently in a group of young people. Two new people joined the group and they were being disruptive. The older ones in the group wanted me to exclude the newcomers on behalf of the group. They didn't express this to me, but they expected that I should see the problem and solve it. When this didn't happen, they spent a whole week in anger. Eventually, one of them approached me. He said, 'We want you to sort this out. I was angry all week thinking about the way they disrupted our group.' I replied, 'Well, what did you do about that?' And he was completely taken aback by that question. He said 'Well, it's not up to me to do anything about it – it's up to *you* to do something about it.' And I could see clearly where he was coming from of course, he had all these arguments. But in this situation there was absolutely no learning going on. Instead there was a transferring of responsibilities. They were falling into that conditional behaviour of saying *you do the job for me.*

Brid: Transference or exercise of power?

Peter: It's a learned behaviour that produces a set of expectations – in this case, the expectation is that a strong, authoritative, and controlling teacher solves all the groups' problems. So this group, working with me, transferred that persona onto me and expected me to fulfil the expected role. Take for example, the idea of the Class Representative in some third level adult education courses. Initially, this is a sort of administrative role, someone who would gather data, distribute information to the group, liaise with the department etc. Now it's often the person a group expects to be their Solver-Of-Problems. The one they expect to do all the complaining. Or the one they expect to do all of the organising of an event. Of course, on the other hand, one of the group is often only too ready and willing to step into that role, and will want to fulfil all those expectations. And may be *put out* when the

whole group, and not them as Class Rep, has to solve the problems. Power structures, power balances, and power plays are very interesting to me as an educator and as a theatre director. I am a little too obsessed with it as a theme, if I'm honest! I seem to look for it and eventually locate it in every piece of work I do, whether it's devising a youth theatre show, or teaching about creative methods of facilitation.

Sometimes I don't have to look for the problem of *power-less-ness* in a group. For example, a few months ago, a colleague asked me to work for a day with a post-graduate group. She said they were disengaged with the programme, and even though they'd now been in university for three or four years, they had not built the confidence to express what they were feeling in the group. They were unable, for example, to speak out when they disagreed with another student. Neither did they feel able to question what they were being taught. When I met the group, they fairly quickly outlined several complaints they had about the course they were doing. I asked if they'd expressed their concerns to the department, and they said 'No.' They gave various reasons for this, such as 'I expect the lecturers to interpret my disengagement as a critical commentary, and to respond by making things better.' Or 'I'm too shy to speak out in the group' or 'I'm afraid if I say something critical it will be held against me.' In fact, they were putting themselves in their own way. None of them wanted to take that huge opportunity for learning which is embodied in *risk*, doing something unexpected, seeing what would happen if they *challenged* or *went against the current*. They wanted someone else to do it for them because they were afraid of the consequences. This fear of the consequences of challenging is of course an old weapon used against the people in the war, isn't it? Don't buck the system or you will be punished severely. Don't challenge the authority because it will isolate you and banish you from its favour. And of course, very often, there *will* be consequences - there may very likely be reprisals if you challenge the system. It is a risk. But we are not *naturally* afraid of challenging authority - I think it's a mistake to believe we are naturally afraid of attracting reprisal or punishment to ourselves. The most outspoken people in the world are children. They will challenge at every step if they see something that blocks their needs. Many teenagers are like this too, but usually by that age, they have been trained out of this behaviour. They've been schooled into acquiescence. If they are still at ease with risk-taking, with challenging, they are labelled as bold, problem-makers, disruptive, anti-authoritarian, and rebels. So, in many ways, our

work is looking at how to be bold.

Brid: This relates to our discussion on how we have internalised authority. Yet these are key learning moments, where we can uncover these hidden trends by focusing on the personal in the context of the social.

Peter: I often hear people speaking about their duty of care as facilitators. But I am *not* talking about *not* caring. A facilitator may notice and draw attention to distress in the group, but not step to solve it for the group.

Brid: Yes, I think the role of caring is gradually emerging in education (Noddings, 2005). It is about adult relationships, however, not that of parent/child. But what do you think are the responsibilities of adult educators, if we want independent, problem-solving, active groups who take responsibility for their own learning?

Peter: The first thing is to create the condition for this mentality to prosper. For example, we should strive not to reproduce the models of authoritarian educators, that some groups may have become used to, and as a result, expect you to be. Freire speaks interestingly about this when he coined the concept of *nostalgia for origins* (1972). My understanding of this concept is that a facilitator, when challenged by a learner, can react negatively and defensively, using their body of knowledge, years of expertise, training and social status to silence the objections of the learner. They retreat to a position that they know well, from whence they came, or at least, from whence their status comes.

Brid: We have to challenge the traditional power relations rather than reinforce the traditional or exploitative. Our practice really has developed in order to enable us to resist the imperative of that authoritative stance. So, for example, we try to learn in circles in order to reflect the *equality* of the relationship between the learners and facilitator, and methods that help people to express complex experiences in their lives, in order to maintain this resistance.

Peter: It poses a lot of questions for us, when we are working with educators here at university level and we introduce a range of adult education activities. This has happened a lot for me where I use drama methods. I often use certain creative methods to help people explore concepts such as *freedom* or

*oppression*. The methods might be a problem-solving game involving some team activity or other. After the activity or game has happened – usually no more than 4 minutes – we spend a lot of time analysing what just happened. My questions are designed to invite participants to consider how this activity, or their behaviour, is representative in any way of activities and behaviours in society. Are we exploring a concept, like *socially conferred status*, or *gender*, or *deference to authority*, for example? I then move the discussion to a point where we critically examine the concept in relation to our own lives. And I invite the group to share stories that illustrate the concept in practice. Finally, these stories have to be connected to a conversation that is about change and justice and equality and power. The stories are a way of examining these concepts in society. I have seen people – usually educators themselves - who have been really excited by these games and activities, who go away and use them with their own groups. They play the game with their learners. However, many do not connect what their learners have just done to wider society. And often the exercise is sterile, or self-referential, or too vaguely personal or abstract – it has no social context. It often doesn't work because the facilitator has not connected it into anything important in society. Nor have they used it as a way to be critically reflective about what is going on in the world around them. It's just a game, and a game is safe.

Brid: When we think about the war against people, and the role of really useful practice, we're saying both learners and facilitators should not 'play it safe.' They should take risks.

Peter: Yes, I believe they should. They should be 'informed' risks, of course – they need to know what the consequences might be for them if they take the risk. But in order to get rid of traditional, authoritative methods of education, and to become active, independent, critical citizens who not only take responsibility for our learning but also for changing the world around us, we need to be able to *be bold*. The authoritative systems want to maintain the unchanging, patriarchal, certain, modes of learning and teaching, and it is our duty to challenge this, fundamentally. Traditional systems see the personal as the field of therapy, about fixing and shaping the person. We see the personal as a means to connect to the socio-political. To paraphrase Augusto Boal, (1998) our work is not about changing, improving, or fixing the person so that they may better fit into social systems; rather it is about changing social systems to meet the needs of the person.

