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Editorial comment

While lifelong learning along with ideas such as ‘the learning society’ may have become popular with researchers, teachers and policymakers, these concepts and related terminology continue to remain problematic. Despite the rhetoric across Europe and globally, there is no agreement about what we mean by these terms or how they can contribute to social and economic development. While there have been significant shifts in policies and major changes in the ways in which we approach learning, lifelong learning remains a mechanism for exclusion and control which creates new and powerful inequalities.

In the 2014 edition, the articles challenge many issues around the meaning of lifelong learning and access to it, seeking to provide answers to hotly debated questions which have puzzled adult educators over a very long period of time.

In the opening article, Lyn Tett draws on a number of inter-related fallacies that prioritise lifelong learning, focusing on improving individuals’ employability skills and the potential to interpret policies more radically. She suggests that a radical approach to education grounded in life situations involves learning that builds on experience emphasising the wealth of people’s knowledge, rather than their deficits. She goes on to challenge the contention that economic success eradicates deprivation and exclusion, that failures are the fault of the individual and that access is fair. She then presents a challenge for capturing the power of learning and the potential that comes from engaging in more democratic decision-making around what is important knowledge. This type of education, she argues, enables us to move away from inequitable, individualised, deficit models of learning bringing about change in understanding for both

self and society. Taking this argument forward, Fergal Hardman, writing about the role of further education in Ireland, reminds us of the need to protect the values of inclusive further education from being subordinated to the demands of employers and servicing the narrow interests of the free market economy. Patricia Neville, Maria O'Dwyer and Martin J Power go on to discuss the social and transformative impact of community-based adult education. The article argues that community education is a key community resource and asset which, if allowed to adhere to its grassroots model, will offer a transformative base for adult learners, their families and wider community. They add their voice to calls for the social and radical model of action that community education inspires to be further acknowledged.

The first section concludes with two articles on issues relevant for improving practices in adult learning.

The first by Karin Dollhausen and Matthias Alke looks at the role of networks in improving professionalism, pedagogical effectiveness and quality of provision and offers us useful insights into how actor relationships can be coordinated to improve social networks. The final article in Section 1, by Lucy Hearne and Petra Elftorp, looks at the guidance counselling needs of clients with dyslexia within the Adult Education Guidance Initiative. Again the research is underpinned by a social justice paradigm which examines financial and structural barriers to accessing services for learners in further and adult education.

In Section 2, Michael Kenny provides a refreshing look at a method for organising participative conferences which enable dynamic inclusive engagement and challenge traditional highly structured hierarchical conference formats. Open Space Technology is viewed as a way of providing a structure for communities of learners to identify learning need and empowering them to address need. The article successfully demonstrates how democratic approaches ensure that imposed learning outcomes do not divert the learning journey to predetermined ends, as well as showing the relevance of this method to community, non-formal, and formal learning settings.

In the final article, Kieran Harrington demonstrates the role of iPhones and iPads in bringing significant change to the way in which people communicate with friends and families, how they access information and how they complete work tasks. His article reports on the introduction of the iPad into an adult basic education classroom to give clear benefits for cognitive and affective develop-

ment as well as the development of critical reflection. The article provides a refreshing look at the role of technology in adult basic education reminding us that technology is here to stay.

I would like to express my thanks to all of the contributors for their thought-provoking contributions. I would also like to thank the members of the Editorial Board and all those who gave up their time freely to review and comment on articles submitted.

Finally, we are again indebted to AONTAS and the Department of Education and Skills who have provided financial support for the publishing of this journal. The journal is published each year in the autumn and its open access on the web means that it is read widely across the globe.

We hope you will find the journal interesting and welcome any comments and feedback that you would like to make.

ROB MARK, EDITOR

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SECTION ONE

Perspectives on Community and Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning policies, paradoxes and possibilities

LYN TETT, UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

Abstract

This paper argues that there are many ways of conceptualising lifelong learning and examines EU and Scottish lifelong learning policies in order to identify their underlying assumptions. Through an analysis of these policies, it is demonstrated that they draw on a number of inter-related fallacies that prioritise lifelong learning mainly in relation to its economic value. Three fallacies are identified: economic success equals eradication of deprivation and exclusion; failure is the fault of the individual; access to education is fair. These fallacies are then deconstructed in order to suggest ways of interrogating their contradictions so that opportunities for more radical educational action can be found.

Key words: (EU and Scottish policy tensions; employability discourse; social inclusion)

Introduction

There are many ways of conceptualising lifelong learning as these two contrasting quotes illustrate:

We should no longer assiduously acquire knowledge once and for all, but learn how to build up a continually evolving body of knowledge all through life – ‘learn to be’ (Fauré et al, 1972: vi).

According to one estimate, the mismatches between the supply and demand of labour cost the European Union 100 billion Euro each year. Therefore, more needs to be done to implement lifelong learning. We need to raise the levels of investment in human resources (Van der Pas, 2001: 12).

In the first quote, lifelong learning (LL) is seen as an inherent aspect of democratic life and focused on personal growth and there is an explicit reference to education no longer being 'the privilege of an elite' (Fauré et al, 1972, p.160). In the second (from an EU Commissioner), LL is regarded as an investment in those that do not have the skills required by employers in order to ensure economic development.

What is seen as legitimate in terms of policy and practice, privileges particular interests that embody claims to speak with authority in ways that shut out other possibilities. Ball (1998) suggests that 'policies are both systems of values and symbolic systems ... [so] policies are articulated both to achieve material effects and to manufacture support for those effects' (124). This means that a particular conception of what the problem is and how it is to be solved becomes dominant. So, if the problem facing governments is conceptualised as responding to an economic and employment climate that requires the constant updating of knowledge and skills, then learning for work will be prioritised. This approach leads to a discourse that emphasises the formation of human capital and the economic importance of knowledge. This illustrates that, whilst the commitment to LL brings many opportunities for development and fulfilment, it can also serve to reinforce inequalities by providing a narrow conception of education that does not focus on the whole human being.

How are contemporary policies positioned within these discourses? This paper examines lifelong learning through an analysis of EU and Scottish LL policies. The EU has been chosen in order to identify the overarching framework of policies throughout the member countries and Scotland because, since devolution in 1999, its policy rhetoric has been focused on promoting greater social justice for all its citizens (Mooney & Scott, 2012) in ways that 'reflect the universal values of fairness' (Salmond, 2012).

Method

In order to interrogate how lifelong learning is conceptualised EU and Scottish policy documents from 2000 onwards have been examined using critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is particularly useful because it combines linguistic analysis with social analysis, where the relationship between policy texts, social practices and institutions is seen as a dialectical one:

... that is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned ... It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 258).

In terms of the policies examined, this meant identifying how particular issues were framed in terms of the knowledge, values and norms as well as the ideology that informed the documents.

The first step of the analysis was reading and re-reading the policy documents, noting down how lifelong learning was conceptualised and represented. The next stage involved looking at how the issue was framed both through the use of rhetoric and metaphor and also in the ideological work of the texts in representing, relating and identifying particular values (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Habermas (1977) makes the point that 'language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimise relations of organised power. Insofar as the legitimisations of power relations ... are not articulated ... language is also ideological' (p 259). This makes the interrogation of policy essential in understanding how social justice is framed and how those in power seek to achieve their ends.

EU lifelong learning policies

After the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2000 education became a key element in the new 'Knowledge Economy' goals of the EU (Lawn & Grek, 2012). The first Commission paper, *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* (CEC, 2000), stated that there were 'two equally important aims for lifelong learning: promoting active citizenship and promoting employability'. The paper also argued that 'both employability and active citizenship are dependent on having adequate and up-to-date knowledge and skills to take part in, and make a contribution to, economic and social life' (ibid: 5). Following the Memorandum there was a focus on the development of 'benchmarks' and 'indicators' that would enable the EU to measure and assess progress in LL on a consistent basis across the Member States (Holford, et al, 2008). The indicators, constructed in 2004, included 'spending on human resources' and 'investment in the knowledge-based economy' with the overarching goal of 'becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world ... with more and better jobs and greater social inclusion' (CEC, 2004: 10). However, the difficulty of reaching this goal was acknowledged as 'immense' in the 2005 Report from the Commission (CEC, 2005: 12).

In 2006 the EU issued a Communication entitled *Adult Learning: it is never too late to learn* (CEC, 2006) which emphasised that ‘general levels of competence must increase, both to meet the needs of the labour market and to allow citizens to function well in today’s society’ (p3). It also suggested that ‘not only does adult learning help make adults more efficient workers and better-informed and more active citizens, it also contributes to their personal well being’ (p5). The Commission argued that adult learning led to many benefits including greater employability, reduced welfare expenditure, better civic participation but suggested that it ‘has not always gained the recognition it deserves’ (ibid: 3). Holford and colleagues argue that this paper ‘represents a significant shift in the rhetoric of lifelong learning policy’ (2008: 61) because there is less emphasis on the knowledge economy. However, they also suggest that there was little evidence of a major change in the action that Member Countries were expected to undertake. Moreover, there was little acknowledgement that ‘adults bring something that derives both from their experience of adult life and from their status as citizens to the educational process’ (Jackson, 1995: 187). Instead, the purpose of education and training was generally constructed as increasing ‘the participation in the workforce of young people and extend[ing] that of older people’ (CEC, 2006: 4).

One key method through which the EU influences policy implementation is through the setting and measurement of competences and outcomes (Lawn and Grek 2012) as part of the ‘open method of coordination’ (OMC). Eight key competences for lifelong learning were published in 2007 and it was argued that:

[They] are all considered equally important, because each of them can contribute to a successful life in a knowledge society ... Competence in the fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy and in ... ICT is an essential foundation for learning, and learning to learn supports all learning activities (DG-EAC, 2007: 3).

However, in the next major document on lifelong learning (CEC, 2010) Member States were asked to collect data on ‘outcomes, drop out rates and on learners’ socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in vocational education and training, higher education and adult education’ (CEC, 2010 p9) thus emphasising participation in formal learning rather than ‘learning to learn’.

This policy embodied the tension in EU policies between its twin aims of ‘edu-

ation ... for productivity, efficiency and competitiveness on the one hand, and education for broader personal development and “social inclusion” on the other’ (Holford & Spolar, 2012: 39), because it also argued that: ‘education and training systems contribute significantly to fostering social cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment in European societies’ (CEC, 2010: 3).

There was a particular emphasis on the social dimension of learning and Member States were asked to give priority to enabling ‘low-skilled, unemployed adults ... to gain a qualification or take their skills a step further ... and broaden the provision of second chance education for young adults’ (CEC, 2010: 8).

Two documents were issued in 2011. The first ‘*on a renewed agenda for adult learning*’ (CEC, 2011a) identified ‘promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning’ (p5) and ‘enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environments’ (p6) as key priority areas. In the second, however, ‘*on the role of education and training in the implementation of the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy*,’ the Council suggested that education and training had a ‘fundamental role to play in ... equipping citizens with the skills and competences which the European economy and European society need in order to remain competitive and innovative’ (CEC, 2011b: 1).

In this document the main purpose of education and training was seen as:

Strengthening lifelong learning opportunities for all ... is essential, notably by improving the attractiveness and relevance of VET and by increasing the participation in, and the relevance of, adult learning (ibid. 2).

It appears that the tension between the social and economic objectives of the EU remains so far unresolved. It is noteworthy, however, that the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy (CEC, 2011b), which is guiding Europe’s overall response to the challenges of the knowledge economy, has a stronger focus on employment than it does on inclusion.

Scottish policy documents

Despite a rhetorical commitment to ‘fairness’ (Mackie & Tett, 2013) the Scottish policies show a similar focus on international competitiveness but with fewer references to social cohesion. A key policy document, *Life through learning; learning through life*, emphasised the personal effects for those that miss out on learning, as well as the impact on the economy, and suggested that:

In ... Scotland we cannot accept: the opportunity gap between people who achieve their full potential and those that do not; the skills gap between people in work and those who are not ...; the productivity gap between Scotland and the leading economies of the world (Scottish Executive, 2003: 1).

In contrast to this broad view of lifelong learning, however, the six indicators that measured the success of the strategy focused either on young people with low qualifications or on increasing the level of qualifications in the workforce. In addition, the perceived associations between exclusion and anti-social behaviour and the emphasis on a 'flexible and adaptable workforce' (ibid) made it easy to justify the compulsory requirement to participate in vocational training for those that were unemployed.

The stress on economic development was even higher in the *Skills for Scotland: a lifelong skills strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007) policy, where benefits 'such as social justice, stronger communities and more engaged citizens' (ibid: 10) were expected to flow from economic development rather than the other way around. Throughout this, and subsequent policy documents, reference is made to the requirement to keep Scotland competitive. For example:

A skilled and educated workforce is essential to productivity and sustainable economic growth ... [because] the skill level of the workforce is likely to impact significantly on the effectiveness of capital investment and the ability of employers to adopt innovative work practices (Scottish Government, 2007: 13).

Both innovation and commercialisation are key drivers of productivity and competitiveness, particularly in an increasingly interconnected global economy. (Scottish Government, 2011: 47).

Moreover, work is posited as the remedy and the catalyst for increasing 'equity', 'solidarity' and 'cohesion'. For example:

We will set out plans ... for improved employability and skills services to Scotland's black and minority ethnic communities. (Scottish Government, 2008: 12)

...placing a renewed focus and flexibility around the skills required to accelerate economic recovery and to sustain a growing, successful country with opportunities for all. (Scottish Government, 2010: 9)

Increased equity – through improving opportunities and outcomes – across Scotland has the potential to engage large numbers of people and communities who face disadvantages into the mainstream economy (Scottish Government, 2011: 89).

Such rhetoric, Fairclough (2003) suggests, is part of ‘the neoliberal discourse of economic change ... which demands “adjustments” and “reforms” to enhance “efficiency and adaptability” in order to compete’ (p.100). Moreover, it is clear that if economic development is concentrated on the already highly skilled workforce, then inequality is likely to be exacerbated as changes in employment patterns will lead to differentials in income (see Hudson, 2006). It also means that people are under pressure to constantly update their skills in order to take their place in a competitive workforce that is ‘focussed on the individual fitting into the culture of educational systems, rather than developing different environments to meet individual needs’ (Mosen-Lowe et al, 2009: 473).

Underpinning fallacies

This brief survey of EU and Scottish policies shows that they share a number of underpinning assumptions that need to be challenged if opportunities for more radical action are to be identified. These policies draw on a number of inter-related fallacies that cumulatively give the impression of a commitment to lifelong learning only in relation to its economic value. However, if these fallacies are separated and examined it becomes easier to see how those that are committed to a more inclusive education might challenge them. In order to do this each fallacy is explored.

Fallacy: Economic success equals eradication of deprivation and exclusion

Within the policies outlined inadequate skill levels within the unemployed and unskilled population were seen as the causes of disadvantage, whilst engaging in learning was identified as the solution. This implies that education and training provision must become more responsive to the needs of employers as otherwise they will not meet the needs of the economy. However, the link between education, training and economic development is complex and participating in education and training does not necessarily drive prosperity for all. For example, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) have shown a strong connection between low levels of inequality in a society and positive educational outcomes, and the OECD (2013) has demonstrated that inequality in skills is strongly associated with inequality in income. In addition, if education is to be effective for economic development, it is crucially dependent on complementary inputs from business

and government. These inputs include new investment, new methods of production, new technologies, new managerial approaches, relationships that are based on trust, and sufficient customers.

Equating participation in learning with economic success also ignores the sharpening polarisation in income and wealth that can lead to a fundamental split in societies. When paid work is seen as the best way of averting social exclusion and people are treated only in relation to their potential contribution to the market economy, a value is placed on each individual only according to that contribution. This could result in a system that deems some people to be 'costly investments with unlikely pay-off', as Darville (2011: 167) argues happened in Canada. In these ways, social exclusion is intensified rather than reduced.

A final issue is the impact of globalisation that has been regarded as reducing the nation state's powers, and so there is little opportunity to intervene except through promoting education and training as a source of sustainable competition (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This leads to the assumption that governments have no choice but to introduce policies to 'up skill' their workforce. Such a view forgets that skills are not neutral but are socially constructed by, for example, trade unions negotiating higher pay for those jobs that are held predominantly by male members or employers offering good quality education and training only to their permanent, highly paid employees (Riddell & Tett, 2006).

Fallacy: Failure is the fault of the individual

This fallacy is intimately related to the preceding one. If the market is perceived as fair and equal, then failure to succeed in a market structure cannot be the fault of the system, but rather is rooted in the failings of the individual to engage appropriately. Within the policy frameworks offered for LL, issues such as non-participation, educational under-achievement, lack of knowledge of the range of opportunities, are not perceived as structural failures but rather issues of individual attitude or ability. However, as Jonker (2005, 123) notes, 'schooling can ... saddle one for life with the feeling that one is doomed to fail. Schooling, in other words, is part of the complex process of shaping and reshaping the self'. So many adults do not participate, not because of low motivation but because of powerful constraints that arise from cultural and social-class divisions. School creates sharp divisions in society, by conditioning children to accept different expectations and status patterns according to their academic 'success' or 'failure'. Through the use of imposed standards and selection, the education system traditionally rejects large numbers of the population that

may subsequently consider themselves as educational failures (Crowther and Tett, 2011). It is hardly surprising that people do not want to engage in a process that is portrayed as 'learn or else' rather than a contribution to human flourishing (Biesta, 2006).

In many ways lifelong learning is regarded as a 'moral obligation and social constraint' (Coffield, 1999: 488) by the state and employers, and legitimates the shifting of the burden of responsibility for education, training and employment on to the individual. At the same time, the term 'employability' also hides the tensions between training workers to meet the short-term needs of employers and the preparation for frequent changes of job for which general education may be more useful. In addition, 'the identification of personal merit with economic success, productivity, consumerism, competition, salesmanship, deception and egocentrism are examples of capitalist values, beliefs and modes of behaviour capable of penetrating all spheres of social life' (Moutsios, 2010: 136).

If it is the structure of society that creates inequalities, then why should individuals participate in a system in which they know they start at a disadvantage? It is insufficient simply to recognise inequality and strive for greater inclusion; rather we need to look at the causes of that inequality. Moreover, if we regard education as being about responding to individual need, then no attention is paid to the ways in which these 'needs' are politically constructed and understood (Crowther et al, 2010). By personalising the characteristics, such as a lack of basic skills, that justify employers and others treating people differently, LL encourages fragmentation and individual solutions.

The fallacy that individual failings lie at the heart of either educational failure or economic success creates a convenient scapegoat for structural inequality justified through the workings of the market. This means that LL becomes one more way of legitimating existing inequalities. However, 'the relationship between education and work is dialectical, composed of a perpetual tension between two dynamics, the imperatives of capital and those of democracy in all its forms' (Carnoy and Levin 1985: 4). For too long the economic has dominated the democratic and so a struggle lies ahead for those who wish to redress the imbalance.

Fallacy: access to education is fair

Brine (2006) has pointed out that the discourse of the EU is premised on a two-

track approach to the knowledge rich, who are entitled to investment, and the knowledge poor that have their learning needs identified by others. She further suggests that this leads to an 'individualised and pathologised learner that is simultaneously constructed as "at risk" and "the risk"' (ibid: 656). This discourse also pervades policy documents from Scotland, and overall it suggests that the state's role is to facilitate the active citizen who should be engaged in securing their own welfare (Holford et al, 2008). EU and Scottish policies also suggest that access to education is fair because it is the individual that has failed to engage in it. However, the education and training that is available to the most disadvantaged is the least well funded and accessible. For example, only 24.72% of those accepted to university in the UK were from the lowest social classes (Reay, et al, 2010) but this is the sector with the highest investment per student. Conversely, adult literacies education lies at the other end of the investment structure and in addition this provision is highly vulnerable to cuts (Tett, 2014).

Another way in which access to education is unfair is because those who make decisions about the opportunities that are available are drawn from a narrow group. One effect of this class, gender and 'race' imbalance is that facilities that could increase access for everyone, such as family-friendly services, or opportunities that are geographically and culturally accessible, are seldom prioritised. Moreover, privileging vocational and work-based training has tended to benefit men more than women, partly because of women's predominance in part-time work where the majority are responsible for paying their own fees (Aldridge & Hughes, 2012).

In addition, an emphasis on new technologies as a way of advancing learning opportunities risks exacerbating divisions, resulting in a society divided between the information-rich and the information-poor (Schuller & Watson, 2009). The classed, gendered and 'raced' nature of participation in education and training is often disregarded and instead 'equal opportunities' policies based on a meritocratic model are implemented. This model ignores the process whereby opportunities are defined, interpreted and applied by those already in positions of power, which means that LL becomes one more way of reinforcing the status quo. Education is not neutral and if people are treated only in relation to their potential contribution to the economy, then a market value is attached to each individual according to that contribution. Rather than education becoming an individual and social force for emancipation, it becomes instead an 'investment' on the part of employers and governments.

Conclusion

I have suggested that, whilst lifelong learning policies present a powerful policy steer that is mainly focused on improving individuals' employability skills, the potential exists to interpret the policies more radically. This is because the contradictions within policies have the potential to reveal the spaces that are available for action and so can challenge the prevailing orthodoxy that education must become more responsive only to the needs of employers. Knowledge, skills, understanding, curiosity and wisdom cannot be kept in separate boxes, depending simply on who is paying for or providing them. This means that, although much of the funding that is tied to lifelong learning policy implementation is linked to programmes that focus on narrow skills that are expected to increase people's employability, there are still spaces for action.

When people are excluded from participation in decision-making, as well as access to employment and material resources, then individual action that will change their circumstances can feel as if it is almost impossible. Working together on local issues can, however, lead to the development of a political culture that focuses on the fundamentally unequal nature of society rather than people's individual deficits. This more radical approach to education will involve learning and development that builds on experience and emphasises the wealth of people's knowledge, rather than their deficits, and is grounded in their life situations. Using knowledge in this way can also enable the development of a curriculum that emphasises the critical understanding of the social, political and economic factors that shape experience, using a 'problematizing' approach (Freire, 1972).

The challenge for us is to capture the positive belief in the power of learning and in the potential of all people that comes from engaging in more democratic decision-making about what is important knowledge. Doing this is risky because it requires courage and spirited conviction for people to learn and educate against the view that some people and some kinds of knowledge are worth more than others, but the other side of risk is hope. Engaging with others in mutual learning is both a source for, and potential outcome of, hope and is closely bound up with the willingness to experiment, to make choices, to be adventurous. This type of education moves away from inequitable, individualised, deficit models of learning and brings about change in understanding both self and society. As William Butler Yeats suggests: 'Education is not filling a pail, but lighting a fire' and this fire is able to illuminate the way ahead.

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Finding a voice: The Experience of mature students in a College of Further Education

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Abstract

This article summarises the background to the development of further education and goes on to describe research carried out with a group of older mature students in a further education college in Ireland. The first research element was a survey and focus group, followed by interviews, which explored with the students their reasons for returning to education, their experience while in further education and what they consider to be the benefits of participation. Three significant concepts emerged from the analysis. The first concept, the latent self, describes a range of social, structural and biographical influences and how they interact and impact on the decision to return to education. The second concept, the emerging self, describes the negotiation of challenges faced by the students in the process of change. The third concept, the revised self, describes the changed self emphatically described by the students as resulting from their participation and characterised by greatly enhanced confidence and agency, which benefits the students, their families and society. Finally, I offer some reflections on the implications of the research for the development of the revised further education and training sector under the new Education and Training Boards and its relationship with other sectors of education in Ireland.

Background to FE

Further Education (FE) is described as ‘education and training which occurs after second level schooling but which is not part of the third level system’ (DES, 2013). It encompasses a diverse range of full and part-time programmes including VTOS, Adult Literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), apprenticeships, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), work-based learning and Community Education. This article looks at mature students on full-time

courses in a further education college. Further education colleges offer what used to be called 'Post-Leaving Certificate courses' (PLCs). This section outlines the development of further education under the Vocational Education Committees, the range of courses offered and the competing discourses that characterise the sector.

The development of the further education sector was influenced by the pedagogical and curricular developments in adult and community education as well as the post leaving type programmes, which emerged in the 1980s. Post-Leaving Certificate courses were intended to prepare students for employment or progression to other courses. Many of the courses, practices, and assessment systems in this sector evolved as a result of pragmatism. As enrolments in traditional courses declined, schools looked for other ways of maintaining student numbers. O'Sullivan's point about the emergence of adult education is valid for FE also – that it 'depended very much on the level of interest and commitment on the part of a particular CEO, VEC committee member, school principal or individual member of a school's staff' (2005, p.518). The development of further education was haphazard, with no overall policy or plan. Much of the development was carried out without official sanction or support. Individual colleges were quick to recognise and provide for gaps in employment and training. The White Paper on Adult Education, 'Learning for Life' (DES, 2000, p.107) acknowledged the growth of the PLC sector 'for young people to bridge the gap between school and work' and recognised the inadequacy of its existing structures and services and promised a review. Structures and practices emerged within colleges which had no official recognition but met the needs of the institution. Many colleges re-named themselves Further Education Colleges to reflect the changing profile of the students, increasing the numbers of non-traditional students, who did not have a Leaving Certificate. For many years the sector used a variety of certifying bodies, including the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee's Curriculum Development Unit, and a number of national and foreign examination boards and professional institutes. FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) now certifies most courses at level five and most two-year courses in colleges of further education are certified by BTEC (Edexcel), a U.K. awarding body.

The doubling of student numbers in FE since 1991 is attributable, almost entirely, to mature students. The sector provides a range of courses not available elsewhere and accommodates students who could not access third level education directly. It also has an important role in providing second chance education and

facilitates a significant number of adults and non-traditional students both on designated return to learning programmes and in mainstream courses. FE colleges now offer a large variety of courses. The student body is diverse, coming generally from lower socio economic groups than those in Higher Education (HE) and with relatively high numbers from intermediate non-manual backgrounds (Watson, McCoy and Gorby, 2006). More than half are mature students. The numbers of non-Irish students and students requiring extra support have risen greatly in recent years. There is a considerable range of academic ability and many of the students have family, work or other commitments. This diversity has implications for structures and teaching and learning in FE.

Despite having significant numbers of students, 35,500 in 2013 (DES, 2013) (with 10,000 within City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB)¹, the FE sector still operates within the confines of the second level system, which has increasingly proved unsuitable for adult learning and the range of activities encompassed by FE. For many years there have been calls for the recognition of FE as a distinct sector within Irish education with appropriate structures and resources and particularly for the implementation of the McIver report (2003)²

Competing discourses

There are two discourses operating side by side in FE. One is characterised by the neo-liberal discourse of individualism, accountability and servicing the needs of the economy. The other provides the supportive environment and individual care that is fundamental to the changes described by the students. The neo-liberal influences at the official and policy level are being mediated by the staff of the college and the practice on the ground, in general, reflects a belief in inclusiveness, an ethos of care and a broader vision of education. This vision includes a concern for the development of the person and the encouragement of a questioning, critical approach that goes beyond the transmission of skills and competencies. These discourses are manifested at college level in discussions about the extent to which the demands and practices of the workplace should influence the educational agenda. The staff, generally, is accessible and understanding when dealing with the issues that affect mature students and recognise the importance of this approach for their students. The McIver report (2003) called for the establishment of non-teaching roles for advisors and counselors,

1 The Education and Training Boards (ETBs), formerly VECs, are by far the largest providers of FE. They are not selective in their intake and have a long history of educational innovation and accommodating non-traditional students.

2 The review promised in the White Paper, 2000.

which have proved to be a key resource for mature students progressing to HE and while in college.

Mature students

The term mature student is often used to differentiate older students from the traditional students of 18 or so who have just left secondary education having completed the Leaving Certificate. In FE mature students are those who are over 21 years of age. Young mature students share most of the characteristics of students a few years younger. This study concentrated on the experience of students who have come back to full time education in the FE sector after an absence of several years. This research was undertaken for a Doctorate in Education in NUIM (Hardiman, 2012) and took place in a large college of further education.

Methodology

The first research element was a survey and focus group, followed by qualitative interviews, which explored with the students their reasons for returning to education, their experience while in further education and what they consider to be the benefits of participation. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) the data were generated and analysed through a systematic process of coding, categorisation and the development of core concepts grounded in the students' lived experience.

Findings

Three significant concepts emerged from the analysis. The first concept of the latent self describes the range of social, personal and structural influences that interacted and impacted on the decision to return to education. The second concept, the emerging self, describes the negotiation of challenges faced by the students in the process of change. The third concept, the revised self, describes the changed self emphatically described by the students as resulting from their participation.

The latent self

This section focuses on why the mature students in this study returned to education. I use the term latent self as a core concept to describe the student on entering further education and the circumstances that lead to the decision to come, the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that came together and impacted on the decision. The term latent self (Mercer, 2007; Baxter and Britton, 1999) describes the feeling that many of the students expressed that an aspect of their personality was neglected.

There are three subcategories of this concept:

The right time

Many of the participants said things that were brought together to make a theme indicating that returning to education happened at the right time. Many said that becoming unemployed was the immediate trigger that made them consider returning to education. This was usually combined with a number of other factors that together resulted in the decision to enroll on a course. In a number of cases it was a chance encounter or recommendation that planted the idea of becoming a mature student. Others had previous experience of the college, knew of it from living in the area, or knew someone who had attended. As Aoife suggests 'It was something that I always wanted to do. I'd been thinking about it and thinking about it. I decided yes, I will do it now [pause] and this seemed like the right time'.

Missing out

Most of the participants had liked school, or at least some aspects of it, and felt that they had 'missed out' by having to leave education early. The affinity with education and a belief in its value seem to have developed quite early. All spoke of their parents' encouragement to go to school and being encouraged to do well even though circumstances and culture often meant that employment was a priority and often a preference. There was a feeling of unfinished business – a vague sense that things might have been different if they had continued or that they would have seen themselves differently if they had continued in education. Clearly, it was an important issue for the individuals who felt that an aspect of their identity had been neglected. James pointed out that 'Circumstances at the time meant I didn't get the opportunity to finish. Maybe I could have gone on. Maybe I could have been working at something different.' Caroline on the other hand said 'Well, to be honest with you, I think I always kind of felt like I'd missed out by not going back to school; as I got older I realized.'

This feeling of missing out, often combined with the opportunity presented by becoming unemployed and a recommendation or discussion with a contact, made returning to education a real possibility rather than a vague aspiration. For others, children growing up provided the opportunity.

Important aspects of the self were being denied or not fully used and the opportunity for reassessment and change came through unemployment or the time being right. Baxter and Britton (1999, p.185) refer to the latent or submerged

self-wanting to be reclaimed and suggest that here education is not seen instrumentally, but as a means of 'realizing the self or becoming the self one always was.' Mercer (2007, p26) speaks of 'reclaiming a part of the self that had not been developed earlier in the lifespan.' Similarly, Dawson and Boulton (2000, p.168) speak of such motivations as 'imbalances' and a return to education a desire to restore balance.

Needing a qualification

Wanting a qualification was often the first thing that the interviewees said to explain how they came to be in the college. For most, however, it was not so straightforward. The decision to return had been less direct. They had become unemployed but going back to education had not been uppermost in their minds and they were acting on a suggestion, a recommendation or an idea that had been smoldering within them for some time. They had a general and somewhat vague aim of getting a qualification and hoped that during the course of the year or two, their options would become clearer, which often turned out to be the case. Others had a stronger, more active desire to revisit education but with no specific course or career in mind.

In some cases the qualification was needed for more than vocational reasons. It represented something important to the person and gave a degree of recognition they felt they lacked. The vocational motivation came easily to mind when they were asked, but clearly there were many other motivations associated with it for the individual. Although many mature students hoped to be able to get a better or different job after college, they were adamant that if this were not to happen they would still consider their time well spent. Some said they would work in a voluntary capacity if they could not find paid work. The focus was not entirely on traditional notions of work and their motivations were more complex than 'I needed a qualification' as the questionnaire would indicate. Most saw their success in the college primarily as a personal achievement.

Adults generally have not one, but many reasons, often inter-related, for returning to education. The decision is influenced by a range of psychological, social, vocational and emotional aspects that may be masked in the constraints of replies to a survey.

Available cultures and discourses influence how learning choices are explained. Vocational motivations are often the most immediately accessible and acceptable reply to a direct question about motivation.

Emerging self

By the concept of the emerging self I mean the processes that contribute the changes experienced by the individual during their time as a student to bring about a revised sense of self. I discuss here a number of issues, which arose from the data and can be seen as challenges, developmental tasks or crises which, with adequate support, are successfully negotiated leading to the changes described by the students.

For mature students coming to FE is a major change and is usually accompanied by some feelings of apprehension and anxiety as well as more positive emotions. For some, their previous experience of education was not happy and their knowledge of FE and the structure of the education system generally is limited. Many worry 'is it for me?' and that they will not be 'able for it' and fear showing themselves up. It is an area where some consider themselves somewhat alien as they see it as the preserve of young people they see as more competent and familiar with the demands of education. According to Vera 'At the beginning you do get a sense of overwhelming [pause] will I be able to achieve this?' Daniel on the other hand was concerned about young people being in the class when he claimed that 'When I saw the young people I said, "is this for me? Am I doing the right thing?" Even though I felt it was a good idea, I just felt I didn't belong there.'

Successfully negotiating this transition into further education and the student role is an identity shift and a major landmark on the road to a changed self-concept.