## Conclusion

The issues raised in this dialogue centred on social suffering emanating from the exercise of patriarchal authority, including the oppression of young people, women, and other subordinate groups. The practice of adult educators for critical democracy entails tackling the hidden agendas that deflect attention away from the heartless exercise of power, on the one hand, such as the focus on the individual at the expense of social analysis, or the compulsion to hand over power to perceived authority on the other, from the fear of punishment, internalised authoritarianism or simply displaced power inherent in representative democracy. However, changing social systems to create a critical, participative democracy is a formidable task, yet it has to start with recognising and empathising with the extent of the suffering that people endure in their daily lives with the abuse of power, patriarchal and structural (Das and Kleinman, 2001:3).

In addition, this article revealed the potential of dialogue as reflexive research to uncover these hidden agendas. This reflexivity ranged over our motivations for work in adult community education, from community theatre to women's studies, intrinsically politicised arenas. We hope that this conversation will initiate a series of autoethnographic conversations which will build a fuller picture of the role of adult community educators in the critical democratic response to the war against people, and in creating a caring, intelligent and powerful new world.

## References

- Adams, Tony E., and Holman Jones, Stacy (2008). Autoethnography is queer. In Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, S., and Smith, L., (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- AONTAS, (2011) *Sowing the Seeds of Social Change: The Outcomes and Impact of a Social Action Model of Community Education*, AONTAS, Dublin
- AONTAS, (2003) *The Adult Learner: Community Education, 2003*
- Bion, W. R. (1961) *Experiences in Groups*, Tavistock, London.
- Boal, A., (1998) *Theatre of the Oppressed Second Edition*, Pluto Press, London.
- Bond, Edward, (2000) *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, Methuen, London
- Bourdieu, P., et al (1999) *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge
- Connolly, B., (2008) *Adult Learning in Groups*, OU, McGraw Hill, Maidenhead
- Connolly, B., (2003) 'Community Education: Listening to the Voices', *The Adult Learner*, 2003.

- Connolly, B., (1989) *Adult Education and Women's Studies*, Unpublished Thesis for Diploma in Adult and Community Education, Maynooth.
- Das, V., and Kleinman, A., (2001) Introduction, in Das, V., Kleinman, A., Lock, M., Ramphela, M. and Reynolds, P., (Eds) *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery*, University of California Press, London.
- Dickson, Anne, (2002) *A Woman in Your Own Right: Assertiveness and You*, Quartet Books, London.
- Ellis, Carolyn, Adams, Tony E., and Bochner, Arthur P, (2011) Autoethnography: An Overview, in *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Volume 12, No. 1, Art. 10 – January 2011, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>, Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> May 2013.
- Etherington, K., (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using ourselves in research*, Jessica Kingsley, London.
- Gardner, H., (1993) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Revised Edition*, Basic Books, New York.
- Hussey, P., (2000) 'The Jesus of Rio Syndrome' in *The Adult Learner 2000*.
- Government of Ireland (2000) *Learning for Life: Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning*, Government Publications, Dublin.
- Inglis, T. and Bassett, M., (1988) *Live and Learn: Day-time Adult Education in Coolock, Dublin*, AONTAS, Dublin.
- Marx, K., and Engels, F., (1945) *Theses on Feuerbach*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.pdf>, accessed 30th Jan 2012.
- Noddings, Nel, (2005) *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative approach to education, Second edition*, Teachers College Press, New York
- O'Reilly, Emily, (1992) *Masterminds of the Right*, Attic Press, Dublin.
- Pilcher, J., and Whelehan, I., (2008) *50 key Concepts in Gender Studies*, SAGE, London.
- Rogers, Carl. (1969). *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*, Charles Merrill, Columbus, Ohio.
- Shor, I., Freire, P., (1987) *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*, Bergin and Garvey, South Hadley, Mass.
- Shor, I., Freire, P., (1987) What is the 'Dialogical Method' of Teaching? in *Journal of Education*, Volume 169, Number 3, 1987
- Skinner, B. F., (1974) *About Behaviourism*, Knopf, New York
- Thompson, Jane (2007) 'Really Useful Knowledge': Linking theory and practice, in Connolly, B., Fleming, T., McCormack, D., and Ryan, A., (eds) *Radical Learning for Liberation 2*, MACE, Maynooth



# SECTION TWO

*Case Studies for Improving Practices*

# The Learning Festival: Pathway to Sustainable Learning Cities?

PETER KEARNS, PASCAL INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES  
YVONNE LANE, PAUL PARTNERSHIP, LIMERICK  
TINA NEYLON, CORK LIFELONG LEARNING FESTIVAL  
MICHAEL OSBORNE, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

---

## Abstract

*Cork and Limerick have conducted Lifelong Learning Festivals, Cork for ten years and Limerick for the past three years. This paper reviews aspects of this experience and considers the question of whether successful Lifelong Learning Festivals can be seen as a pathway to building sustainable learning cities. Discussed in the context of an initiative by Cork, we examine how Cork has adopted an international development by PASCAL to reconceptualise learning cities as broadly based sustainable opportunity cities, and action by Limerick to extend its city experience to the whole county following the decision to amalgamate city and county.*

**Key Words:** (lifelong learning, learning cities, learning festivals)

## Introduction

Lifelong learning festivals are an emerging feature of the Irish scene to promote learning throughout life for all and build community, social capital and identity. Festivals in Cork, Limerick, and Waterford illustrate the potential of this approach, with the pioneering Cork Lifelong Learning Festival having reached its tenth anniversary in 2013.

Learning festivals have intrinsic value and may also be a catalyst and framework to build an inclusive and sustainable learning city, combining local and global perspectives in addressing the challenges and opportunities of a dynamic and unpredictable globalised environment, the so-called “a runaway world” (Giddens, 1999).

This question was addressed during the Tenth Cork Lifelong Learning Festival within a seminar<sup>1</sup> which explored the relevance to Cork of ideas developed

---

1 Cities of the future: the EcCoWell Approach

under the PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE) about more holistic and integrated approaches to city development entitled, *EcCoWell*. This approach is set out in a paper, written by one of the authors of this paper (Kearns, 2012).

This article provides an overview of the development of the Cork Lifelong Learning Festival over the past ten years and the more recent Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival, and then asks whether a Lifelong Learning Festival should be seen as a catalyst and platform to build a sustainable opportunity city that progresses key social, environment and economic aspects of development in holistic and integrated ways. In commenting on this question, the paper draws on insights from the Cork seminar and discussions with the steering group for the Limerick Learning Festival.

### **The Cork Lifelong Learning Festival**

The Cork Lifelong Learning Festival aims are to promote and celebrate learning in all its forms, and to encourage take up among all age groups, particularly those who may not usually participate in learning. Reflecting those aims, the festival's motto is: *Investigate, Participate, Celebrate!*

Its guiding principles, agreed in 2004, remain unchanged:

- all events take place under the Lifelong Learning Festival banner – the focus is not on individual providers
- it is not aimed at recruitment but on demonstrating what can be done
- all events are free
- as many events as possible are hands-on, allowing the public to join in as well as watch.

The first Festival in 2004 was organised as a pilot project, and ran for three days with over 65 events, by 2013 that had increased to about 500 activities over a week.