Another challenge commonly faced by older students is managing established roles, obligations and demands on their time and attention. Many have children, part-time work or elderly parents to consider. Lack of time is frequently mentioned, especially by those with young children, and study and assignments have to be organised at the times least disruptive to family life, often late at night. There is also the awareness that illness of a child or a breakdown in arrangements will result in having to take time off college. A number of periods of unavoidable absence and consequently falling behind are often cited by adults as the reason for dropping out or deferring (Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010, p.115). Some spoke of 'not being able to switch off completely' and having to have their phone on, 'just in case'. Feelings of guilt for not being available to children are common. Also common, however, is the recognition that the children benefit from their parent's participation and the role model it provided. Managing multiple roles is another stressful challenge that is part of

being a mature student. Adult relationships can be strained by such re-negotiation of roles and the change and development in the individual brought about by participating in education has implications for the student, partners and relationships.

While mature students with children complained of not having time for everything and their social life being curtailed, others without such responsibilities said they had no problems keeping up with friends. Some spoke of treating college 'like a nine-to-five job'. Many men spoke of college giving a structure to their day and providing valuable social contact which they greatly missed since becoming unemployed. The social aspect of college was important to all the interviewees.

The first assignment is a major landmark for most mature students. An assignment is graded and carries with it all the connotations of being judged in what for most is a strange or new area, demanding different skills that many feel they are lacking. It is generally a written piece produced on a computer, which in itself may be a big challenge, and many feel that they are exposing what they consider their weaknesses in this area. It takes time to become familiar with the language of assignments and academic work generally. Students sometimes feel dropped in the deep end, where aspects of language, presentation and formatting are taken for granted. The first assignment can be traumatic and important in determining whether a student, of any age, will continue. This is so even in a climate of encouragement and support. Maeve argues that 'When I did so well so well in that, it made me excel at the rest of them. I felt confident, more confident. When I was doing it I was so unsure, am I doing it right?' While Jason points out that 'The exam terrified me. To sit in a room with just a single desk in front of you I thought was unbelievable, Jesus, I was terrified. I'd never done an exam before'.

Success in assignment is a major turning point, contributes to students' self-esteem and validates their academic abilities. It is seen as an acceptance into the student role and student identity and bestows a feeling of entitlement to be in college. It is part of the reconstruction of the self, as Vera believes.

At the beginning, you do get a sense of overwhelming [pause] will I be able to achieve this? And that risk is there. Was it a wasted year? Before, up to now. I mean I know myself I can do this now.

Students speak of coming to grips with the language of assignments and of working out what is expected of them. This represents the acquisition of new forms of cultural and educational capital, which carries with it a revised sense of themselves as capable learners.

A key factor in the students' experience mentioned by all the participants was the support they received in the college. They found the relationship very positive and based on mutual respect. They all commented on the accessibility, friendliness and encouragement of staff and the vital role this played in their success. The flexibility and understanding afforded them with deadlines and assignments when they were having difficulties in college or home was greatly valued and in many cases was vital in their decision to stay. Vera expresses it thus: 'Well, I feel there's great support here, to be honest with you [pause] you can talk to them, they understand your situation'.

Revised self – finding a voice

The revised self is a core concept that emerged from how the participants described the significant change they felt they had experienced as a result of their time in the college.

When asked to summarise what they had got from coming back to education by far the most common response was 'confidence'. Confidence came up first when discussing academic work and assignments but it was soon clear that it extended beyond academic competence into other aspects of the students' lives and was largely responsible for the revised self they reported. Mercer (2007) also suggests that academic and personal growth are not mutually exclusive categories, but inter-related. As so many responses explained their confidence in terms of speaking, saying things and having things to say, I developed the core category, finding a voice, as a conceptual label (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.121) to describe this revised self. Voice is used here to include not just the act of speaking but a sense of agency, respect and entitlement to participate. Finding a voice also has metaphorical connotations of not having had a voice, of speaking up after a long silence and finding that you have something to say. It also implies speaking up for yourself, asserting a claim for recognition and a right to question and participate. It is not only a personal development but it is also social as it is manifested in dealings with others. It describes and symbolises the transformation described in the students' narratives. Jason believes he now has 'Confidence, a hundred percent. Not afraid to speak up or ask questions.' Vera believes that she now can 'voice a viewpoint that I wouldn't have voiced before',

while for Daniel the benefit is that when he is ‘sitting in front of the TV ... you’d understand what’s going on, that’s important. You know what’s going on.’

All the participants recognised that they had changed since starting their course. They were surprised at the change in themselves having come to the college expecting to acquire more or different academic knowledge or skills to enhance their CV or prepare them for employment. These things came as well, but the personal changes were more significant and were manifested in the willingness shown by the students to progress to another course or to HE. These progression options, as well as other significant changes in their personal or professional lives, would not have been considered before.

Finding a voice, speaking up, questioning, knowing what is going on are crucial for the fulfillment of the individual and imply a greater ability for meaningful interaction with others and engagement in society. For Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, (1986, p.134) to be silenced is to be voiceless, selfless and mindless, subject to the authority of others. Tarule (1996, p.276) sees voice as an ‘indispensable aspect of knowing and thinking’ and dialogue as ‘making knowledge in conversation.’ Finding a voice means being able to participate in discussion and ‘making knowledge.’

The benefits of participation in FE are not just for the individuals and their families. The increase in confidence, sense of agency and ‘knowing what’s going on’ mean that these students have a greater ability and willingness to participate in the community and contribute to an enriched public sphere. Finding a voice implies a greater capacity for discussion and the development of a more critical aspect to their reasoning that enhances their functioning as active citizens.

Many adults return to education having experienced a change in their lives, their roles and their sense of identity. Unemployment and grown children leaving home were cited by many of the adults in this study. Time in the college offered them many of the characteristics of a moratorium. West (1996) suggests that education can offer space for adults to experiment with their identities. It is seen as an enjoyable, if sometimes fraught, opportunity for time apart, ‘me time’ which allows for questioning, learning, discussion with other adults and discovering or reclaiming aspects of the personality that had been neglected or submerged. This moratorium provides an ‘in-between’ space, a safe place for the latent self to develop and emerge. This is not a straightforward process but involves several stages or crises, the successful resolution of which mark progress to the revised self.

The mature students in the study acknowledged the key role of family and friends. They mentioned particularly the staff in the college who, as mentioned above, mediate the neo-liberal imperatives of the system and create an atmosphere in which the students felt comfortable, welcome and respected. A supportive environment is not just a fortuitous pleasant extra, but also an essential aspect of negotiating the transition to a revised self.

Conclusion

The increase in numbers of mature students in FE occurred, much like the growth of the system overall, without any stated policies or target quotas. In a time of high demand for places and in a system whose main stated purpose is to prepare students for employment, mature students, especially older mature students, may be seen as less deserving of a place than younger applicants. In this context, it is important to ask how FE staff can formalize a commitment to improving access and success and enhancing the experience of non-traditional students. This could involve considering quotas and liaising with community education facilitators and adult education organizers. At present, these sectors operate separately with very little attention given to cooperation or student progression. The expanding remit of the ETBs should do much to facilitate more coordinated and streamlined provision in consultation with employers, Intreo, and others.

Although there have been policies in place for many years at government and college level which encourage access to HE by non-traditional groups, no such policies exist for FE. Access offices and designated supports for mature students have been successful in attracting mature students and supporting them in HE. FE has not been included in these developments. This reflects FE's second level status and the continuing unsuitability of these structures for what happens in the sector and the urgent need for change.

Recently there has been much focus on the role of FE supplying the skills needs of the economy, addressing unemployment and contributing to economic development (Kis, 2010; Sweeney, 2013). There have also been calls for a stronger role for employers and greater efficiency, flexibility and evaluation in FE. Teaching and learning knowledge and skills for employment are part of the work that is done well in FE. As well as measuring the success of courses by the number who attain employment, evaluation must also include other significant benefits that are more difficult to quantify. These students' stories show that learning for living and learning to make a living need not be incompatible. Their time in FE

has enhanced their lives and better equipped them to address the priority areas identified in the White Paper (Ireland: 2000, p27) which included consciousness raising, citizenship, community building and cultural development.

The realignment of FE offers an opportunity to address the issues facing FE and to affirm the value of publicly accountable, inclusive education and what it has to offer students of all ages. It is vital that the FE sector under SOLAS and all involved in further education in its various forms have a clear vision of their purpose and value and a strong voice in these significant developments in Irish education, in order to protect the values of inclusive further education from being subordinated to the demands of employers and servicing the narrow interests of the free market economy.

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The Social Value of Community-Based Adult Education in Limerick City

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Abstract

This article documents the findings of a qualitative study into the social value of community-based adult education in Limerick City. The article demonstrates that participants experience significant improvements in numerous facets of their lives and we argue that it is crucial that we recognise the multiple and inter-connected social impacts that community-based adult education offers to its participants, as well as to the community in which this service is provided.

Key words: (Social Benefits, Community Education, Community Education policy)

Introduction

It has long been established that public education promotes civic solidarity and social cohesion (Heyneman, 2003). However, European and national policy developments in recent years have created an expanded vision of lifelong learning, one that promotes active citizenship as well as employability. *The Lisbon Strategy* (2000) and *Europe 2020* (cited in CEFA, 2014, pp.3, 9) have promoted this policy shift at a European level, following research that demonstrates that participating in education has a positive impact on peoples employability, income levels and occupation (Carnoy, 2000, Blondard et al., 2002 both cited in Schuller, 2004a, p.3). Nationally, the economic collapse of the Irish economy and the chronic unemployment problem has meant that education and training, especially in the community education sector, is increasingly being offered as one of the ways to reduce Ireland's economic deficit. With policy documents such as *Pathways to Work* (and the *Action Plan for Jobs* cited in CEFA 2014, p.13) the once apolitical and informal community education sector is being increas-

ingly co-opted into the state mechanism. Many could contend that this subsuming of community education into state governance predates the current economic climate, a process that began with the increased neoliberalism of the Irish state throughout the Celtic Tiger years (1994–2008). This increased neoliberalism is evidenced in the imposition of a ‘value-for-money’ managerialism into the Irish healthcare system (Skillington, 2009), community development (Lloyd, 2010) and education (Grummel, 2007). The desire to align community education with government priorities and the potentially negative impact on its original ‘aims of enhancing learning, empowerment and contributing to civic society’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.25) has also been acknowledged.

Individual commentators (e.g. Finnegan 2008, Connolly 2007, Brady 2006 all cited in CEFA, 2014, p.6) as well as the Community Education Facilitators’ Association (cited in CEFA, 2014, p.18) have called attention to the increasing political tendency to reduce community education to an economic rather than social value. The possibility that community education in Ireland could be further depoliticised has also come one step closer with the publication of the *Community Education Programme: Operational Guidelines for Providers* (Department of Education and Skills, (DES) 2012 cited in CEFA, 2014, p.18). These guidelines present a contradictory picture of the role and function of community education in Ireland. On the one hand, the guidelines underline the role of community education in combating educational disadvantage. However, in outlining the intention to develop ‘a cohesive integrated service approach’ the guidelines worryingly add that one aspect of this approach will be to ‘avoid duplication’ (DES 2012 cited in CEFA, 2014, p.18) of services. Such a statement resonates strongly with the managerialism of neoliberalism but also jars with the grassroots ethos of community education and its interest with being ‘community-led, reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community’ (CEN, 2000 cited in O’Reilly 2012, p.9). One way which community educators and campaigners have mooted to challenge this reductionist mind set has been to call for more research to be conducted on the multiple impacts of community education (e.g. The Edinburgh Papers, 2008; Mannien 2009, and Voss 2007 cited in Bailey, Breen and Ward, 2010, p.9). It is against this wider context of a call for more primary research on the value of community education that this research is located.

In 2010, 50,000 participants took part in community education (DES 2011, p. 25). Despite this number very little research has been conducted on the educa-

tional experiences of learners in this sector, with the exception of Slevin (2009), Evoy and McDonnell (2011), Bailey, Breen and Ward (2010) and Bailey, Ward and Goodrick (2011). The data from these studies offers an insight into how community education provides adult learners with a positive learning experience from which they acquire a renewed sense of self as well as an improved quality of life. The main findings from a qualitative research study exploring the social outcomes of community education in Limerick in 2011 will add to this growing body of literature.¹

It is important to acknowledge that Limerick City is the second most disadvantaged local authority in Ireland² with high proportions of unemployment and lone parent households (McCafferty and O’Keefe, 2009 cited in City of Limerick VEC, 2011, p.13). Low educational attainment in the city is often referenced. The Fitzgerald Report (2007), for example, reported that there is significant educational disadvantage in specific estates and in Limerick City as a whole (see also City of Limerick VEC, 2011, p.13; Barrett, Walker and O’Leary, 2008, p.3). Third-level attainment figures also highlight geographic disparity in Limerick City (see for example Humphreys, 2010). Yet, Limerick City also has a strong history in the promotion of learning. Since 2011 Limerick has held an annual Lifelong Learning Festival, which promotes learning throughout life for all and strives to build social capital and identity (Kearns, Lane, Neylon and Osborne, 2013). Adult and community education is a pivotal component of this focus on learning and is provided and/or supported in Limerick City by a mix of statutory, community and voluntary organisations. Limerick City Adult Education Service (LCAES) is located within the City of Limerick VEC³ and is tasked with providing learning opportunities to youths and adults returning to education. The LCAES works in collaboration with community-based groups to provide community-based adult education in 59 locations across Limerick City. In 2011, over 3,000 people participated in such courses, through three distinct and integrated programmes; Community Education, Basic Education Solutions (adult literacy) and Upskill Solutions (further education). Such sig-

1 The study was funded by the Limerick Community Education Network, Limerick City Adult Education Service and the Limerick Regeneration Agencies. The authors would like to acknowledge the support and assistance provided by the Research Steering Group throughout the research process. Additionally, the authors wish to thank those who agreed to participate as interviewees, as without their generosity and input this research would not have been possible.

2 The first being Donegal (Donegal Community Education Forum, 2008)

3 At the time of research the public service education organisation was known as the City of Limerick VEC. In 2013 this entity was reconfigured and is now known as the LCETB (Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board).

nificant enrolment figures indicate that the provision of community-based education offers a significant platform for the aforementioned lifelong learning to the inhabitants of Limerick City. In this respect, Limerick City provides a useful example of how community education can be ‘creative, participative and needs-based’ (CEN, 2000 cited in O’Reilly 2012, p.9).

Methodology

In 2011, a qualitative study of the social value of community education in Limerick City was undertaken.⁴ This qualitative research focus is in keeping with the participant centred philosophy of community education (Connolly, 2004, p.11). Purposive sampling was used to provide conceptual richness (Lindlof, 1995) and a series of twenty-five focus groups was convened in community locations. The composition of focus groups was diverse: including adult learners (past and present, male and female, participating in both accredited and unaccredited courses), family members of learners, community-based adult education tutors, Home School Community Liaison Coordinators, representatives of funders of adult education in Limerick City and support staff for community-based settings. All of the focus groups were approximately one hour in duration and endeavoured to elicit the participants’ views on their experiences of community education, the benefits identified as a result of such participation and the challenges facing the on-going provision of community education.

Ten in-depth interviews (averaging approximately 45 minutes each) were also conducted with current and past adult learners, in order to examine and expand on issues emerging from the focus groups. As a result of the sampling strategy a total of 145 individuals participated in the research. Analysis was therefore based on data reduction and interpretation.

As a consequence of this process of data analysis, four overarching key themes were identified. These themes, though overlapping and reinforcing, were:

- Impact on Individuals
- Impact on Families
- Impact on Communities
- Impact on Wider society.

4 See Power et al. (2011) for the final report from this study.

Impact on individuals

Human capital ‘refers to the knowledge and skills possessed by individuals, which enables them to function effectively in economic and social life’ (Schuller, 2004b, p.14). Attending community education classes can result in improved economic outcomes, which subsequently allows learners to secure better paid employment (McNair, 2002, p.235). Further personal dividends can include decision making skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills and improved communication skills (McNair, 2002, pp.240–241). In this research, the cumulative reported benefits of participation in community education at an individual level highlighted issues around self-image, social contact and involvement, and orientation towards learning.

Poor educational attainment and a lack of interest in schooling were the most tangible effects of the learners’ learning experiences prior to participation in adult education classes, and a common view was that such courses constitute a ‘second chance’ at learning. In addition, a previous failure to understand the lifelong impact of education was identified by a majority of learners in almost half of the focus groups conducted:

Well for me like it wasn’t important at the time you know because you were so young you didn’t understand what education was, but as soon as you start going looking for work you realise then how important it is (Participant, Adult Learner Northside Group).

This (new) recognition of the importance of lifelong learning was attributed to the learners’ participation in adult education courses.

In the context of personal development, previous negative experiences of formal education were generally overridden by the sense of empowerment that arose from participation in adult education. The research process itself provided anecdotal evidence of this, as did the reported accounts of improved communication (e.g. resolution of a long-standing issue with a child’s teacher) and self-confidence (e.g. giving a PowerPoint presentation to 140 people). Many learners expressed pride and a sense of belonging as a consequence of their participation. As one participant noted ‘... you’re bringing life experiences and everybody is bringing life experiences and it’s very enrichin’ (Participant, Adult Learner Northside Group).

The data suggests that community education is having a significant impact on

the progression of adult learners in the city. While there is a definite point of difference between accredited and non-accredited learners, with the former group referring to up-skilling and job attainment and the latter concentrating more on looking for new classes to replace those that were due to end (in order to 'keep busy'), both groups of learners were united in their aspiration to continue their education and the process of self-improvement. In this respect, community based education has enhanced the human capital of the participants. This supports Narushima's (2008) research which found that attending lifelong learning classes for the elderly allowed them to continue pursuing various educational interests. As a result participating in community education can help promote lifelong learning (Feinstein and Hammond, 2004, pp.201–202).

The social benefits of community education for individuals range from acting as an outlet for socialising to actively working towards social inclusion. Participation in classes equated to a sense of freedom for the majority of learners, while the social component appears to enable learners to draw on support from each other. Based on feedback from learners, peer support is subdivided into two sections – things in common with fellow learners and active peer support. Both aspects of this peer support are interconnected and overlap.

Increased identity capital emerged strongly during the fieldwork. For some, it was explained simply as 'having a voice' while others described how they now perceive and present themselves differently. One of the learners explained that she began the classes by introducing herself as a housewife but now refers to herself as a childcare worker. Other female learners referred to the self-satisfaction in realising that they have an identity beyond their parenting role. This is in keeping with Inglis and Bassett's (1988 cited in Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.270) findings that women engage in adult education in order to develop an identity for themselves outside of the domestic role and setting.

A significant finding from the study is that the classroom setting was noted by approximately half of the learners as a venue where personal issues such as loneliness, the impact of suicide and addiction issues etc., can be discussed with other learners (who have become friends), and in this context the learners appear to be offering tangible supports to one another. In this respect, community education had a preventive function; preventing aspects of 'personal and social dislocation' (Feinstein and Sabates, 2008, p.57).

Finally, our data suggests that what begins as a decision to seek out new ave-

nues of socialization, or as a break from the daily routine, ultimately results in the recognition of the impact of lifelong learning, which generally leads participants to enroll in further classes. Their respective educational journeys present community based learners as individuals who have developed a sense of resilience, responding to personal challenges. Through their interactions with fellow learners and tutors they have become empowered through their class interactions to pursue further learning.

Impact on families

The case study in Limerick clearly indicates that the social benefits of participation in community education extend beyond the individual learner to their families. These benefits include; positive influences on children's education; the transmission of a new view of education in the context of a lifelong process; improved family communication and affirmative changes in family dynamics.

The relationship between participation in community education and secondary benefits for learners' children is very apparent in the data. In terms of social benefits, that relationship extends beyond mere parent-child interactions. From examples provided by learners, community education has contributed to effective communication with school teachers and principals, and formal learning being supported in the home environment. Parents report being more confident in their dealings with their children, e.g. helping with their homework. This changing role in family dynamics and personal relationships is particularly pronounced among literacy learners where people adopt new roles thanks to their literacy training. In this respect, community education would appear to be playing a part in not only normalising learning in the family, but also helping to break the cycle of poverty or generational disadvantage experienced by some families. As such, one learner summarised community education as "empowering parents to empower their children".

The data suggests that the adult learners that participated in the research are now cognisant of the need to demonstrate to children and grandchildren that learning is not something that should 'stop at the school gates'. This recognition was raised regularly during interviews with learners. Parents described drawing on their own biographies to act as an incentive for their children to do well at school: '... you would talk to kids more to make sure they went to school cause they would turn out like myself and you don't want that' (Participant, Adult Learner Northside – Literacy Group). There were repeated references made to the role model aspect of engagement in adult education classes. There were

three main components to such a role; that children would see the importance of staying in school now so that they would not have to depend on such classes in later life; that seeing their parents interested in education would influence their own interest; and that learning would be seen as important beyond the boundaries of formal education. Such benefits may have had humble beginnings, but they have gained momentum in the journey towards the most pivotal social benefit, that of breaking the cycle of social marginalisation:

It broke a cycle in my family, you know the cycle of the mother does not work, does not educate herself, you get to a certain level in education and then you go get a job. Like myself I was working at 15, my mother was working at 13 so I was just repeating the cycle and then I was able to break it and education gave me the ability to break that, to realise that there is more (Participant, Past Learners Focus Group).

Improved familial communication was evidenced through a variety of examples. One woman, for example, sat the Leaving Certificate at the same time as her grandson and described how their communication had ‘never been better’, as it gave them something in common as well as providing an opportunity for mutual support and understanding. Learners referred to the fact that adult education provided a communication outlet with their grandchildren that they did not have with their own children. Others described how they have a better understanding of the stress and pressure that their children are under as a result of study and exams (since beginning to do homework themselves) and they ‘aren’t as hard on them’ as a result.

Finally, participation in community adult education is creating new forms of support for learners from spouses and family members, leading to a more equal distribution of domestic chores and responsibilities. In particular for some women, commencing classes was their first time being away from home for decades, thus changing family dynamics. The practical skills attained through classes also affected this dynamic – one man, for example, told how literacy classes meant that he could attend appointments (e.g. with doctors or at the social welfare office) without his wife accompanying him for the first time since they had married. This, in effect, gave him a new sense of independence in addition to freeing up his wife’s time. This shift in dynamic, however, is not always positive. One participant cited the sense of redundancy that his wife experienced when improved literacy enabled him to manage the household bills for the first time in their marriage. The subsequent reversal in their long-estab-

lished spousal roles put a strain on their relationship: ‘she started to feel that I had taken over her job, I suppose’ (Participant, Past Learners Focus Group).

These findings indicate that community education has a profound impact on families. Beginning with the learners, their educational experiences enhance their individual human capital and identity building capital. This level of personal transformation introduces a new degree of bonding social capital within families which can give way to new relationships being forged between spouses as well as between adults, children and grandchildren. These interactions strengthen and support everyone respectively.

Impact on communities

The theme of community was one of the most prevalent throughout the study. Being a member of a community has a physical, psychological, and social connotation for participants (Cohen, 1985). This sense of community in turn yielded a politicising as well as an educational impact on participants. These included: an increasing awareness of social issues within the community; enabling participation in adult education; integrating learners into the community; community engagement and giving back to the community; and increased use of community facilities and resources.

Participants in this study displayed an acute awareness of most of the social issues that affect their communities. Even from the outset of interviews, where experiences of formal education were sought, many stories were prefaced with lines such as “your address is your biggest problem when you’re trying to get a job”. A variety of other socio-economic issues were raised by learners, examples include young motherhood, long term unemployment, crime, drug use and the consequential stigmatisation that is experienced by the entire community. The correlation between class and educational exclusion was identified by many learners, particularly in the context of how opportunities to recognise the talent of people from disadvantaged areas were often missed, thus preventing any effective social mobility. However, there does appear to be a greater overall understanding of the role of education in counteracting social marginalisation. The development of such awareness is important given that Freire (1986) argues that people must be enabled to develop a critical awareness of the world around them and their relationship to it in order to become empowered.

The research findings highlight that community-based adult education is perceived as being “owned by the community” and that it should be kept “within

the communities”. For the majority of learners, basic logistics meant they felt local access to classes influenced both their decision and ability to participate. In this sense community education was a geographically bonded concept. As a result, transportation, costs (e.g. towards a tea kitty) and childcare arrangements were the most heavily cited factors in accessing a course. However, most of these barriers were overcome by community provision.

An important issue that arose in the course of the focus group discussions relates to that of territory; the sense that people belong to “certain parishes” and areas. For some, the range of courses available in the local community limited the educational horizon of local residents. However, the sentiment was quite strongly expressed that adults have a bounded sense of community and “won’t go outside of their own area” (Participant, Tutors Focus Group). Additionally, a number of the learners spoke of how community education classes actually helped them to integrate into the community, which they saw as being extremely important given that they had moved into the community from elsewhere.

There were numerous examples of how participation in classes and the subsequent establishment of informal networks (social capital) and increased self-confidence (an element of human capital), led to increased community engagement. The majority of focus groups recalled examples of where people were involved in activities that were organised by the local community. In these ways, adult learners in Limerick City are offered a number of different opportunities to be active in their local community. These opportunities include the establishment of parent-support groups, nominations to Boards of Management of local schools and signing up to other locally-run activities such as yoga and dancing. In these ways, community education in Limerick City openly facilitates the development of linking capital in the community.

One of the most striking factors to emerge during discussions with learners about their knowledge and use of community facilities was how participation in classes was generally their first encounter with such facilities. This is as an extremely important development in terms of building capacity within a community. Many of the learners spoke of how they had walked by buildings such as community centres, family resource centres and community development projects and had never known what they were. One man, for example, told of how he walked by his local community development centre every day for years on his way to and from work and never even noticed it was there until he began classes. This was echoed in every focus group. The ability of community educa-

tion to raise participants' awareness of the amenities in their community is a less apparent, but valid and worthwhile contribution to any community.

Impact on wider society

The social benefits of community education also extend into the local and national political arena. In this research study learners referred to voting in elections, empowered by the fact that they could read party manifestos and fill out the ballot sheet for the first time. Lobbying to safeguard community education was also cited on numerous occasions, arising from awareness among learners of the link between funding cutbacks and a reduction in the number of classes available. Participating in community education is thus directly and indirectly fostering a desire for social change, which has culminated in political action by some adult learners. Such engagement, in the broader context of civil society, is critical. As Harvey (2014, p.72) contends 'voluntary and community organizations are known to contribute knowledge, expertise, ground-truth and a long-term perspective to the policy-making process.'

The development of an informed social awareness among participants not only inspired forms of political activism, it also contributed to the development of empowered relationships with social institutions. One clear indicator of this change was how the increased personal confidence of learners extended into their relationship with institutions and their interaction with professionals and statutory agencies. Learners spoke of being able to offer opinions (to individuals and agencies) for the first time, in turn feeling rewarded on a personal level, and as a consequence being empowered to continue learning.

Community education classes in Limerick City have also created opportunities for people of different age groups to interact and socialise with one another. The cooperation between mixed age groups who may traditionally have had no previous interactions with one another should be seen as a highly beneficial outcome. It helps create bridging social capital and may reduce ageism and age discrimination as a consequence.

It is important to note that amidst the multitude of benefits cited during the research, barriers to participation in community education were also identified. While some are logistical and easily resolved once classes commence (e.g. sharing lifts), the two most significant barriers are previous educational experiences and financial considerations. Many learners commented on how difficult their formal education experience was and, accordingly, had a degree of fear and hes-

itancy about returning to education: “I’ve met people lately who were carrying this burden around for years and felt desperate about education” (Participant, LCAES Focus Group). In the context of financial barriers, this can be attributed more to costs associated with attending classes (cost of transport, materials, etc.) than class fees per se, which are typically nominal in nature. However, in light of the current economic climate even minor costs can present a perceptible barrier to access and/or participation.

Conclusion

Community education is at an interesting juncture at present in Ireland. Upstream policy developments as well as a national financial crisis have contributed to structural changes in the organisation of community education. However, at a time of economic and social upheaval, it should be equally important to remember the social and transformative – individual and social – abilities of community education. This research adds its voice to recent calls to reiterate the social and radical model of action that community education inspires. To this end, this article has documented the impact that community education is having on Limerick City, by mapping the social benefits of this type of education for its adult learners, their families and communities. From their initial community education experience, adult learners can progress through stages of personal development and confidence to develop supportive relationships with their family members as well as with their peers in the classroom. Moreover, taking part in a community education class is presenting its participants with opportunities to create and sustain social support networks for themselves. All of this has resulted in a better understanding of the processes of change and increased social awareness. In summation, the article demonstrates that adult learners experience significant improvements in their lives which go far beyond any economic impact that community education might bear. To this end, community education is a key community resource and asset which, if allowed to adhere to its grassroots model, will offer a transformative base for adult learners, their families and wider community.

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Social Dynamics in Adult and Community Education Networks: insights from a case study

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Abstract

Implementing network type structures has become a widely appreciated strategy to promote actor-relationships in the field of adult and community education and to coordinate them purposefully. However, there is still a lack of knowledge on how a “successful” coordination of actor-relationships can actually be achieved. This paper offers some clues to answering the question by outlining basic characteristics of social networks with reference to a recent case study from Germany.

Introduction

According to a widely known definition by Mitchell (1969, 2), a social network is “a specific set of linkages among a defined set of actors, with the additional property that the characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret the social behaviour of the actors involved.”

Since the 2000s, the EU’s education policy has made efforts to promote network type structures that facilitate partnerships between institutions or corporate actors (Scharpf, 1997) engaged in the field of lifelong learning (EU Commission, 2000). The idea behind this initiative is that promoting lifelong learning requires not only the efforts of single actors, but coordinated action (Field, 2000). Defining and implementing networks enhancing multilateral relationships between the relevant actors has been identified as an appropriate strategy. Networks are therefore assumed as “manageable” in the sense that the relationships between the actors involved can be coordinated purposefully – this, for example, with a view to objectives such as widening access and developing innovative education and learning opportunities.

Networks have also gained attention from practitioners in adult and community education on an on-going basis during the last decade, although the focus of attention has been somewhat different. While in education policy discourse, networks and partnerships are often linked to the expectation of engaging key actors in the delivery of lifelong learning policy goals (Field, 2008, 41), practitioners in the field of adult and community education appreciate networks more in relation to their actual development needs. Here, networks are often seen as “vehicles” to improve mutual recognition and support and lobbying issues related to adult education and community education, especially in relation to decreasing levels of public funding. The Irish Community Education Network (AONTAS, 2011) may serve as an illustrative example in this context.

The expectations associated with adult education networks are all qualified, as they refer to research findings which provide evidence on the role of networks in the context of educational governance and co-ordination of relevant actors in lifelong learning (Field, 2005). On the other hand, there is evidence that networks do not operate automatically in a desirable way, as they represent complex social relationships with a high potential for conflict. Lyn Tett, Jim Crowther, and Paul O’Hara (2003, 40), for example, point out a number of pitfalls emerging in adult education networks, including diverging motives for participating, diverging conceptions of work and collaboration, fears regarding possible restrictions on participants’ autonomy, necessary concessions regarding the collaboration with non-preferred partners, opportunistic attitudes among actors, and so on. Last but not least, the education policy focus on networks and the public funding that goes with it involves the risk of actors making the creation and development of networks a business in itself, in order to be able to secure public funding (Field, 2008, 43).

All of this suggests that successful networks in terms of enabling actors to collaborate effectively are more of a positive exception than the rule. This leads us to the question in relation to which social dynamics in networks should be taken into account, and how relationships in adult and community education can be managed in order to avoid the typical pitfalls mentioned above. In this article we are going to outline some clues from theoretical reflection on social networks and an empirical case study, which may help to clarify factors and conditions relevant to successful adult and community education networks.

Building on Mitchell’s aforementioned definition, we begin by focusing on research findings on the basic characteristics of social networks. We will high-

light the specific challenges for successfully coordinating actor-relationships in networks. Later, we will draw on the question of how network relations may be coordinated successfully in practice. It will become obvious that creating a multidimensional frame of interpretation, allowing participants to both stabilise and vary their roles and positions within the network, is critically important in this regard. To illustrate this point, we will draw on the results of a qualitative empirical case study conducted in a network of 45 member organisations that has existed in Germany for more than thirty years.

Basic Characteristics of Networks

If we want to find out how to successfully enable and manage relationships in adult education networks, we need an understanding of the basic characteristics of networks and their effects on the individual and collective actions of those involved. For an overview of these characteristics and effects, we refer to readings and reinterpretations of the current state of research, including the work by Borgatti and Foster (2003) and that of Jansen and Wald (2007).

Networks as social capital

A major part of network research is dedicated to exploring how networks impact on the individual and collective actions of those involved. Many researchers agree that the impacts of networks are based essentially on actors' social embedding in a multilateral context of relationships. Building on the basic theoretical work of Bourdieu (1983), this social embedding is often interpreted as "social capital". According to Bourdieu's theory of the three forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural capital), social capital is conceived as a resource in the sense of providing easy access to information and knowledge. On the one hand, social capital can be used as a collective good to stimulate creative and/or entrepreneurial action, achieve results together, improve competitiveness, and build trust for developing group solidarity. On the other hand, social capital can also be used as an individual and collective resource for obtaining power, positions of leadership, upward social mobility, employment opportunities, and so on (Coleman 1996). This latter use of social capital, however, involves the disadvantage of causing strong rivalries and a loss of value as soon as multiple actors occupy the same position. However, both aspects are important in order to understand how actions are coordinated in networks.