Events range from performances to information sessions, guided tours and nature walks to exhibitions, demonstrations, workshops, with plenty of opportunities for people to try something new. They take place in venues all over the city. The emphasis is on fun - showing that learning is always enjoyable, whatever your age. Many community and educational organisations involved in for-

mal and non-formal learning take part. The Festival is inclusive, encouraging marginalised groups to participate by not only attending events but also organising events themselves.

Many events are regular classes which invite the public to come and watch and often to take part; others are organised specially for the Festival. Organisations planning an event – for example, a presentation of certificates, the final of an annual competition – are encouraged to time it to coincide with festival week.

Where possible, events are taken into the community: shopping centres, library branches, the streets & on the water. The Festival's Patron is the Lord Mayor, which is a recognition of its civic role.

### **Community Education Networks.**

At the core of the festival are Community Education Networks. They were established as a response to the government's 2000 *White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life*. Membership of a network is open to all education providers in the defined locality, bringing together diverse organisations, among them: Family Resource Centres, Home School Community Liaison teachers, the Travelling Community, Adult Basic Education & Literacy Services, Third Age Learning Groups, Disability Groups, and others. There are 10 networks in Cork. While most networks are based on districts, there are also two interest based citywide networks: Disability Education Network (DEN) and a Community Music Education Network

In Cork, it is believed that the Festival gives each network a focus, as it helps members to connect with each other, as planning and running an event provides a sense of common purpose. Each network is unique, with a local identity, and the events they organise reflect that membership varies, depending on the part of the city in which the network is located. As well as helping organise a network event, members often also run their own events.

All the networks are in areas of disadvantage, mostly within RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment & Development), a government programme aimed at targeting disadvantage and integrating services locally.

In 2002 Health Action Zones were piloted and have since been established across the three northside RAPID areas by the Health Service Executive. Several practical on-the-ground actions are carried out with the support of local advisory groups, for instance, walking groups, health checks, healthy eating courses.

In a sense, they are a step on the path to integrating Learning & Healthy Cities.

### **Challenges and lessons**

Securing reliable sources of funding has always been a challenge and continues to be so. The festival does not have an income, as all events are free. Costs are kept to a minimum – around 25,000 – a modest sum, considering the people of Cork are offered a week long event with around 500 free events for all ages and abilities across a wide variety of interests.

The Festival builds on the success of previous festivals; often an organisation starts with one event, and many have gradually increased the number. That gradual growth is to be recommended from the experience of Cork. It can be discouraging if an event has a low attendance; so it is best to start small and build up, as the festival has done.

Participation is voluntary – and no fee is charged to take part. It is important that people ‘buy in’ to the idea of being involved. Such enthusiasm gives the Festival its atmosphere, and has contributed to its growth and success. Corporate branding and marketing is provided, but most participants have learned over the decade that they need to publicise their individual events.

The Festival exists in uncertain times. The Cork City Development Board will be disbanded under plans announced by government. The Cork City and Cork County VECs are being amalgamated into the Cork Education and Training Board this summer. Where the Festival’s ‘home’ will be in the future and how it will be financially supported are two future challenges. At the same time, the EcCoWell seminar included in the 2013 Festival raises broader questions relating to the role of the Festival in the development of Cork as a sustainable and inclusive learning city.

### **The EcCoWell question**

The ideas set out in the EcCoWell approach drew on the experience of cities participating in PIE, and ideas from several East Asian cities, especially Taipei. These ideas were brought together by Kearns (2012).

The EcCoWell approach was a response to a landscape of partial and fragmented responses marked by a plethora of sectoral responses such as Healthy City, Green City, Learning City, Creative City, Culture City. As Kearns (2012) affirms: “there is much that could be connected across the plethora of segmented ideas to build creative partnership responses to the spectrum of challenges confront-

ing them”. The question of social, environmental, and economic sustainability is central to the EcCoWell argument.

The EcCoWell aspiration initially is conceptual: the challenge is now to find strategies, in a range of contexts, to foster integration and holistic strategies in city development to bring together learning, health and well-being, environment, culture and place making. This quest has been taken up in discussions in Cork and Limerick.

### **The Cork Seminar**

Following a keynote presentation by Kearns, 80 participants divided into four groups to discuss how the EcCoWell agenda could be advanced locally. The groups were: Environment, Health, Economic Development and Learning. Each sought to focus their ideas in a single project that would benefit the future Cork. Some interesting cross-sectoral ideas were advanced in these discussions, such as music education for social inclusion.

The seminar was an initial step in examining how EcCoWell ideas could be adopted in Cork in facilitating integrated, holistic and sustainable development. It will be followed by an international seminar in September 2013, which will explore the subject *Cities for the Future: Learning from the Global to the Local*.

### **Limerick City of Learning**

Limerick City of Learning Steering Group promotes the value of learning in Limerick, in all settings and across all stages of life cycle. It was established by the Limerick City Development Board in 2002. The group launched its strategy document, *Limerick City of Learning: Together for a Brighter Future - A Collaborative Framework for Progress*, in 2008. This Framework puts learning at the heart of the development, renewal and regeneration of Limerick and outlines strategies to support its citizens to cope with the challenges of globalisation and concomitant technological, social, economic, environmental and cultural change.

Over the last three years the project has evolved while still keeping its roots in that visionary document. In 2011 the Steering Group was reconstituted around key sectoral networks, partnerships & fora rather than specific institutions or individuals, in order to promote recognition and integration of all learning opportunities and activities whether formal, non-formal or informal. The

Steering Group supports the range of sectoral networks and groups in their efforts to engage people in positive learning experiences.

In 2011, the Limerick City of Learning group also partnered with Nexus Consulting on the *EC-funded R3L Grundtvig 'Quality Indicators for Learning Regions'* Project. The final outcome of the project, Eckert *et al.* (2012) includes many references to the work of the Limerick City of Learning Steering Group, the Irish case study site.

### **Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival**

The annual Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival is now established as an important flagship project for Limerick City and County, with the third festival held in March 2013.

It plays a strong role in furthering the specific objectives for the Limerick City of Learning Project: -

- *Enhancing the profile of Limerick as a Learning City/Region* - The Festival is a celebration of learning in all its forms and for all ages across the region. By showcasing a wide variety of enjoyable and informative events, it aims to promote Limerick as a superb location for social and work-related learning and development.
- *Developing the concept of the Learning City into that of a Learning Region* - The pilot Festival in 2011 had 70 events, growing to 200 events in 2013. Over the last two years, it has worked with County Limerick partners to expand the range of events. This year's Festival was organised by the Limerick City of Learning Steering Group with Limerick Communications Office, Limerick County Council, County Limerick Vocational Education Committee, West Limerick Resources and Ballyhoura Development Ltd.
- *Increasing awareness and uptake of the range of learning opportunities in communities experiencing disadvantage* – a key goal for the Lifelong Learning Festival is to engage communities and individuals experiencing exclusion from learning opportunities. It does this through the activities and contacts of key Community groups such as the Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN); ensuring maximum exposure to those least convinced of the value of learning.
- *Further developing the Framework of the Learning City/Region to ensure the*

*inclusion and participation of all key stakeholders* - The theme for the festival in 2013 was 'Learn Your Way to the Future'.