Strong and weak ties

Researchers have often referred to how relationships are treated within networks, and which functions are ascribed to those relationships. Building on

Granovetter (1973), a basic distinction is made between “strong” and “weak” ties. In practice, strong ties may take the form of close friendships and (quasi) family-like clique structures. Weak ties, by contrast, are characterised by a lower degree of commitment but also a higher degree of flexibility. Typically, so-called middleman or mediator positions tend to be rather weakly connected to other positions in the network. Strong or close ties in networks form the basis for group-specific forms of solidarity, promoting the emergence of homogeneous social communities that tend to maintain normative boundaries and separating them from other actors and new entrants to the network. On the other hand, weak or loose ties in networks often form the basis for expanding the set of relationships and thus the range of possibilities for accessing information, the accumulation of social capital, and the enhancement of market opportunities and competitive advantages.

Selection and group processes

The emergence of a network as a “defined set of actors” (Mitchell, 1969, 2) is tied to selection processes as well as the rejection of existing and prospective members. In this regard, networks may be distinguished in terms of how these processes take place. Whether or not a tie will be formed is always up to the actors to decide. At the same time, group processes always play a role as well. A “new” actor’s other social ties, and the other networks he or she is involved with, are important in relation to the future development of a network and the selection of actors. This may be a key factor either for intensifying that relationship or for rejecting and terminating it.

Adjustment and contagion

For the actors networks are, on the one hand, relevant environments they need to respond to; on the other hand, they are dynamic entities created and sustained through actors’ mutual exchanges. By their involvement in networks, actors are placed in a situation where they have to respond to the same network environment together with other network actors. This, in turn, favours the emergence of similar practices among the actors and – in a long-term perspective – makes them resemble one another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Furthermore, the fact that actors are involved in an on-going process of mutual exchange causes their characteristics to change over time. Such changes may concern their knowledge, norms, and attitudes regarding certain values – as a result, network actors become increasingly alike in their behaviour. The advantage of this development is that it can help intensify and deepen the transfer of information and knowledge between actors. The main disadvantage is that

declining diversity among the actors diminishes the potential for creative and innovative responses.

Resource access

The prospect of gaining better access to valuable resources (information, knowledge, practical know-how, funding, work materials, decision-making power, etc.) is a key factor for actors to form and develop networks in the first place. Getting involved in networks, therefore, is an appealing option if it involves new access to resources. However, even actors who already have a wealth of resources at their disposal may benefit from getting involved in networks, as this is often associated with a high level of prestige, reputation, and influence, as well as senior coordinating tasks. The combination of different actors in networks favours the development of asymmetrical relationships that may find their expression in varying levels of status and prestige among the actors involved. At the same time, networks enable processes of production and distribution among actors that may ultimately lead to one-sided dependencies and may thus threaten the stability of the internal exchange relationships.

This short overview of network characteristics has shown that the impact of networks on the individual and collective behaviour of the actors involved is complex and ambiguous, and that the actors in turn may themselves have an effect on the further development of network activities by demonstrating certain behaviour. It is hardly possible to give an objective assessment of the behavioural patterns provoked inside and through the network. The meaning and the function that these patterns acquire in and for the network rather depend on the respective network context. We may assume that individual and collective behaviour patterns emerging in a network are most likely to acquire functional meaning and value if they help mitigate hazardous developments in actors' social ties (such as tendencies towards low-level commitment or tendencies towards social closure). These behaviour patterns re-balance the interior dynamics of the network or create a "dynamic equilibrium".

Against this background, one can imagine the challenging task of managing network activities "successfully". It becomes clear, for example, that familiar concepts of organisational management aiming at structural transparency and hierarchical regulation of actor-relationships fail to do justice to the complexity and the actual social dynamics released within networks. At the same time, we are also faced with the question of what managing network activities successfully may look like. In order to get some clues to answer this question we are

going to outline findings from empirical data collected by Matthias Alke in 2011 and 2012. The data collected are part of an extensive case study, which refers to a German community and adult education network.

Case description

The network was founded in 1982 and currently consists of 45 adult education providers. The reasons why this specific network offers a good opportunity to investigate the issue of coordinating actions within networks are the following: First, the network is based on a clear pedagogical mission since its foundation in 1982, championing a kind of adult learning, which is marked by pluralism, openness, and programmes designed to address the needs of adult learners. Over the years, the network has succeeded in continuously reinvigorating that mission, thereby keeping it attractive both for the actors involved and for the relevant environment (participants, grant makers, and other stakeholders). Secondly, the apparent life cycle of the network is evidence of the fact that it succeeded in involving actors on a long-term basis but also in creating the openness required for engaging new actors and enabling others to leave the network. Third, the actors in this network are mostly small public institutions (1 to 3 employees) with limited resources, restricted developmental opportunities, and – as single actors – with marginal political influence. Their participation in the network proves that the network is obviously able to provide its members with benefits in terms of accumulating social capital and accessing valuable resources. This, in turn, suggests that the actors and social ties in this network are coordinated in a manner experienced as attractive by both the weaker and the stronger actors. As a consequence, this network can be considered “successful” – and may hence serve as a model for deeper investigation of the ways in which actions are being coordinated here.

Findings from the case study

In the following, we will refer to empirical data collected by means of participant observation. Observations were made during three one-day “regional meetings”. These meetings of network actors take place on a regular basis; each meeting is hosted by an actor from the region. The regional meetings serve to form sub-networks within the overall network. Despite the obvious differences between these sub-networks, they reveal typical modes of how relationships between actors are enhanced and moderated within the overall network. The observations took place in various sub-networks and were documented in detailed transcripts, partly taking the form of interaction recordings. The detailed nature of these transcripts allows us to reconstruct the interactions

in a way that satisfies the requirements set for critical discourse analysis (Van Leeuwen 2008). We can therefore show how the outcomes and effects of network coordination are both represented and reproduced in the interactions between actors. In particular, the transcripts tell us about implicit and explicit coordination, the schedule of interactions, special discursive elements, and the selection of additional actors as a key element for expanding network ties. In the interests of brevity, we will highlight just a few features of the network in question.

Implicit and explicit coordination

Each of the sub-network meetings is hosted by a membership institution of that sub-network. The sub-networks are free to decide where the meetings take place and which actor of a sub-network is responsible for organising and moderating the event. Despite their autonomy, the sub-networks remain linked to the overall network through the elected general manager. He is the only person allowed to attend all regional meetings, and he has a say in determining the agenda for each of the meetings. At the same time, he serves as a mediator and coordinator. This function comes into play when the general manager shares his knowledge about developments in the various sub-networks, for instance if there are significant deviations between the sub-networks. He will combine this communication with an appeal – more implicit than explicit – to the sub-networks to re-adjust their self-organisation in order to enable a more coordinated development of the network as a whole.

Schedule of interactions

When planning the meetings, actors choose different settings, which serve as a symbolic reinforcement of whether the interactions are open or closed in nature. Two of the observed meetings were held in a seminar room, for example. One meeting took place in an open space that could also be used by other members of the host institution while the meeting was in session. Except for a few minor variations, the schedule for these meetings is always the same:

- Arrival (e.g. shared breakfast)
- Opening (welcome, introduction, fine-tuning the agenda)
- Round of actor introductions and reports from the institutions
- Report about adult education policy trends

- Additional topics
- Wrap-up

What is interesting here is that the standardised schedule takes equal account of the actors' social embedding (e.g. shared breakfast), the mutual affirmation of each actor's characteristics (reports from the institutions) and thus of the valuable resources available within the sub-network, as well as the joint determination of the network's position of power and its possibilities for exerting political influence. This standardised schedule enables the actors both to experience and to reproduce the complex meaning of the network.

Special discursive elements

In our analysis, the term '*discursive elements*' refers to communicative patterns that gain a structuring function within the interaction processes observed at the sub-network meetings. In particular, we would like to highlight three such discursive elements that also seem to have a coordinating function within the network.

One relevant discursive element in this regard is *communicating about the absence of actors*. This is done, for example, by making the absence of individual actors an explicit topic of discussion. Usually, this does not involve any judgment in one way or another. However, the mere fact that the absence of individual actors is generally being noticed and commented on by those present seems to illustrate the normative importance of each actor's commitment to participating in the network. This is also signalled, somewhat more explicitly, by the greetings, requests, and other expressions of interest from absent network actors, which are – in case of occurrence – read aloud to those present by the moderators or other participants at the beginning of a meeting. At the same time, this practice helps placing the current interactions in a broader virtual social network structure, encouraging those present not to regard themselves as a closed group, and to keep in mind the importance of the current interactions for the preservation and development of the network of relationships and communications.

Another recurring discursive element which was observed at all regional meetings is *commenting on what has been said*. Such comments may include assessments, evaluations, or criticism, for example. Through their comments, actors stimulate each other to engage in negotiations of individual and collective views

of reality, value-driven attitudes, and normative orientations. In particular, the “report on adult education policy trends” is often used as an opportunity to arrive at shared points of view regarding the network’s internal and external relations, and to develop shared strategic goals and possible actions regarding the implementation of the institutions’ shared pedagogic mission, in a context of educational governance and funding that tends to be seen as “restrictive”.

Last but not least, *highlighting actor-specific contributions* that are made available as a collective good for the whole network is another special discursive element. Speaking about such contributions (e.g. the collecting and sharing of relevant specialised information, or professional development initiatives by individual actors that are open to all network actors) makes up a significant part of the meetings. Participants recall past contributions in an appreciative way and emphasise current contributions by highlighting the names of the responsible actors. De facto, this means assigning asymmetrical network positions to “desirable” active actors on the one hand and less active actors on the other. When looking at individual interaction sequences in the transcripts, we can observe the factual coordinating effect of this discursive element – for instance when actors discuss the network activities to be carried out in the future, and determine which actors might take the lead in those activities. In this process, we see individual actors coming into the focus of the other actors because of their real or claimed expertise. At the same time, this creates expectations regarding the implementation of actor-specific contributions, which may become a delicate issue for the actors in question, especially if they decline to accept a task. After all, if an actor declines to accept a task, the others will immediately begin to question him: Does he act opportunistically, that is, only in his own interest? Does he really have the expertise he claims to have? Does he live up to the respect the others have for him? In other words, declining to accept a task for the network always involves the risk of losing respect among its members.

Assessment of aspirant actors

In the network we reviewed, actors are selected in an open social situation. This could be observed during a sub-network meeting to which a representative of an aspirant educational institution following Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy (which postulates the existence of an objective, intellectually comprehensible spiritual world accessible to direct experience through inner development) was invited. One item on the agenda was devoted to introducing this institution to the circle of network actors. One crucial aspect of this “admissions interview” was finding out whether this institution would be a good match for the existing

set of actors. The transcript of the interaction sequence shows that it was not so much factual aspects such as programming, leadership structure, quality assurance, or market success that were seen as relevant selection criteria but rather whether the institution's philosophical orientation would be a good match for the network's pedagogic mission, as well as whether the institution was already embedded in a network of other collaborative relationships. What is interesting here, on the one hand, is the open communication during the selection process, by means of which the network also communicates to the prospective member that it expects this kind of behaviour of actors who want to join. Furthermore, the selection criteria communicated to the prospective member provide evidence of the fact that admission to this network is restricted to actors whose orientation resembles the network's pedagogic mission and the values and normative orientations associated with it. A homogenous set of actors is thus preferred over diversity. This aspect is linked to another priority in this network, namely, the strategic interest in forming a powerful lobby. Obviously, the network is interested in recruiting actors who will help expand the recognition of the network's pedagogic mission and thus strengthen and expand the foundation from which the network can formulate its claims for political legitimacy and public funding.

Lessons learned

What lessons can be learned from the above analysis? We now highlight some pointers for practice as well as for policy representatives in relation to the conditions conducive to managing and therefore coordinating actor-relationships in a network successfully.

It would appear that the coordination of actor-relationships within a network becomes easier when the number of actors is reduced. As outlined above, the network as a whole consists of a number of regional sub-networks, which are conducted by residential actors. This makes it easier for the actors to stay in touch with each other and to build strong ties, thus enhancing trustful relationships, mutual support as well as collaborative activities. Moreover, being involved in a smaller group seems to encourage the actors to show their commitment and responsibility. However, decentralisation implies the challenge of sustaining the linkage between the different sub-networks and between the sub-networks and the network as a whole.

Featuring a key position within networks is essential. As shown above, the network features one actor as "general manager" who is allowed to supervise the

regional sub-networks with a view to their integration into the whole of the network. This happens also by introducing a number of general organisational conditions in order to ensure and to facilitate regular and structured communication among the network actors.

Unlike organisations where managers enjoy a formal status as leaders, the role and work of the network manager is dependent on his (or her) acceptance by all actors involved. In our case, the manager appears rather as a moderator who acts in a non-directive form and on the basis of a collective consensus. Coordination therefore emerges implicitly – that is, by pointing out the relevance of certain situations and events, such as deviations, absences, valuable actor-specific contributions, and the like. Actually, coordination occurs when actors themselves respond individually or in concert to the network situations and events highlighted in the course of interaction.

A successful coordination of actor-relationships promotes the internal and external empowering function of a network. Our analysis has shown that the network is appreciated by the actors in two respects: On the one hand, the network provides the benefit of embedding the actors in a community of shared values, mutual respect and support (internal). On the other hand, it facilitates the strategic social formation of the actors with regard to the network's position of influence (external) in the wider context of educational governance. Both sides of coordination can be seen as an interconnected dynamic, which strengthens the empowering function of the network.

Involving new actors is therefore a challenging event. Though networks regenerate themselves over time by taking leave of actors and involving new actors, these events always affect the network as a community of values and strategic alliance as a whole. As shown in our example, the prospective member has to pass a demanding assessment carried out collectively by the actors of the sub-network – this with a focus on whether or not the values and orientations of the prospective member matches the values and strategic perspectives important to the network.

These – of course preliminary and case specific – findings from our analysis show that the coordination of social relationships in a network context is more likely to function or even succeed if the network management takes account of the complexity and ambiguity of relationships or, in short, the social dynamics in a network (Jütte 2002, p.307). More concretely, our analysis proves the

importance of developing forms and ways of managing actor-relationships, which stimulate the actors' response to each other and to the values and strategic perspectives shared in the network context. Such forms and ways of managing are apparently characterised by making discreet use of formal communication and by providing discursive elements to which actors can correspond to autonomously. It could therefore be worthwhile for practitioners in adult and community education, as well as educational policy makers, to bear in mind that initiating and developing networks successfully does not depend on structures and management systems, as in organisations. Success rather depends on the competence or even "art" of stimulating the actors' discourse and by promoting coordination in the course of interaction.

Finally our case study reveals also a critical point worth mentioning here. On the one hand the network can be seen as successful in terms of continuity and social stability, which is also a result of promoting the homogeneity of the actors involved in the network. On the other hand the network suffers from a certain lack of flexibility and innovativeness, in particular with regard to the take up of new ideas and themes in order to stimulate the actors' discourse and cooperation.

So, for practitioners as well as for policy makers interested in developing networks in the field of adult and community education it could be a rewarding task to consider the question of how much homogeneity and heterogeneity between actors is necessary to improve social stability and to provide a network with "other" impulses. For example, it could be a good idea to launch networks, staffed with actors from diverse educational sectors (e.g. schools, community centres, vocational training, universities) in order to promote joint planning of education provision as well as initiatives for professional development. Activities like this could contribute also to a better alignment of the different expectations of policy makers and practitioners concerning the role and function of networks in adult and community education. It will be a special task for further investigation and research to provide evidence in relation to this question.

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An Investigation of the Guidance Counselling Needs of Adults with Dyslexia in the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI)

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Abstract

The experiences of adult learners with dyslexia is an under-researched area in Ireland at present. This article will discuss the findings from phase one of a mixed methods research study, which is investigating the guidance counselling needs of clients with dyslexia within the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI). The research is underpinned by a social justice paradigm and a pragmatic methodology. So far, an online survey has provided insights from AEGI guidance practitioners on the complexities of provision to clients with this 'hidden' disability. The 'lived realities' of adult learners with dyslexia is currently being explored in phase two of the study.

Key words: (adult guidance counselling, adult learners, dyslexia, social justice)

Introduction

This article will discuss the findings of the first of two phases of an empirical research study. The overall aim of the study is to investigate the guidance counselling needs of clients with dyslexia in the Irish further/adult education sector in order to inform the development of a framework for provision within the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI). Guidance is now strongly positioned as a tool for “assisting citizens to overcome gender, ethnic, age, disability, social class and institutional barriers to learning and work” (OECD, 2004, p.70). The study is motivated by a social justice perspective where the elimination of barriers to full participation in education, employment and decision making for adult learners with dyslexia are prioritised (Irving, 2005; Young, 1990). This is mirrored in the study’s methodological framework where a mixed methods design is being used to address issues of social justice in educational research (Denzin, 2012).