The growth and success of the Festival must be attributed to the effort, creativity and commitment of many partners who promote and support learning for all ages.. The network of partners, event organisers and learners are brought together three times throughout the year, reviewing, evaluating and planning for the next Festival. These meetings are an opportunity to share ideas and experience, and collaborate on joint events.

### **PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE)**

Peter Kearns visited Limerick during the Lifelong Learning Festival and discussed the current development of PIE and some ideas developed on integrated city development with members of Limerick City of Learning/Learning Region Group. Participation in this initiative would enhance the work of the Limerick Learning Region by offering the opportunity to share experiences, learn from others and develop international networks. This exchange and sharing information on initiatives may further help develop the sustainable Learning Region and perhaps provide opportunities for action research.

### **Developing into a Wider 'Limerick Learning Region'**

The Limerick City of Learning Steering Group will now work to expand the group to include partners across the wider Limerick Region. This work has already started at the Festival Organising Committee level, where County Limerick Partners are represented and have been actively involved in the Lifelong Learning Festival.

Limerick City and County Councils are in the process of amalgamating into a new single local authority structure seeking to meet some of Limerick's challenges in a more integrated way. The Vocational Education Committees in Limerick City, County, and County Clare are also amalgamating to become the single Limerick Clare Education and Training Board (ETB). These developments provide an automatic platform for creation of integrated development strategies, regionally and sectorally, and for the creation of shared vision and identity, under a lifelong learning framework. There are slightly different approaches in Cork and Limerick to the various rationalisations. The local authority structure is amalgamating City and County in Limerick; whereas Cork City Council remains separate from the County. The rationalisation of the VECs however has an impact on both cities, with the Cork City and County

VECs amalgamating under one Education and Training Board.

Some of the practical steps and initiatives in developing the Limerick Learning Region will include: -

- The present City of Learning Steering Group will re-configure to become a broader 'Limerick Learning Region' Group. Consultation and planning will be undertaken as part of this reconfiguration.
- The networks already formed through organisation of the 2013 Lifelong Learning Festival will form the basis of new opportunities for networking and partnership development across the Learning Region agenda. These networks and partnerships will undertake a range of lifelong learning initiatives during the year and will not be solely concerned with the annual Festival.
- Existing initiatives in both rural and urban locations will be identified and extended to create partnerships across the region, thus contributing to the development of a sustainable learning region.
- New pilot projects/initiatives will be developed that demonstrate active involvement and partnership of two groups/networks from the City and County. These initiatives will in turn foster increased participation, partnership and engagement in the lifelong learning Initiative.
- In 2014, particular efforts will be made to collaborate with, and link to, "Limerick City of Culture" planning and promotion activities.
- Extending the branding of the Lifelong Learning Festival to learning initiatives going on at other times.
- Expanding the branding into other areas of work that would not normally be associated with Learning; e.g. where there is change happening driven by the desire to do things better; learning and development is taking place.
- Link with Cork for their September flagship event '*Cities for the Future: Learning from the Global to the Local*'.

### **Conclusions and the way forward**

The experience of Cork over ten years, and the emerging experience of Limerick suggest that a successful Lifelong Learning Festival can provide a stimulus to

building a learning culture in a city as a platform for a sustainable learning city.

While these are tentative observations that will need to be tested by the outcomes of the initiative Cork is taking to build a sustainable opportunity city, and the success of Limerick in extending its City of Learning and Lifelong Learning Festival experience to the whole of Limerick County, there are grounds for taking the view that successful Lifelong Learning Festivals can, over time, build the conditions, understanding, and support to open pathways to developing a sustainable learning city.

The experience of Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, demonstrates that a learning culture evolves in a community over a considerable period of time as an institutional framework, customs and habits, and a shared vision foster the values that are given expression in a learning culture, and reflected in the social, cultural, and economic experience of the community in adapting to changing conditions (Kearns and Papadopoulos, 2000).

In the case of Sweden, for example, the founding of folk high schools, open air museums in rural areas, and the overall building of a strong adult education system can be seen as steps in this process of building a vibrant learning culture. (*ibid.* 2000).

In a similar way, Lifelong Learning Festivals in Cork and Limerick can be viewed as steps in a pathway towards building sustainable opportunity cities well adapted to the conditions and challenges of the twenty first century. The way in which the Cork EcCoWell seminar emerged from the experience and networks built by the Lifelong Learning Festival suggests this process, with the critical role of leadership and vision evident in the collaborative effort to mount the seminar and plan international follow up.

Lifelong Learning Festivals can, over time, build up awareness and understanding of the value and benefits of learning throughout life in many contexts, both for individuals and communities. They foster broad coalitions of organisations with an enhanced awareness of common interest in building an inclusive, sustainable city, underpinned by an evolving learning culture.

It may be that the Lifelong Learning Festival has a distinctive value in the process of building a necessary learning society in Ireland. In Cork and Limerick, while much remains to be done in following through on the foundations laid, a platform exists for future strategic action. The Cork initiative with its EcCoWell

seminar and the future international seminar planned, illustrates a city progressing towards a sustainable future as a liveable, inclusive, and competitive city, while the success of Limerick in progressing from a City of Learning, with a successful Lifelong Learning Festival, to a region where these initiatives support strategic social, economic, and cultural development will provide a test of the relevance of this approach to Irish needs.

While the jury is still out, there are grounds for taking the view that successful Lifelong Learning Festivals open a pathway towards building sustainable learning cities in Ireland.

### *References*

- Eckert, T., Preisinger-Kleine, R., Fartusnic, C., Houston, M., Juceviciene, P., Dillon, B., Nemeth, B., Kleisz, T., Ceseviciute, I., Thinesse-Demel, J., Osborne, M., and Wallin, E. (2012) *Quality in Developing Learning Cities and Regions: A Guide for Practitioners and Stakeholders*. Munich: Ludwig Maximilian University.
- Giddens, A. (1999). *Runaway World: How globalisation is reshaping our lives*. London: Profile Books Ltd.
- Kearns, P. (2012). *Living and Learning in Sustainable Opportunity Cities*. <http://pie.pascalobservatory.org> Accessed 7 March 2013.
- Kearns, P. & Papadopoulos, G. (2000). *Building a Learning and Training Culture: The experience of five OECD countries*. Adelaide: NCVER.

# Can we do it better? A case study of how reflection within a programme team supports changes and innovations to practice.

BREDA MC TAGGART, IT SLIGO

ORLA WALSH, IT SLIGO

---

## **Abstract**

*Adult learners, and women in particular, have to combat a number of specific barriers to participate in lifelong learning opportunities. Frequently, delivery modes of adult learning programmes do not take these varying demands into consideration (McCulloch & Stokes, 2008). However, when they do, positive results ensue. This case study discusses these issues, highlighting how innovations and changes to delivery methodologies of a part-time degree programme impacted positively on recruitment and retention of the viable student cohort of students.*

**Key Words:** (lifelong learning, barriers, accessible education)

## **Introduction**

Socio-cultural and cognitive models of development hold that people learn over the course of their lives, and, as a result, require and seek educational opportunities and provision over their lifetime (Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008, p.123). While academic institutions are in a position to devise and provide programmes to cater for all learners, they should consider the inclusion of those at different stages of the lifespan in their design (Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008, p.123). Unfortunately, research would indicate availability, design and delivery of programmes in academic institutions do not always meet this need (Crosling, Heagney & Thomas, 2009; Tinto, 2010).

This is a recognised problem in the Irish context, with only 21 per cent of adults currently holding qualifications at NFQ level 8 or above. This pattern, combined with a challenging economic situation, increased government emphasis on a knowledge economy and rapid developments in higher education policy leads to a situation where “the scale of potential demand for higher education

from adults is very substantial” (Department of Education & Skills, 2011, p.46). The response of the Irish higher education sector and individual academic institutions to address these demands has been inadequate, with a persistent low level (12% - 16%) of part-time study opportunities, limiting the accessibility of higher education for working adults and adults with caring responsibilities (Department of Education & Skills, 2011, p.46-47).

This paper explores the issues of accessible higher education programmes. It investigates how without knowledge and understanding of the needs of the part-time adult student learner, market share is limited.

The structure of this paper is as follows: it begins by exploring the profile of adult learners and the barriers to participation encountered by this student cohort. Moving forward, the paper outlines the case, programme context and barriers to participation identified by potential students to a part-time Honours Bachelor of Arts (BA) Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in a higher education institution. Finally, the paper will outline the essential changes made to address such barriers to participate in learning for adult learners in this case context.

### **The adult learner and barriers to lifelong learning**

Malcolm Knowles (1913 – 1997), the American educationalist who had an enormous influence on adult education, popularized the term ‘andragogy’, defining it as ‘the art and science of helping adults learn’ (Baumgartner et al., 2003; Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008). Adult learners, according to Knowles, are self-directed, independent learners who are ready to learn, are orientated to learn and motivated to learn (St. Clair, 2002; Clardy, 2005; Jordan, Carlile & Stack, 2008). In most cases, adult learners chose to return to education, and are therefore intrinsically motivated and are generally self-directing. Knowles adopted a humanistic approach to adult learning which holds that humans are motivated by an innate drive to fulfil their potential (Bernstein and Nash, 2005).

While adult learners may be intrinsically motivated to learn and bring with them a wealth of life experience to the classroom, there are challenges facing their decision to return to education such as geographical inconvenience, unfavourable programme delivery structure, monetary issues and personal responsibilities. (Bourdieu, 1986; DES, 2011; McTaggart, 2012). Specifically, issues of debt and delayed earnings are central to the lives of many people when considering returning to education, where often decisions on where and what to

study are based on their individual direct economic capital; whether they can afford to return to education and survive economically or not (Brennan and Osborne, 2008; Rose-Adams, 2012). The issue of affordability also takes into consideration the geographical convenience of higher education institutions, and the reality of whether students can afford to travel and/or move to access educational opportunities away from their support mechanisms of family and friends (Parry, 2005; Bathmaker & Thomas, 2009; Rose-Adams, 2012).

Equally, a student's decision to progress to higher education can be impacted negatively by an institution which does not provide programmes that reflect the student's individual needs in terms of programme structure and content. The impact of this on potential adult learners is that it can make it more difficult to return to, and successfully progress in, higher education if the student believes the institution is not meeting their needs, and does not support their cultural or social capital, in either the programme design or delivery (National Office of Equity of Access, 2008; Pegg & Di Paolo, 2013).

While these have been identified extensively in research exploring barriers to student recruitment, retention and attainment, research would also indicate that there are potentially many additional barriers for women. The White Paper, *Learning for Life* (2000), confirmed that education for adults should guarantee equality of access and participation for all adult learners, but the reality is that those working in the home with young children, especially women, are among those learners to be excluded from the educational system (DES, 2000). Therefore, barriers to participation in lifelong learning are many and challenging for women in particular as they can include not only monetary, time and location of education opportunities, but also the socio-psychological demands for many of the role responsibilities held such as being carer of the young, the elderly and employee (DES, 2000; Patterson & Dowd, 2010).

### **Early Childhood Care and Education landscape**

Ireland's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector is evolving and developing rapidly. A dynamic policy context underpins practice, within a framework of quality service provision and a professional workforce (Course documentation for the B.A. in Early Childhood Education and Care, 2012). A significant milestone in 2002 was the development of the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR, 2002). This document explored the professionalization of the ECCE workforce

with particular emphasis on existing early years professionals. The framework went on to develop a blueprint for professional development for the sector.

One of the most influential policy changes was the introduction of the ECCE Scheme in 2009. This scheme aimed to provide all children in Ireland access to a free pre-school year of appropriate programme-based activities. More recently in 2010, a vision for the development of a graduate led workforce was initiated by the launch of a Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE sector (Department of Education & Skills, 2010a). This has been validated by a directive from the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) stating the only relevant discipline eligible for the higher capitation rate is an Early Childhood Care and Education NFQ level 7 and above award (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), 2011).

As can be seen, there is increasing recognition among academics and ECCE professionals that work which involves the care and educating of young children is complex and requires enhanced qualifications and ongoing professional development (The Early Years (Scottish) Framework, 2008; Early Years (0-6) (Northern Ireland) Strategy, 2010; The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy for Australia, 2012–2016, Department of Education and Employment and Workplace Relations (Australia), 2009; Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2010; Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (Scottish Standing Council), 2012).

This view is supported in the Irish context within the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* (DJELR, 2002) which highlights the fact that ‘high quality early education leads to lasting cognitive and social benefits in children’ and, therefore, the professional education of early years practitioners is crucial in achieving success in providing quality ECCE services (Walsh, 2011).

Equally, at European level, CoRe, (2011), a European research project on Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care, suggests that a pre-requisite to a quality ECCE system is a professional and qualified ECCE workforce. This quality agenda requires a workforce where 60% of its members are educated to bachelor level (CoRe, 2011). Therefore, the opportunity to access further education and training through part time programmes and flexible modes of delivery is absolutely essential for the early year’s workforce and their service users.

### **Where we were**

The BA Hons. ECCE part-time programme in the case study institution was developed in September 2006, the same year as the first full-time ECCE programme. The programme was developed to meet the needs of 23% of the ECCE workforce in the region who had no formal qualifications to work with young children, and for those who had already obtained a level 5 and or 6 qualification in the ECCE field and wished to progress to a higher award on a part-time basis (DCYA, 2000). On the year of its commencement (2006) a small cohort of 11 students embarked on their part-time ECCE studies.

The original programme structure was complex and based on a template of another existing part-time programme in the relevant department of the case study institution. Students were required to attend college two evenings per week (7- 10 pm.) and on 12 Saturdays per year, at a cost of approximately 2,500 per annum. A Level 8 Honours degree would be awarded on the successful completion of two practice placements and 6 years of part-time study. This was an enormous commitment in time and on the finances of the learner and some withdrew from the programme early with a Level 7 award, after 4 years of part-time study.

While enquiries were made by prospective students and individual meetings held over the years since the first intake in 2006, insufficient applicants each year prevented a sustainable first year programme from starting. Similar to findings of other research in the area of student progression, the problem lay not with the intrinsic motivation of adult learners, but with the mode of delivery of the programme itself, and monetary issues (Parry, 2005; Tinto, 2010; Rose-Adams, 2013).