Firstly, in this article, the policy context is examined and literature related to adult dyslexia and adult guidance is critiqued. The overall methodology and the methods of data collection and analysis are then outlined. The findings from phase one, an online survey with AEGI guidance counsellors, will be discussed. The article concludes with a discussion of the overall findings to date and their implications for practice.

Policy context

The social justice movement has been concerned with civil rights issues related to ability, race, gender, sexuality and social class (Young, 1990). While there is a general agreement, regardless of political and ideological background, about the importance of social justice, there are different ideas about how to embed social justice within the career profession (Arthur, 2008). The distributive model of social justice is perhaps the most prominent in current policies (Irving, 2005). For example, 'lifelong learning' is framed by a distributive social justice discourse with a focus on responsabilisation, flexicurity and career management skills (CMS) in Ireland and abroad (DES, 2000; Grummell, 2007; Sultana, 2012). There is an onus on individuals to engage in lifelong learning to increase their productive potential (Irving, 2005).

The distributive model has been criticised for implying that a person's value is connected to his/her economic and productive potential where the main barrier to employment is oneself, rather than social context (Arthur, 2008; Grummell, 2007). Accessibility and inclusion issues are pronounced in disability, education and employment policy discourse (DES, 2000; DES, 2001; European Commission, 2010; OECD, 2004). However, Irving (2005) argues that the frequent use of words such as 'inclusion' simplifies complex social issues and does little to create an inclusive society. There has also been a move towards a social model to disabilities, which is linked to the distributive perspective and highlights the importance of equal opportunities (Irving 2005). This model asserts that excluding individuals with disabilities from any aspects of life is a form of ableism and a violation of human rights (AHEAD 2008). Ableism is now recognised in legislation of most western countries (Loewen and Pollard, 2010).

The primary role of the AEGI, established in 2000, is to provide an impartial guidance service to adult learners to support their education progression (DES, 2000; NGF, 2007). The adult education sector has seen a dramatic participation increase in the past few years, as adults who previously may not have considered going back to education are now returning due to the economic recession and

unemployment (Aontas, 2013). Furthermore, the target groups in the AEGI have recently been extended from three identified groups of adults over the age of 18, to fifteen groups from the age of 16 upwards (NCGE, 2013), leading to stretched resources in the sector (Hearne, 2012). Additionally, there have been major policy developments in the Irish sector, such as the establishment of Educational Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS, and the disbandment of FÁS, which may have significant implications for the adult guidance sector and adult learners themselves.

Dyslexia – A hidden disability

A number of core issues in relation to dyslexia have been identified in the literature, such as difficulties establishing prevalence, negative emotional, educational and vocational implications for adults living with dyslexia, issues of disclosure and accessibility to assessment and support services.

Dyslexia is a contested and controversial term that lacks a universally accepted definition. The definition adopted in this study is that put forward by the Taskforce on Dyslexia (DES, 2001):

Dyslexia is manifested in a continuum of specific learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling and/or writing, such difficulties being unexplained in relation to an individual's other abilities and educational experiences. Dyslexia can be described at the neurological, cognitive and behavioural levels. It is typically characterised by inefficient information processing, including difficulties in phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming and automaticity of basic skills. Difficulties in organisation, sequencing and motor skills may also be present (DES, 2001, p.28)

As a result of a multitude of dyslexia definitions, it is difficult to establish its prevalence (Miles, 2004). However, it is often suggested that approximately 5–10% of the general population have dyslexia (DAI, 2014; Tanner, 2010).

Dyslexia is interchangeably described as a 'specific learning disability' and a 'specific learning difficulty' (DES, 2001). While there is a preference amongst educationalists in the UK and Ireland to use the term 'difficulty', dyslexia is identified in British and Irish legislation as a disability (Disability Act, 2005; Equality Act, 2010). The terms 'dyslexia' and 'specific learning disability' are often misleadingly treated as synonymous despite 'specific learning disabili-

ties' including considerably different conditions to dyslexia, such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (Hughes et al., 2009).

As support for secondary school students with dyslexia has been in place in Ireland since 1975 (DES, 2001), it seems likely that adults with dyslexia who went to school prior to 1975 may not have received appropriate support in their education. Students with specific learning difficulties make up 57% of all Irish students with disabilities and this is by far the largest sub-group in Higher Education (AHEAD, 2012). However, these figures refer only to students who have disclosed a disability verified by medical documentation, and who have registered with the disability service in their institution.

In light of dyslexia being described as a 'hidden' disability (Tanner, 2010), it is important that educational stakeholders, including guidance counsellors and literacy tutors, have sufficient knowledge of dyslexia and a good referral system (Herrington 2010). However, there is a risk of reinforced marginalisation of individuals with dyslexia, as they generally are required to both disclose their disability and provide documentation of a diagnosis in order to access support services (Loewen and Pollard, 2010). Nalavany et al. (2011) estimate, from their international literature review, that circa 50% of adults choose to disclose their dyslexia in the workplace.

Furthermore, not all adults with dyslexic difficulties are formally assessed, which may limit their access to support services (Loewen and Pollard, 2010). In Ireland, a formal psycho-educational assessment is made by an educational psychologist. However, a dyslexia assessment currently costs approximately €450, with a waiting time of 3–6 months, with no state provision for adults (DAI, 2014).

Additionally, there is an ongoing debate about whether or not to diagnose dyslexia, and if dyslexics should be distinguished from poor readers or not. For example, Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) argue that *all* struggling readers should receive needs-based educational interventions, regardless of diagnosis. Similarly, the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) recommends that the term 'dyslexia' should be replaced with 'struggling reader'. They also state that a dyslexia diagnosis can be disempowering and give a "false sense of comfort" (p.45). On the other hand, Hughes et al. (2009) state that "adults with dyslexia are entitled to this knowledge about themselves", and that the information from a diagnosis can be empowering (p.37).

A study on effective adult literacy teaching found that dyslexia does not impact on the learning progress (Brooks et al., 2007). However, if one considers other aspects, several benefits of receiving a dyslexia diagnosis have been identified in the literature, such as increased access to support services and psychological wellbeing (AHEAD, 2009; Tanner, 2010). Furthermore, the *Review of ALCES funded Adult Literacy Provision* (DES 2013) includes a recommendation for the development of clearer guidelines for working with adults with Specific Learning Difficulties, and as an initial step in this process a review of existing guidelines within the context of adult literacy provision is necessary.

In Ireland, adult guidance counselling predominantly employs a humanistic Rogerian model, encompassing three areas of guidance, namely: personal/social, educational, and vocational (NGF, 2007). In relation to the guidance needs of clients with dyslexia, the literature suggests that dyslexia has an impact on all three interlinked areas. For example, a person generally must fail before accessing dyslexia assessment services, creating feelings of failure, which may lead to low self-esteem and depression in adulthood (Borgfors, 2008). The importance of *re-framing* perceptions of self for individuals with dyslexia have been highlighted (Tanner, 2009). There are also a number of studies indicating that adults with dyslexia show significant differences in educational and vocational choices, compared to adults without such symptoms (e.g. Taylor and Walter, 2003). Additionally, adults with dyslexia have been found to often have dysfunctional career trajectories, moving from job to job to avoid difficulties associated with their dyslexia (Bell, 2010).

In relation to adult guidance interventions, adult learners with disabilities may require different types of guidance and perhaps more time, compared to adults without disabilities (AHEAD, 2008). Some specific career development theories have been proposed, such as Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2002) and career constructivist/narrative approach (Savickas, 2013). However, this is in relation to disabilities in general, not dyslexia in particular, and it is argued that more research in this area is urgently needed (Fabian and Pebdani, 2013). The first phase of data collection in this study investigated this topic from the perspective of AEGI guidance counsellors in autumn 2012.

Methodology and Methods: Mixed Methods

This mixed methods study is underpinned by pragmatism, allowing the researcher to use the methods that work best (Morgan, 2007). The appropriateness of mixing quantitative and qualitative methods with their associated,

and often portrayed as conflicting, epistemologies, is a frequently debated issue (Creswell, 2009). The pragmatic paradigm, however, offers a dualism where the 'either-or' choice is rejected, prioritising issues of how to deal with and address practical and social problems, such as dyslexia understanding (Morgan, 2007). For example, pragmatists take an 'intersubjective' stance, which means that one accepts that a single reality exists but that every individual has his/her own interpretation of that reality (Morgan, 2007).

Both guidance counsellors and adult learners with dyslexia are identified as key stakeholders in this study and a mixed methods design has been stated to be particularly suitable to address issues of social justice as it allows for the inclusion of both "voices" (Creswell, 2009). Whilst social justice generally is more closely associated with qualitative methods, quantitative methods are important, not least because we live in a society where public policy predominantly is informed by quantitative data (Creswell, 2009).

The first phase of data collection involved a quantitative online survey (Survey Monkey), investigating the topic from the AEGI practitioner's perspective. This provided data related to their experiences of providing guidance counselling to adults with dyslexia, and a snapshot of current issues in practice. The findings are also informing the second phase of data collection, where in-depth data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with adult learners about their lived experiences associated with having dyslexia.

Whilst surveys are less flexible than interviews, an online survey was used in the first phase, as the entire target population could be included in an efficient and cost-effective manner (Hewson and Laurent, 2008). A limitation of using a quantitative method is that the data has less context and depth and with low response rates, the reliability can be compromised (Babbie 2013). However, as the target group was a relatively small group (64 guidance counsellors), a number of qualitative responses was also collected in the survey which generated more in-depth, contextualised data. Further, a high anonymity level can be achieved using online questionnaire software, such as Survey Monkey, which can reduce bias and increase openness and honesty (Hewson and Laurent 2008).

The online survey addressed the following key thematic areas: experience of working with clients with dyslexia, referrals and diagnosis, and professional practice. It was distributed to a purposive sample of 64 AEGI guidance counsel-

lors nationally (Babbie, 2013). Despite numerous reminders and best efforts to encourage responses, the response rate was 41.5% (n=27). It is possible that the survey was sent out during a particularly busy time for the AEGI practitioners. However, it is also possible that the response rate was poor due to the stretched resources in the AEGI (Hearne 2012). Whilst numbers appear low, a response rate of 41.5% is above the average for online surveys (33% according to Nulty, 2008) and the data still provided valuable insights into the experiences of the guidance counsellors, which has informed the data collection in phase 2. Each variable was analysed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative data from open-ended questions were subject to content analysis, yielding specific themes.

Phase 1 findings

In relation to dyslexia prevalence and diagnosis, the majority (80%) of the AEGI guidance practitioners estimated that less than 10% of their clients have diagnosed dyslexia. In contrast, the respondents' estimation of proportion of clients with *suspected* dyslexia (non-assessed) varied more, from between 0–10%, to as many as 41–50% of their total number of clients.

The type of support most frequently sought by clients with dyslexia is educational guidance only. The next most frequent is a combination of social/personal, educational, and career guidance. The least common sought is information only, and career guidance only. Just over half (57%) of the respondents believe that clients with dyslexia require specialised guidance interventions such as referrals, re-framing, and more careful explanation of information. However, others argue that *more* guidance, rather than different guidance interventions, is needed for this client group.

The main issues facing clients with dyslexia are thought to be difficulty in accessing formal assessment services, feelings of failure and stigmatisation. Furthermore, non-disclosure of dyslexia may lead to non-suitable guidance interventions, restricted access to support services and special accommodations, low self-esteem and educational disengagement.

In terms of inward referral to the AEGI service, all respondents indicated that they have supported clients with dyslexia through the self-referral process. The second most common source of referrals is ETB (formerly VEC) literacy services (78%). The two services which most of the respondents have referred clients to are the ETB Literacy Services (77%) and external assessment/diagnostic

services (68%). However, the majority of respondents consider the referral services for clients with dyslexia inadequate (77%), and provide reasons such as literacy services not being specialised in relation to learning disabilities, a lack of local services, financial barriers to formal assessment, and lack of resources post-diagnosis.

Several benefits of receiving a diagnosis have been identified, such as 'putting a name' on the difficulties, access to appropriate support services, and elimination of other potential causes of learning difficulties. Overall, 81% of the practitioners would encourage a client to receive a diagnosis where dyslexia is suspected, but the financial barrier to accessing formal assessment services appears to be a major issue for clients in the AEGI. A number of facilitating factors to accessing formal assessments were also identified by the respondents, namely; financial assistance, guidance counselling, follow-up support post diagnosis, a trusting client-practitioner relationship, appropriate referral procedures, awareness of services, and a willingness to be assessed.

Only 19% of the respondents use pre-screening psychometric measures for clients with suspected dyslexia. Some do not regard themselves qualified to use such tests and others feel that they can be limiting or that general guidance interventions are more effective. Similarly, standardised psychometric assessment tools were generally not considered suitable for clients with dyslexia. Dyslexia friendly guidance information material is provided by the respondents to different extents, ranging from 'Never' (14%), 'Only when specifically requested' (14%), 'Sometimes' (62%) and 'Always' (10%). The majority of respondents (75%) agreed that there is inadequate professional support for guidance counsellors working with clients with dyslexia in the AEGI. Whilst some of them have accessed CPD training (57%), new training is needed and should be available to all AEGI services.

Finally, 62% of the practitioners indicated that they do not use specific approaches when working with clients with dyslexia. Of those who do, some of the approaches mentioned are the narrative guidance counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and person-centred guidance counselling. However, these approaches are not always used exclusively with clients with dyslexia but also with the general client population.

Discussion of Findings from Phase 1

The variation reported in the survey in relation to prevalence rates of clients in the AEGI with *suspected* dyslexia appears to concur with previous research (Miles, 2004). This may be related to the fact that the issue of dyslexia has only been addressed in the education system in recent times and some adults with dyslexic difficulties may not identify as dyslexic (DES, 2001). Furthermore, as dyslexia is a *hidden* disability the guidance counsellor needs to be familiar with presenting difficulties if the client does not disclose his/her dyslexia (AHEAD, 2008). One survey respondent argued that literacy difficulties are not necessarily caused by dyslexia. It is possible that attitude towards dyslexia may also impact on respondents' estimations of prevalence.

The AEGI practitioners in the study indicated that educational guidance was the most frequently requested type of provision by clients with dyslexia. This may partly be explained by the fact that some AEGI services have been found to limit their guidance provision to educational guidance, rather than providing a holistic service with personal/social, vocational, and educational guidance (Philips and Eustace, 2010). However, the findings did not reveal whether there are any differences in the types of guidance adults with or without dyslexia require. Furthermore, as a combination of personal/social, educational, and vocational guidance counselling was identified as the second most frequently sought type of guidance, this would suggest that most services indeed do offer a broad range of guidance to clients with dyslexia.

Whilst the issue of *more*, rather than *different* interventions for clients with dyslexia emerged, the knowledge base of guidance practitioners, appropriate referrals for assessment, learning and support services are also essential (Bell, 2010; Fabian and Pebdani, 2013). Additionally, re-framing negative associations with learning and of the 'self' has been identified as pertinent in both the literature (Tanner, 2009) and the findings from the survey.

In relation to the issue of diagnosis, there are several positive implications for the individual to receive a formal assessment (Tanner, 2010). The benefits of a diagnosis that emerged include: being able to '*put a name on*' the difficulties, access to support services and special accommodations in higher/third level education, and elimination of other potential underlying causes. An indirect benefit for the family of the client was also identified as dyslexia often is hereditary and a diagnosis of one family member may help explain difficulties that other family members may experience. In contrast to current debates on the

negative effects of labelling individuals as dyslexic (e.g. Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014), receiving a diagnosis was described as ‘putting a name on the difficulties’ and the respondents believe that this is important for adult learners. This will be explored further in Phase 2 of the study from the perspective of adult learners with dyslexia).

The respondents of the survey also identified several barriers to accessing formal assessment services, such as the financial implications for the client and the lack of local services. Furthermore, the findings also indicate that there is a lack of follow-up support post-diagnosis, which is regrettable as this is described as crucial for individuals with dyslexia (AHEAD, 2008). Additionally, advocacy is recognised as a core guidance competency (NGF, 2007) and one practitioner stated that the guidance counsellor is in a better position to advocate for more support in adult education if the client has a formal diagnosis of dyslexia.