### **Professional reflection- can we do it better?**

Schön, (1987) has written extensively on the value of reflection for all professionals throughout their careers and, as professionals in the field of education, reflection on our work is key to our professional practice. It was clear from this process that the part-time programme in ECCE delivered in the case institute required restructuring. This decision making was timely and was supported by the publication of the ECCE Workforce Development Plan and its strategic vision of a graduate led workforce for the sector (DES, 2010a), and the previously mentioned directive from the OMCYA stating that the only relevant discipline and qualification eligible for the higher capitation rate is an ECCE NFQ level 7 and above award (DCYA, 2011).

Consultation meetings were held with representatives from the ECCE sector and pathways for continued professional development discussed. As a result, a new model of delivery emerged. The BA Honours programme is now delivered in 4.5 years with online support and face to face contact over 12 weekends each year (6 per semester, every second Friday and Saturday). Similar to the full-time structure, this programme requires students to complete two practice placements, each of four hundred hours duration. In recognition of the wealth of experience that some adult learners possess, students can seek recognition of prior learning for one of these practice placements.

The new structure was received with tremendous interest from the sector and 20 adult learners embarked on the first year of their part-time studies in ECCE in September 2011. Reducing the programme from 6 years to 4.5 and providing classes all day on a Friday and Saturday saved on time and cost of travelling to and from college, and was more manageable to fit with their existing family and work commitments. This removed the biggest barriers to learning identified by these part-time students.

Only one student withdrew from the programme, and this was due to significant family difficulties. Feedback from the cohort has been positive to date, and the structure although demanding, has been embraced by the students.

Students participating in the programme, in its new structure, did not request any changes to its delivery. Feedback was most positive, and many have highly recommended the programme to colleagues in the sector. As a result, the programme team has been requested to explore the possibility of delivering a similar model elsewhere.

### **Listening to our students**

This case study examines how complexity of delivery of lifelong learning programmes impacts on recruitment and retention in a higher education degree programme. However, when educational professionals with knowledge and skills of content and delivery take the opportunity to reflect and listen to their students they can shape and develop innovative practices to meet the needs of all key stakeholders.

### *References*

Bathmaker, A. and Thomas, W. (2009) 'Positioning themselves: an exploration of the nature and meaning of transitions in the context of dual sector FE/HE institutions in

- England' [online]. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, (2). 119 – 130. Available from <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=t713430659~tab=issueslist~branches=33-v3333> [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010].
- Baumgartner, L., Lee, M., Birden, S. and Flowers, D. (2003) 'Adult Learning Theory' [online]. *College of Education Ohio State University*, Available from [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009].
- Bernstein, D. and Nash, P. (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (2005) *Essentials of Psychology*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The forms of capital'. In: J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press. p.241-258.
- Brennan, J. and Osborne, M. (2008) 'Higher education's many diversities: of students, institutions and experiences; and outcomes?' *Research Papers in Education*, 23(2), pp. 179–190.
- Clardy, A. (2005) *Andragogy: Adult learning and Education at its best?* [online]. Towson University, Available from [http://www.eric.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdisc2sql/content\\_storage](http://www.eric.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdisc2sql/content_storage) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009].
- CoRe (2011) *Competence requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. London/ Ghent: University of East London, Cass School of Education and University of Ghent, Department for Social Welfare Studies [online]. Available from [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core_en.pdf) [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December 2011].
- Crosling, G., Heagney, M. and Thomas, L. (2009) 'Improving student retention in higher education'. *Australian Universities' Review*, 51 (2), pp. 9-18.
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2000) *National Childcare Census Report* [online]. Available from: <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/NationalChildcareCensusReport.pdf> [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2011].
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011) ECCE Programme Guide to the Programme and the Administrative Procedures - for Service Providers and Parents. [online]. Available from: <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoasp?fn=%2Fdocuments%2Fchildcare%2FGuidetotheProgrammeAdministrativeProceduresforServiceProvidersandParents.htm&StartDat=1+January+2011&UserLang=GA>. [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012].
- Department of Education and Employment and Workplace Relations (2009) *Australian Early Years Workforce Strategy, The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy for Australia, 2012–2016*: [online]. Available from <http://foi.deewr.gov.au/node/2918> [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> January 2013].
- Department of Education Northern Ireland, (2010) *Early Years (0-6) Strategy. June 2010*, [online]. Available from [http://www.deni.gov.uk/English\\_\\_early\\_years\\_strategy\\_.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/English__early_years_strategy_.pdf) [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2012].

- Department of Education and Science (DES), (2000) *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* [online]. Available from: [http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/fe\\_adulted\\_up.pdf](http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/fe_adulted_up.pdf) [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009].
- Department of Education and Skills (DES), (2011) *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* [online]. Department of Education and Skills, Available from: [http://www.heai.ie/files/files/DES\\_Higher\\_Ed\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/files/files/DES_Higher_Ed_Main_Report.pdf) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> June 2012].
- Department of Education and Skills (DES), (2010a) *A workforce development plan for the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland*. Dublin, Stationery Office.
- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), (2002) *Quality childcare and lifelong learning: Model framework for education, training and professional development in the early childhood care and education sector*. Dublin, Stationery Office.
- Institute of Technology, Sligo, (2012) *B.A. (Hons) Early Childhood Care and Education: Course Document of Background Information*, Sligo, Institute of Technology.
- Jordan, A., Carlile, O. and Stack, A. (2008) *Approaches to Learning: A Guide for Teachers*, Berkshire, Open University Press.
- McCulloch, A. and Stokes, P. (2008) *The Silent Majority: Meeting the Needs of Part-time Research Students*. Issues in Postgraduate Education: Series 2, Society for Research in Higher Education, London
- McTaggart, B. (2012) A bit of a doddle, The impact of hot knowledge on student retention in higher education. *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*.
- National Office of Equity of Access (2008) *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008–2013*. National Office of Equity of Access to Higher Education, Higher Education Authority.
- Parry, G. (2005) *The Higher Education Role of Further Education Colleges*. [online]. Paper commissioned by the Foster Review of Further Education Colleges in England. London, DfES, Available from: [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/uploads/documents/Higher\\_EducationinFE\\_Gareth\\_Parry.doc](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/uploads/documents/Higher_EducationinFE_Gareth_Parry.doc) [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> March 2009].
- Patterson, L. and Dowd, K. (2010) ‘Using the Women’s Community Education Approach to Deliver Community Employment Training: A Case Study from Longford Women’s Link. Adult Learner’. *The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, p121-131 2010.
- Pegg, A. and Di Paolo, T. (2013) ‘Narrating unfinished business: adult learners using credit transfer to re-engage with higher education’. *Studies in Continuing Education* (In Press).
- Rose-Adams, J. (2012) Leaving University Early; A Research Report from the back on course project. *The Open University, Milton Keynes*.
- The Scottish Government (2008) *The Early Years Framework Scottish Government*. [online]. Available from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/257007/>

0076309.pdf [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013].

St. Clair, R. (2002) *Andragogy Revisited: Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Myths and Realities*. College of Education Ohio State University [online]. Available from [http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs?data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/00000196/80](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs?data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/00000196/80) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009].

Schön, D. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco, John Wiley & Sons.

Tinto, V. (2010) *Enhancing Student Retention: Lessons Learned in the United States*. Presented at National Conference on Student Retention, Dublin, Ireland. October 28, 2010.

Walsh, O. (2011) *Early Childhood Care and Education Students' perceptions of their first practice placement*. Waterford I.T.: MA in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education, unpublished.

# SECTION THREE

*Book Reviews*

# Going to College as a Mature Student, The next step in your Academic Journey

DENIS STAUNTON (2012), ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION,  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

---

As a mature adult having entered the realm of higher education through community education it is fair to say I have embraced many a guide in the hope of developing my learning techniques and amending poor study habits. Admittedly I approached 'Going to College as a Mature Student' by Denis Staunton in a relaxed and 'I have read it all before..' manner but I can categorically state in honesty that this book is the 'must have' for any mature student. Within this book's pages I found the answer to a learning failing on my own part; that of 'reflection' which now seems to me to be an intricate part of the higher educational system and the crucial practice for any adult learner to embrace if partaking in the world of academia.

It is possible to read this book from cover to cover as it weaves through all aspects of the educational process or the book may be utilised as a tool in which the adult learner may dip in and out of depending on need. The book is divided into six sections of relevance for the pending or current mature student covering all aspects of interest for any adult learner regardless of nationality or educational attainment. Within each section there are various chapters, each of which are put together incredibly simplistically, there are highlighted facts to note, pages which contain key points and importantly, for the discerning student, a reference guide to further reading.

Section one leads the way in explaining in a comprehensive manner how to actively become a mature student by outlining various routes into higher education drawing on aspects such as the National Framework of Qualifications as an academic guide. Access to higher education may seem daunting to any adult returning to learning however, Staunton covers routes to be undertaken such as Access and Community Based Programmes, lending concrete advice and guid-

ance to cover aspects of entry requirements and the practicalities of the economics involved. Section two manages to provide a psychological reasoning for the student. It helps to explain the transitional change which happens instantaneously. The topics covered in section two manage to aid the adult learner by more or less speaking directly to the reader in an encouraging and thought provoking manner, ‘...learning is a continual trial and error experience and is not a passive process’ (p53).

‘Forming Effective Study Habits’ and how to ‘Understand the New Learning Environment’ are covered in sections three and four. The methodological approaches to study habits are important here: Staunton leaves no stone unturned in this area as he describes how the brain processes information. He charts the various types of learning styles which ultimately encourages the student to examine the best approach to take in a personality-based interest way. His research provides the adult student with ‘materials’ to be used as ‘tools’ to aid the learning process. For me ‘reflection’ seemed to once again jump from the page, the notion of ‘dialogue with self’ (p159) based on habit forming around the practice of information understanding. It is apparent that if one begins to actively reflect, as Staunton suggests (pp161-2), the student learner will constantly evolve and be able to actively manage his or her academic performance.

There is so much to ponder in the ‘Six Key Study Strategies’ and ‘Knowing About Learning Resources’ for these two areas of the book aid the adult learner to further devise a plan of attack for successful learning. The explanatory nature of these chapters can only be described as excellent in my opinion. Essay writing is one of the issues covered, arguably one of the most fundamental challenges to all academic students across their entire learning period. Again Staunton provides an understanding and psychological approach to this phenomena in an encouraging way in order to give positive direction in the art of writing: ‘A good essay...thought through, within a personally shaped framework of assumptions and arguments,’ sums up Staunton’s guidance on this matter and further builds upon his earlier ‘reflective’ approach for the mature student (p272). In the final section of this book we are given more step by step ways in which to use relevant sources within higher education, from library usage to student welfare support systems, ‘Sometimes talking to somebody will help to clarify the issues’ (p335). It is surprising that up until the end of this book there are new insights to be gained as issues pertaining to college support systems are broadly discussed.

My own personal educational journey as an adult learner has been psychologically, physically and academically uplifting plus, at times I must confess, very difficult. I have endeavoured to approach each hurdle upon the winding path by using any source available within the broad realm of university life. Interestingly, it is notable that within the pages of Staunton's book, 'Going to College as a Mature Student' I found that I recognised myself in the context of being a student and that the author did in fact 'speak to me' across its pages. Furthermore, from engaging in its ideas I feel a new renewed confidence as I approach the final year of my BA Hons Arts Degree at UCD. My only gripe is the fact that I did not have access to this book back when my love of academic study began within the framework of an under-resourced, community education system. I further propose that there could be a workshop programme based on, and centred entirely around, the pages of this book for the adult learner, using Denis Staunton's theoretically based ideas and methodologies as he presents them. Excitedly I admit that this book is 'essential' and an 'absolute must' to have as component for any person thinking of, or in the process of, learning as its style is incredibly accessible and informative.

**COLETTE AINSCOUGH**

*BA Student, University College Dublin (UCD).*

# Gender, Masculinities and Lifelong Learning

EDITED BY MARION BOWL, ROBERT TOBIAS, JENNIFER LEAHY,  
GRAEME FERGUSON AND JEFFERY GAGE (2011)  
ROUTLEDGE ISBN 987-0-415-66759-3

---

“Gender, Masculinities and Lifelong Learning” does a number of things; it gives us an insightful overview of the contemporary discussion pertaining to where men and boys are positioned within the discourse of education and learning, it creates a significant addition to the existing literature in this field, and it encourages us to question any of our related preconceptions.

In the early chapters, the authors offer us a succinct analysis of the ideologies and theoretical development of the core concepts which underpin the book’s main discussion. I feel that this is achieved in an accessible manner which would give a reader who may be investigating these topics for the first time a comprehensive introduction, while also giving real value to those who are deepening their existing knowledge. A good example of this is where the book clearly defines several terms which may seem confusing to anyone other than those well versed in the sociology of education. The terms ‘informal education’, ‘non-formal education’, ‘informal learning’ and ‘non-formal learning’, may seem interchangeable but it is important to understand their differences if the reader is to get full value from the book. Similarly the book gives the reader a definite picture of the authors’ views on gender and masculinity. Drawing on a wide range of sources they arrive at four assumptions which lay the foundation for the deeper and more specific discussion which takes place in the later chapters.

The book has five editors, all of whom are from New Zealand with the exception of Marion Bowl who is from the UK, and includes chapters from a further seven contributors which increases the geographical spread to include Australia and Canada. So even though the book has a very international feel to it, we must remember that the discussion is based mainly on the experience of English speaking, developed nations.

Drawing on the relevant research, the nine chapters which make up parts two and three of the book each discuss a specific concept or topic. These chapters make the book a useful reference for academics, practitioners and policy makers, who may benefit from its insights at various stages throughout their careers. From my perspective there are a couple of concepts which are worthy of particular mention.

In my opinion, the debate around the “crisis in masculinity” is handled well and they point out that “there was little evidence that women had outstripped men in terms of educational participation.” However, one must remember that their discussion about the crisis in masculinity is confined solely to their context of education and learning and that the crisis may exist elsewhere. It is of course difficult to maintain clear boundaries when discussing such concepts. Education and learning clearly intersects all other aspects of a person’s life and the book points out how lifelong learning can contribute to an individual’s wellbeing.