However, dyslexia is a *hidden* disability and approximately 50% of adults choose to disclose their dyslexia in the workplace (Nalavany et al., 2011). This is particularly unfortunate considering the negative implications of non-disclosure identified in the survey findings and the literature, such as: inappropriate guidance interventions, limited access to support services, reinforced low self-esteem, and restricted career and educational progression (e.g. Loewen and Pollard, 2010). In terms of inward referrals of clients with dyslexia, 78.3% of the AEGI practitioners respondents have received clients with dyslexia through the ETB (formerly VEC) literacy services, which may be an indication that literacy students are now accessing guidance services to a larger extent than previously (Philips and Eustace, 2010). However, keeping in mind that dyslexia is a hidden disability, it is important not to assume that all dyslexic adults have literacy issues or that all literacy students have dyslexia. A good referral structure and strong linkages with local services is vital for guidance counsellors working with clients with dyslexia (AHEAD, 2008; NCGE, 2013). However, as the findings from phase 1 indicate, referral services are inadequate and thus reinforce difficulties for clients with dyslexia. Specifically, there appears to be a lack of specialised services locally for adult learners with dyslexia and the respondents suggest that the literacy services are equipped to deal with literacy issues in general, but not always dyslexia in particular. Brooks et al. (2007) on the other hand, suggest that dyslexia does not impact on the effectiveness of literacy teaching.

Some of the survey findings demonstrate that the practitioners use the model that works best, based on the experiences or problems of the client rather than

the client's ability. There is a lack of research in relation to the most suitable guidance approaches to working with disabled clients, which needs further attention (Fabian and Pebdani, 2013).

Finally, the respondents in the survey expressed the need for more specialised referral services, more relevant training and practitioner support and more time to address issues properly in the guidance process. Correspondingly, a lack of training, time, funding, and support are the main barriers to implementing social justice guidance interventions in professional practice (Arthur, 2008). In addition, with new policy changes in the further education sector, there may be more challenges for guidance counsellors in supporting adult learners with dyslexia if additional support services are not in place for cross-sectorial delivery.

Conclusion

This study is positioned within the Irish adult educational guidance sector (AEGI) during a time of significant changes in the provision of further education. The AEGI guidance counsellors' experiences elucidated in phase one of the research study provide an insight into the complexities of provision and the challenges, barriers, and facilitating factors related to their work with clients with dyslexia. The core issues include financial and structural barriers to accessing assessment services and specialised services post-diagnosis for learners in further and adult education. More CPD training for adult guidance counsellors in the area of specific learning disabilities is crucial, as the hidden aspect of dyslexia requires an understanding and awareness of dyslexia related issues, such as the emotional, educational, and vocational impact of dyslexia on adult learners. Whilst the literature suggests that strong linkages with local services, such as literacy services, is vital for guidance counsellors working with clients with dyslexia (AHEAD, 2008; NCGE, 2013), the respondents of the survey indicated that the current referral structures are inadequate. The necessity for more collaborative, structured referral systems across the different services in further and adult education appears to be a significant issue that needs to be addressed.

Finally, the issues that emerged in phase one will be explored in more depth with adult learners in phase two of the study, which is now underway. Rich and contextual data is now being collected through a number of semi-structured interviews with adult learners about their experiences of living with diagnosed or suspected dyslexia.

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SECTION TWO

Case Studies on Improving Practices

Making Conferences Human Places of Learning

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Abstract

Open Space Technology is a cumbersome name for a participative conference model that enables dynamic inclusive engagement and challenges traditional, highly structured hierarchical conference formats. Based on self-organising systems, (Wenger, 1998) Open Space Technology conferences have an open process, start with no agenda and empower the most equitable outcome determined by those attending. This article describes the author's participation in an Open Space Technology conference, discusses the principles underpinning Open Space Technology methodology and considers its application in adult learning engagement settings.

The Traditional Conference and Open Space Technology

A conference is a structured, hierarchical formal meeting of people with a shared interest. A conference is organised primarily as a plenary event with some opportunity for questions and breakout groups. People generally go to conferences to hear one or more speakers but more often to meet others, that is to network. Generally, most people who attend conferences, except for the presenters, are passive receivers of information and conference proceedings do not issue for a protracted period. Often when asked about a conference attended, people recall a person or persons they met during the coffee breaks as a highlight from the event, or information collected in a side discussion. Open Space Technology suggests that such chance meetings should be the focus of the conference process.

Harrison Owen popularised Open Space Technology as a method in the 1980s in response to the stifling nature of traditional conferences. However, Owen did

not copyright or trademark the intellectual property of Open Space Technology and encourages its free use. The very nature of the process challenges the hegemony of control, expertness and hierarchy of traditionally organised seminars and conferences. Open Space Technology is open, participative, and egalitarian. Young people adapt to Open Space Technology as a method without question, while people familiar with control and hierarchy initially feel uncomfortable with its liberating possibility.

Open Space Technology works best where, according to Corrigan (2004), there is:

- A real issue or question of concern
- A diversity of players
- A complexity of elements
- Presence of passion (including conflict)
- A need for a quick decision.

Each person attending an Open Space Technology conference brings with them the responsibility to be fully present, openly participative, and totally inclusive. No delegate should leave an Open Space Technology event saying “I didn't get an opportunity to say something”, or, “I didn't know what they were talking about”, etc. etc. This is because within Open Space Technology, participants have control over their own actions and the opportunity to maximise their involvement, contribution, and learning at all stages during the event.

My First Experience of Open Space Technology

Some time ago, I received an invitation to a one-day conference on the theme “Exclusion in Local Development: the Challenges” to be held in Athlone, County Westmeath. The fee was modest, the topic interesting, and I was free. There was no programme in the invitation, just a paragraph about the topic to be addressed, a start and finish time, that lunch was included, and that it would be a participative event. Even though I noted the lack of a programme, I had trust in the agency running the event and I was keen to learn more about exclusion, so I went. That event introduced me to one of the most challenging group work methods I have experienced – Open Space Technology.

When I arrived at the venue, about twenty minutes after due start time, I had expected to be able to slip in to the back of the conference while somebody was speaking. Instead, I entered a big room where about eighty people were seated in a semi-circle. People made room for me. I had missed the introduction so I was picking it up as it went along. There was no one making a keynote address, there were no seated rows, no top table. This was not as I expected.

The conference facilitator spent the first thirty minutes of that day inviting people who attended to come forward, share with others what aspect of the conference theme they wanted to discuss, write the topic briefly on an A3 sheet, and append it on the conference wall. After thirty minutes, thirty two discussion topics were put forward addressing a range of current concerns relating to “Exclusion in Local Development”. Some people suggested more than one topic, some suggested none, but we were all intent on the emerging process of evolving an idea into a discussion topic. Each person who proposed a discussion topic was invited by the facilitator to put their name on the A3 sheet as an indication of their commitment to have this topic discussed, to lead the discussion as necessary, and to prepare a report on the discussion for the conference proceedings on that day. When all the topics were listed, the facilitator announced that now the conference had an agenda drawn from the people who were committed enough to attend and share the reason they were there on the conference community wall. So, the first step in Open Space Technology is to encourage people to populate the conference community wall with the topics they want to talk about during the time available. In the list, I saw topics that interested me.

Next, the facilitator invited all who had suggested topics to meet at the community wall to share, combine, and amend their topics as necessary in order to form a programme of workshops for the day. This step is called the ‘market place’ and provided an opportunity for topic proposers to meet and barter with others who proposed similar discussion topics. This might sound chaotic but in reality, it works because people want their issue discussed and will naturally barter to get their issue on the conference programme. Following this step, there were fourteen discussion topics on the wall. These were to become conference workshops.

The primary role of the facilitator in Open Space Technology is to protect the assigned time and space for the agreed workshops to take place. Each of the fourteen workshop topics was assigned a space and a time throughout the day. Now, a conference programme designed by those attending had emerged.

Meanwhile, the rest of us networked informally over tea and coffee that is always on-tap in the community cafe at Open Space Technology events. The facilitator invited us back to the conference community wall to review the list of workshops and to sign up for the workshops we wished to attend. If people wanted to attend a number of workshops that were on at the same time, they were encouraged to do so and to move from one workshop to another as they wished. Such delegates are called 'bumblebees' because they move from discussion to discussion, cross-fertilising ideas and sharing information. We all know that at every conference there are those who do not go to any formal sessions. They sit in the cafe or stand in the hallways chatting with others. Such delegates at Open Space Technology events are called 'butterflies'. They flit around informally and make valuable contributions from the margins. I attended a number of workshops on that day led by people who were passionate about their topic. I enjoyed the freedom of being able to move from one discussion to another as my interest was tempted. The whole event was dynamic and interactive.

While the workshops were going on, a person, selected by the workshop participants in each workshop, recorded the discussion and immediately wrote it into a pro-forma conference report in a dedicated media room (three networked laptops and a printer). At this event the report was finalised, printed and distributed to delegates before they left. In more recent times, the conference report is emailed to delegates on the same day. In this way, the voice of the delegate is kept intact from their expression to publication.

That conference was eighteen years ago. Since then I have trained in Open Space Technology methodology and used it widely. I have used Open Space Technology in rural and urban settings, with small and large gatherings of people, in a local community centre and in Africa. I have used it in schools with young people and at university level with academic staff. It has always worked and always will, as long as there is openness to the outcome of people's unfettered interaction.

Principles of Open Space Technology

Owen (2008) notes that the organisation of village meetings in Southern Africa inspired Open Space Technology. In African villages, family huts are organised in circles around a central village fire. When people need to discuss a concern, they come together around the fire. During long village discussions, there is an ebb and flow of activity as people come and go to their family chores and farm work. Similarly, Open Space Technology encourages active participation

in workshops particularly through the 'law of two feet'. This law invites people to move from workshop conversation to workshop conversation, or from workshop conversation to coffee shop, etc., as they please. The 'law of two feet' gives people permission to be free in whatever space they are in, and makes Open Space Technology events dynamic and never boring.

There are four principles that govern the Open Space Technology workshop conversations. These are:

1. Whoever comes are the right people
2. Whenever it starts is the right time
3. When it's over, it's over
4. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened at that time.

These four principles give the workshop freedom to proceed with whoever shows up, to start when they are ready, to finish when they are done, and to be content with the outcomes. It means that the workshop is not controlled by organisers who were not at the workshop, or that the workshop has to continue even if there is no energy in that space at that time. If no one turns up for the workshop, the convenor can go to another workshop, or, they can write up their views on the discussion topic as a workshop report and have it inserted into the proceedings. In that way, nobody is excluded; the minority view is heard equally.

When the workshops are finished, the delegates reconvene in plenary to wrap up the event and receive the conference proceedings. The process of inputting workshop reports immediately and producing the proceedings in the view of all attending is a powerful and energising community effort. Because of the energy, participation, and the anticipation, I have yet to see people leave early from an Open Space Technology conference. The strengths of Open Space Technology are its simplicity, its flexibility, and its productivity. It requires one highly skilled facilitator and a commitment to seek a positive outcome in equality and inclusiveness. It does not require sophisticated facilities or a high level of administration.

Open Space Technology is a self-organising system that starts with no agenda, is an open process, and empowers the most equitable outcome. I have seen young people convene their own workshops, people with literacy difficulties dictate a

workshop report to a volunteer scribe, and people who never attended a conference step forward and lead a workshop, because they wanted to get that topic discussed. I have seen proceedings produced on the day of the conference and discussed at a community council, parish, or development group meeting the next evening. In Virginia, Co Cavan, one hundred and ten local rural people had a one-day conference on rural issues that affected them, in Clare a community council had a national conference on services for older people in the community, in Dublin twenty four young people used Open Space Technology over a double class period to discuss justice for shantytown residents in South Africa, and in Nigeria religious missionaries discussed good practice in handing over their mission to local religious. Open Space Technology was and is used by scientists to discuss scientific theory, by technicians seeking technical solutions, by managers looking for better systems, and by business owners seeking customer feedback. In summary, Open Space Technology has shattered and reconstructed my illusions about conferences.

The only time Open Space Technology does not lead to a positive outcome is when the attendees allow themselves to be disempowered by an external force; that is, when the outcome is already determined.

The Open Space Technology Concept in Adult Learning

Best practice in adult learning mirrors the practice of Open Space Technology. Peer-to-peer problem focused collaboration, seeking positive outcomes, is central to effective community education. When people meet in a spirit of openness and diversity, the potential for learning is significantly enhanced. Open Space Technology provides a structure for the community of learners to identify their learning need and a process by which learners can be empowered to address that need. The democratic nature of Open Space Technology ensures that imposed learning outcomes do not divert the learning journey to predetermined ends. Open Space Technology is an ideal model in informal learning settings where the outcome is not predetermined and can give people the confidence to progress into more formalised learning. In more formalised settings, the Open Space Technology method can be adapted for specialisation but will always retain a holistic perspective. Where it has been adapted to specialised situations, it has accelerated deep learning and advanced productive learning. Open Space Technology welcomes innovation and variation. Many adaptations have been made across cultures, specialisms, and locations. As a method, Open Space Technology is constantly evolving and offers possibilities within community, adult, and further education settings. While Open Space Technology

invites a number of variations, such as incorporating technical experts, facilitating participants with disabilities and accommodating online interactions, it provides a deceptively simple way for people to interact and learn from each other.

Conclusion

In this article I have described the Open Space Technology methodology to demonstrate how it can optimise participation, inclusion, and learning within a constructivist context. Open Space Technology can be adopted for wider application in community, non-formal, and formal learning settings and offers a standard template for conferences and seminars. In my view, Open Space Technology makes conferences human.

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- Visit <http://www.openspaceworld.org>. This is a global community resource, managed by a volunteer webmaster, supported over the last ten years or so by a number of helpers and contributors, and linked to a number of other Open Space community gathering points and resource sites. “Membership,” online and around the world, is open, informal, self-selected — and active.

Visit http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm or http://chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/?page_id=1515 or <http://transitionculture.org/2008/03/21/12-tools-for-transition-no10-how-to-run-an-open-space-event/>. Tool #10: Details on the steps in planning an Open Space event.

From Tablet to Tablet, from Mesopotamia to Galway

KIERAN HARRINGTON, GALWAY & ROSCOMMON EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD

Abstract

iPhones and iPads are bringing significant changes to the way in which people communicate with their families, friends, colleagues and with the outside world, and how they access information, carry out work tasks and interpret and incorporate the non-alphabetic symbols and signs that represent daily realities. Additionally, many primary and secondary schools in Ireland have now replaced traditional textbooks with iPads loaded with the same textbook material, thus putting parents at a disadvantage if they are not familiar with the technology. This paper reports on the introduction of the iPad into an adult basic education classroom in which students were provided with a tablet which they used as a literacy tool for reading and writing, as well as a method of communicating digitally, of participating in digital social networks, and of keeping up with new social models through the use of various applications.

The Traditional Conference and Open Space Technology

At Galway Adult Basic Education Service (GABES), our primary rationale for incorporating iPads into the education setting was to respond to the duty of keeping adult students in touch with these new methods of communication. Limited access to learning opportunities leads to limited opportunities in life in general (Leu et al., 2004), and limited access to information, now predominantly accessible through digital literacy, defined by Glister (1997: 6) as ‘the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide variety of sources when it is presented via computers.’ This limited access not only disadvantages people as far as seizing life’s opportunities is concerned (Leu et al. 2004), but also impacts on matters of life and death (if we consider the area of health literacy, for example).

Focusing on the area of work and work skills in an era of ubiquitous digital communication, it is especially worrying that those without digital literacy may be left on the wrong side of the *digital divide* and are likely, 'to have their opportunities for getting work curtailed,' and their progress in their present work hindered (Bynner et al 2008). In a report published by the National Adult Literacy Agency in 2013 on distance learning, it was found (ibid: 6) that many of the students surveyed, who were either unemployed as a result of the recession or looking for work, 'felt vulnerable ... because of anxieties about their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.' The report recommends (ibid: 64) that 'distance learning staff respond rapidly and innovatively to changing demands of policy and new literacies.' The recent OECD adult skills survey (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) on literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments also refers (2013: 46) to 'limited knowledge and experience using the given tools of technology' as a further complication of the process of problem solving.

iPad project review

Feedback on the contribution of the iPad to group literacy classes was sought from the students by means of a questionnaire and a group discussion. The tutor and the course coordinator were interviewed, classes observed, the blogs posted by the students were analysed and attendance registers were monitored closely.

Participants

All six group participants were long-term unemployed. They attended two weekly sessions of three hours as part of a programme known as Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), which was introduced in 2005 by the then Department of Education and Science, with the aim of providing a longer and more intensive literacy programme to adults who are educationally disadvantaged. The participants, in groups of six to eight students, attend six hours of tuition per week over a 14-week period. ITABE is the only Irish literacy programme in which the students' progress is monitored and assessed, using a standardized framework.

In the case of this specific project, the two weekly sessions were delivered by two different tutors. One session was delivered in the traditional manner. In the other session, each student was provided with an iPad.

Participant feedback

The participants had different reasons for attending the course, but improving basic literacy and IT skills was relevant to all students. Some spoke of feeling excluded: “I always felt left out ... everyone was talking about computer things ... my children and friends.”