From an Irish perspective, it was gratifying to see how the work of the Irish Men’s Sheds Association is seen to have contributed to the international dialogue regarding men’s learning and wellbeing. These thoughts are included in the contribution by Barry Golding whose research set the foundation for the growing Men’s Sheds Movement here.

The book highlights several insights which inform how we think about boys’ and men’s learning, including engaging with a very necessary debate about how the current political climate emphasizes the economic, rather than social, role of education. Measuring any educational or learning opportunity solely on its potential to enhance economic activity may cost a society dear in the long run.

Overall, this book argues that gender is but one of several key structural forces that have influenced education and learning over the centuries and it warns against reinforcing stereotypes or falling back to essentialist opinions.

**JOHN EVOY**

*Irish Men’s Sheds Association.*

# Feminist Popular Education in Transnational Debates

EDITED BY LINZI MANICOM AND SHIRLEY WALTERS (2012)

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN ISBN-13: 978-023033913

---

The book *Feminist Popular Education in Transnational Debates* is a tribute to feminist popular education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The collection of contributions to this book makes more widely visible and more appreciated the challenging, innovative, creative and intellectually engaging pedagogy of feminist popular educators. Through presentation of rich case studies, diverse perspectives and problematic representations grounded in diverse contexts this collection encompasses a critical analysis of discourses of power, deep self-reflexivity and a range of arts-based practices.

This work encompasses an interchange between feminist and popular education through explorations of differences and diversity of local and global, personal and social transformation and critical and reflective contemporary discourses.

This book is a contribution to contemporary transnational feminist conversations about transformative pedagogies of possibility. It gathers together accounts of feminist adult educators, scholar-activists, artist-activists and social-change facilitators as they critically reflect on their pedagogical practices. It explores these practices within and across a range of geopolitical contexts, learning communities, and organisational settings. The chapters discuss a variety of educational processes, creative methodologies, and learning modalities. They explore participatory, dialogical, inventive, and community-oriented pedagogical practice which collectively produce emancipatory knowledge and praxis that are the ways of understanding the self and the world, and open up possibilities for engagement and collective action for change. This book plays tribute to the profound and pervasive influence – within critical adult education, community organizing, feminist pedagogy, transformative learning, and

other participatory education approaches – of the legacy of Brazilian educator-theorist Paulo Freire (2004, 2009).

Reaching its ultimate aim in transformations of inequalities, and bringing out the best in each of its contributors, this edited book makes an invaluable tool for use in the university, adult education, and community learning settings.

**DR. EKATERINA KOZINA**

*Office of the Vice-President for Learning Innovation, Dublin City University.*

# Call for Papers 2014

---

**The Adult Learner** is the Irish journal of adult and community education founded in the mid-1980s. It aims primarily to serve the needs of the adult education community in Ireland by providing a forum for critical reflection on the practices of teaching and learning. The journal aims to continue to make knowledge, research and writing accessible to the widest possible audience and emphasises the implications of critique for practice. The journal has a long established practice of giving priority to subject matter that addresses disadvantage, social exclusion, equality, workplace learning and the study of the teacher/student relationship. Community education, literacy, citizenship and access issues are also of importance in the journal. The journal welcomes papers which are relevant to those working across the broad field of Adult and Community Education and which make a contribution to debates both in Ireland and internationally.

**The journal invites contributions as follows:**

1. **Papers which** engage in critical debate and analysis of concepts and theories and/or practices in the field. They may include findings from recent research and where this is so, should include a brief outline of any research methodologies used. Papers which initiate dialogue between individuals, groups or sectors in the field of lifelong learning are also welcome. These papers should be no more than 5,000 words in length including references.
2. **Practice- based contributions including case studies** which exchange of ideas about what works in various programmes, innovations and contexts and which share examples of good practice. These papers engage in analysis of practical aspects. Papers should NOT exceed 3,000 words in length including references.
3. **Reviews of approximately 600-1000 words.** These may provide a review of

books, materials and resources that help identify and evaluate a wide variety of teaching and learning resources that may be of interest to adult and community education participants, providers and anyone interested in adult and community education.

All papers submitted undergo a refereeing process which involves at least two referees. Where contributions are accepted this may be on condition that changes recommended by referees are taken account of. We recommend contributors consider the diversity of our readership and ask that articles are written with an international readership in mind. We are very grateful for all contributions submitted and will consider each on its merits and provide feedback.

**All papers submitted should conform to the following guidelines:**

***Relate to the broad aims of the journal and relevant to the field of adult and community education.***

***Provide evidence of a coherent and focused argument and be supported by robust evidence***

***Outline and explain any methodology used***

***Be contextualised for both an Irish and international readership***

***Be submitted in the format outlined ( see separate guidance).***

***Begin with a short abstract (not more than 100 words)***

***Include a reference section which refers only to articles mentioned in the text***

**Papers must be submitted in Word format by email to [eperuffo@aontas.com](mailto:eperuffo@aontas.com).**

Papers should be typed, 12 pt Times New Roman, double line spaced on one side of A4. Headings should be in bold and in the same format. They should include all references cited in the article in a *references section*. Only those cited in the article should be included. The papers should begin with a short abstract (maximum 6 lines preceded by a 'key words' statement.)

All papers should be presented in a style as outlined in the ***Style Guide for Contributors (separate document)***. Only books/articles /web-sites referred to in the text should be included in the references.

The name, address, and email address of the author should be submitted on a separate attached sheet rather than on the manuscript and where appropriate should include the work-place of the author. A short statement about the author (no more than 60 words in length) should be attached.

The number of words should be include at the end of the article and should conform to the word limit depending on which section you are submitting to. Articles which exceed the length will be returned to the author(s).

Please note we cannot accept papers which do not conform strictly to the guidelines.

The editor welcomes queries from writers who may wish to discuss possible subject matter and approaches.

**The deadline for submission is 31<sup>st</sup> January 2014. Please note that contributions cannot be accepted after this date.**

Please send all correspondence to Ms Eleonora Peruffo, Secretary to the Adult Learner at: [eperuffo@aontas.com](mailto:eperuffo@aontas.com) .

**Please mark for the attention of:**

The Editor, *The Adult Learner Journal*,  
AONTAS,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor 83-87 Main Street,  
Ranelagh,  
DUBLIN 6,  
Ireland.



*The Adult Learner is the Irish journal for adult and community education founded in the mid 1980s and is published by AONTAS.*

*Its aim is to serve the needs of the adult education and lifelong learning community both in Ireland and internationally by providing a forum for critical discussion and reflection. The journal seeks to make new knowledge easily accessible to the widest possible audience through emphasising the importance of describing and critiquing practice and through publishing the results of research. The journal gives priority to subject matter that addresses issues of community, citizenship and learning and which focus on disadvantage, literacy and equality. It also includes contributions on how adults learn in formal, non-formal and informal settings including life and work contexts.*

*The journal provides a forum for publication and dissemination of reflections on research, policy and practice in the broad field of adult and community education.*

*The journal can also be viewed on the AONTAS website, where further details on how individuals can make contributions are made available each year.*  
[www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)



aontas



Adult Education Officers' Association