Others wanted to access further education and learn new skills in order to enter or re-enter the labour market. William, a thirty-year old unemployed male, for example, said, ‘I need to be able to go into a company and say I can do this.’ Those who were parents mentioned that they wanted to be able to supervise their children’s online activities. One of the latter commented that before the course, when her children spoke about iPhones, iPods, iPads and the Internet, it felt like they were speaking a foreign language.

On the more specific question of the use of new technologies in the classroom, some participants said that they were initially reluctant to engage when iPads were first introduced. Mary, a fifty year old female, admitted that she didn’t see a connection between the iPad and reading and writing, while William¹ said he ‘didn’t see any place outside the classroom for computers for me ... my mind was shut ... but now I see lots of opportunities.’

A blog (which was set up by the class via the iPad) posted by one of the participants reveals the progress, both at the level of the technology and core literacy:

We are using iPads now – it feels great to be part of something new. We are able to download our blog so it looks like an app. I never in a million years thought that I would be writing things like that and using words like that. It makes me feel good to get an iPad every class – cause I’m worth it. We help each other using spelling apps and we check who has looked at our blog – we take turn reading comments.

Thomas, a forty year-old unemployed male stated that he, an avid movie goer, once introduced to iPads and social media, began to tweet, blog and access movie reviews which enhanced his literacy skills. Prior to this he would ‘take a chance’ on a movie; now he not only does research on-line and reads reviews in advance, but he also writes his own reviews and engages in blogging and tweeting about movies.

1 Pseudonyms are used for reasons of confidentiality

On a broader interactional scale, the ITABE students reported a sense of relief and success at being able not only to engage in activities that seemed beyond their reach, but also to engage in them collaboratively. The group bonded more easily through their collaborative work with the iPad and through the close contact of sitting around a table together. This is a significant development in light of our usual experience with IT classes, in which strong learning communities are difficult to establish using PCs in the normal computer room layout.

Tutor feedback

The tutor identified the iPad as a tool to support new opportunities for teaching and learning and acknowledged the need to develop not only an educational project but also one that would be creative and personally relevant to the students' lives. In a preliminary session, the learners and the tutor discussed how new digital literacies might influence their present lives and futures socially, educationally, personally and economically. The tutor thus gauged the learners' knowledge and experience of, and feelings towards, new literacy, bearing in mind that making a connection between people's everyday practices and classroom topics and themes allows for a closer fit, making the learning both relevant and useful.

The tutor commented on how the use of the iPad changed the three interactional patterns of the classroom: between teacher and students, students and students, and between students, materials, and resources. Working together with the teacher in a context of increased classroom interaction gave more scope to the students to express their life experiences and utilise them as material in the classroom. As far as the interface with materials is concerned, on the educational level, the user-friendly mobile iPad embodied new digital multimodal skills and integrated them with traditional reading and writing. At the level of practicality, one piece of hardware functioned in a multipurpose capacity.

Significantly, the device and apps, apart from promoting multimodal semioticity at the educational level, also used the same software and hardware symbols as other ubiquitous digital devices. As one student said: 'that one there the box yoke with the arrow. It's the same on all the camera ones!'

While there was a greater sense of ownership and personal control of the iPad, the level of collaborative learning amongst the students also increased. The social networking sites and the blogs were negotiated collaboratively and students reflected on the concept of permanence in public writing and how that

increases the needed for careful editing and critically reflective reading. The new techniques, new apps, new ways of doing things were shared more readily than they would have been in the context of the traditional cold and cluttered IT room.

The students embarked together on tasks such as creating their own blog, and were eventually contacted by students of a similar school in the United States (The Thornhill Education Centre, Kentucky). Both sets of students were able to take a virtual stroll around both centres using the camera facility on the iPad, and by the final weeks of the ITABE programme, they communicated with one another regularly. The students used the iPad to write and send local histories of the Galway region to the American students. This greatly improved the cognitive aspects of the students' reading and writing skills.

Coordinator feedback

The course coordinator reflected on the affective, cognitive, enactive and socio-economic aspects of the project. The students' confidence and self-belief increased as a result of being trusted with the iPads – literacy students frequently have had negative experiences in formal schooling and bring this negative schema with them when they join adult literacy services, which are often delivered in old decrepit buildings. The coordinator compared the positive effects of the service moving to a new building with state of the art of facilities, to the introduction of the iPad: the students felt – to paraphrase one of them – that they were worth it. The coordinator also made the important point that to get the full benefit of the iPad in the classroom, it not only had to be used as a literacy tool in developing and improving basic literacy, but the full range of its possibilities needed to be engaged in order to develop the semioticity of digital literacy.

The coordinator pointed out that many of the digital activities introduced developed the students' core reading, writing and numeracy skills. They wrote and received messages on the iPad and used apps to help them with maths operations. Additionally, they had to develop skills of critical reflection when they filtered for publication the messages that they received on the blog.

Two of the students have made particular progress socio-economically: one finding work as a buyer, using touch-screen technology, another finding placement work in data entry. Two other students reported enactive progress: one volunteering with a local homework club, and another joining the university

access programme and reporting that he was the most advanced student as far as new technologies were concerned. The students also began to use their new skills outside the centre. For example, when the group was on its way out to meet a local writer, one of the students suggested taking the iPad, and then proceeded to take notes and record some of the meeting with the device.

Reflection

In GABES, equal priority is given to building confidence and building basic cognitive skills, and each gain feeds off the other. Success, for example in the everyday basic skill of writing one's name, leads to a gain in confidence and the concomitant enthusiasm to tackle other tasks, which in turn leads to greater self-esteem and general confidence. Such gains were significant and developed in line with the achievement of managing the mechanics of the iPad, using it as a literacy tool, using apps and gradually availing of the full range of capabilities that the iPad offers. Of course, the experience of participating in social networking activities such as blogging, maintaining a Facebook page, and above all, using one of these ubiquitous hand-held smart devices, brought a sense of belonging to the fast changing world.

The students' attendance also greatly improved and a new sense of enthusiasm was noticed after the introduction of the iPads. Such an improvement is quite normal in the centre after the introduction of innovation. However, unlike normal attendance patterns, which, as we have noticed, usually re-establish themselves when the novelty wears off, good attendance was maintained.

The centre is careful not to equate any educational gain with socio-economic gain, and certainly does not promote the idea of *literacy equals jobs*. However, the examples noted in the coordinator's reflection above demonstrate that such socio-economic progress is possible.

Even though we stress the importance of new workplace multimodal digital literacy and semiotic systems in our education reports to higher authorities, questions always come back with regard to the "real" progress in "real" literacy, referring to the development of core reading and writing skills. Such questions are asked on the one hand by governmental organizations understandably concerned about value for money and the conversion of literacy education into job acquisition, and on the other hand, by more conservative managers and practitioners who worry that core basic skills will be neglected. Some tutors in the centre put forward the valid point that such a basic exercise as handwrit-

ing could be forgotten. However, the iPad, just like the book or the newspaper, is a reading tool, and, just like the pen, it is a writing tool, and while it will take time for it to be accepted as such and for educational philosophies to converge, industry and commerce forges ahead without inhibition. Adult students must be prepared.

There are, of course, as pointed out above, benefits for cognitive development. Writing postcards using an app not only practices digital skills, but also hones discourse and genre awareness. Other specific examples that demonstrate core skills practice and progression include blogs on homophones, analysis of twitter language, and statistical analysis of blogs and tweets – all aided by the personal iPad. The students, the tutor and the coordinator reported on improvements in core reading, writing and numeracy skills and these were recorded in the ITABE assessment. For example, in the ITABE assessment section on the conversion of common fractions into percentages, it was reported that an app was utilized successfully to help the students with this operation.

Limitations

The economic issue is an obvious concern. Not every adult literacy service can afford to buy a suite of iPads for group use and even if the money was available, other considerations apply. For example, a suite of 10 iPads would cost €5,000, which equates to approximately 111 classes (3 one-hour classes a week over a 34-week adult education calendar).

Although increased attendance has been cited as a benefit here, the downside was that attendance at the other ITABE class (where a more formal approach was followed), fell off. This has implications for the teachers involved, as students will perhaps look on the formal classes as being boring by comparison. Such an issue could be resolved by classroom contracts and group management.

As with any innovation, the acceptance of change can be a barrier. Evans-Andris (1995) concluded after an eight-year research period, that the main reaction by teachers to computers in education was that of avoidance. Winnans and Brown (1992), Dupagne and Krendl (1992), Hadley and Sheingold (1993), Rosen and Weil (1995), Robertson et al. (1996) and Mumtaz (2006) all investigated the reasons why teachers avoid embracing new technology and found that it all came down to a difficulty in accepting change. Total integration of the use of iPads in the classroom beyond this pilot stage will thus depend on the management of change.

Conclusion

Every human being is born with the facility of acquiring the complex system of communication known as language through social interaction in early childhood. However, ways of graphically representing oral language have been invented – they did not evolve through a process of natural selection. Writing systems are generally thought to have begun in Mesopotamia (Ancient Sumer) in 3200 BC, in China in 1650 BC and in Mesoamerica (Zapotec in Mexico) in 650 BC. Even before then humans were making basic graphic signs (knot records, pictographs, notches, hatch marks, pebbles, etc) to represent language, in order to satisfy the human need to store information. Ironically, new digital communication turns graphic developmental evolution on its head as we are now again in a phase where non-alphabetic semioticity is ubiquitous, as the reference by one of our students to “the box yoke with the arrow” evinces. Similarly, there has been a development from pen, paper, and book to PC and laptop and from there to iPads and iPhones. The latter actually marks a return to pen and paper type mobility, unobtrusiveness, and greater sense of ownership, evidence of which we see on a daily basis.

We have seen clear benefits as far as cognitive, affective, enactive, socio-economic development are concerned, and importantly in the development of critical reflection. The iPads have helped the students learn to read and read to learn. However, there are also economic, logistical and human resource issues, and limitations which need to be weighed up by adult education managers. Notwithstanding the benefits and the difficulties associated with introducing the iPad into adult education, the one irrefutable determining factor for adult education managers and tutors is that iPads and iPhones are not going away: they are here to stay.

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SECTION THREE

Book Reviews

Critical Pedagogy in Uncertain Times: Hope and Possibilities

SHEILA L MACRINE (EDITOR)

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, NEW YORK, 2009

ISBN: 978-0-230-33956-9

This edited collection gathers together thinkers on education as diverse as Paulo Freire and Maxine Green. In many ways, it provides a beacon in the darkness that is overcast on education since the financial collapse globally. It shines a spotlight on the impact of disaster capitalism on education in the USA, mainly, but it is exceedingly timely in Ireland as we hurtle down the same road under the guise of customer satisfaction on the one hand, and the instrumentalism of meeting the needs of the economy on the other. The collection starts with a foreword by Stanley Aronowitz, a long-term critical educator, who has seen the trajectory of education throughout many other market failures with little regard for the impacts on marginal populations. He concludes that this volume is a necessary guide for any kind of optimistic resistance to the prevailing blind faith in the market.

This blind faith in the market prevails in spite of the obvious failures in the various boom and busts of the 20th and early 21st centuries. This exerts enormous stress on teaching and learning in higher, mainstream and adult education to become more pragmatic and skills-based and less intellectual and critical in order to prepare students for their place in the labour market. This is a feature we have direct experience of here in Ireland, with the underlying assumption that unemployment is due to a skills deficit, rather than a shortage of jobs. Even within the logic of the market, this makes absolutely no sense, as a skills shortage, under the law of supply and demand, should lead to higher wages and terms and conditions of work. Yet we see very little depression of wages for an oversupplied market, for example, banking and law, and absolutely no enhancement of wages for care workers, retail and hospitality personnel and so on. Indeed, the minimum wage is under extreme pressure with the argument that it makes Ireland uncompetitive. Yet minimum wage is hardly a living wage,

and it further impoverishes the workers in this austerity economy.

Henri Giroux, in his chapter on the attack on higher education, argues that the primary task of educators, students, community activists and political projects is to challenge the ascendancy of cynicism and anti-democratic tendencies of the neo-liberal ideology. He holds that it is vital to make the connection between education and democracy at the very least. This is the fundamental reason why intellectual engagement is central in order to enable people to develop a critical consciousness. Maxine Greene, further, holds that imagination has a crucial role to play in that intellectual process, that of consciousness.

Imagination is what imparts a conscious quality to experience and the realisation that things do not repeat themselves, that experience should not be expected to be uniform or frictionless. Moreover, experience is enriched and stimulated through live encounters with others... (p.142)

As a feminist adult educator, I know the part that imagination plays in personal and social development. Indeed, it is the capacity to imagine another world that enables change for emancipation. The mantra of austerity politics, *There is No Alternative*, clearly demonstrates a distinct lack of imagination. And imagination is a crucial dimension of critical pedagogy, in order to re-frame oppressive or regressive pressures exerted by the uncertain times of today.

Powerful voices are represented in this edited collection. Giroux's chapter could be compulsory reading for all adult educators working in HE, with his analysis on the assault on the field that is felt almost as keenly in Ireland as the USA. Sheila Macrine asks Ira Shor, *What is critical pedagogy good for?* (pp 119–136). And the kernel of his response is to make the connections between knowledge and power. Instrumentalism aims to shift knowledge from this connection with power to endless neutral information. Peter McLaren and Nathalis Jaramillo explore the role of critical pedagogy, Latino/a Education and the politics of the class struggle, while Donaldo Macedo delves beneath pre-packaged democracy, particularly focusing on the ideological propaganda of USA politics and the so-called war on terror, so that many US citizens cannot tell myth from reality. While this may be far away from Ireland, yet this type of propaganda seamlessly shifted the responsibility for the economic disaster in Ireland from banking and monetarism, to the public service and vulnerable citizens.

The main flaw with this collection is the almost total absence of a feminist anal-

ysis, a glaring omission, and one which needs to be addressed if critical pedagogy is to genuinely respond to the damage that neo-liberalism does to the whole field of education. Nevertheless, this is a powerful read. One of the major benefits of being a reviewer is that I read with an eye on other readers, particularly adult educators, rather than simply for my own learning. I know how a book or article can play a fundamental role in critical education. Critical educators don't always need the classroom: books like *Critical Pedagogy in Uncertain Times: Hope and Possibilities* are essential for creating the vision for the alternative. Yes, there IS an alternative.

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Transformative Learning and Identity

KNUDD ILLERIS

ROUTLEDGE ABINGDON, OXON, 2014

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This is a fresh and extremely helpful mapping of the contemporary themes that informs how self-identity can be firmly framed within Transformative learning. It stretches beyond the realms of mere concept and attempts to bridge what has been for too long the missing link between Transformative learning and application. This is a book that demonstrates the importance of paying attention to the conditions and demands placed upon the individual learner within a high 'risk globalized liquid' society.

Illiris explains that the previous studies of Transformative learning have been restricted by being posited within an adult learning environment. He is a strong advocate of this liberating model being open for anyone. He expands the boundaries of age, cultural and social diversity.

Illiris begins with the essential bedrock of knowledge and research currently available to inform the all-important questions of how and why human learning mechanisms operate within a contemporary context. He purposefully intends from the beginning of the book to bring the key tenets of Transformative learning and identity together. This requires a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from the wealth of knowledge that historically has developed from our understanding of learning psychology, adult learning personality, clinical psychology and later sociology. Fundamentally, each of these disciplines explores how the individual relates to self and manages their own existence and the increasing external pressures that contemporary society places upon them.

This has led Illiris to structure the book in three sections. The first five chapters are devoted entirely to the concept of Transformative learning, and give an overview of theories and models that have contributed to this discipline

Illiris keeps the focus on application. He extensively draws upon the work of Jack Mezirow in an attempt to explain the key tenets of this theory. He justifies the concentration on the changing meaning schemes and meaning perspectives that Mezirow contends stem from our socialisation in childhood. This is key to setting the tone of identity, and lays the foundation for Knudd to draw upon the contributions of child psychology and development. He sets the scene for the practical outworking of changes in meaning perspectives agreeing with Mezirow that it is not merely enough to process a mental change, but this must be transparently applied in order to satisfy change has taken place. One of the outcomes of engaging in this process is raising self-awareness. He discusses how adult education plays a significant role in this process and used Edward Taylor to explain the core elements of Transformative learning in relation teaching and education. This lays out the credentials necessary to embed the process within institutional structures that too often ignore this key aspect of such important self-development and relegate it to 'soft' subjects.

Framing the chapters in this way gives Illiris an opportunity to develop his thinking around what is transformed by Transformative learning. For this he draws largely upon the work of Paulo Freire and hints towards the application of liberation through such a process. This is particularly interesting for practitioners, academics and researchers to begin to explore ways to map how this might begin to make a difference to individuals and communities who are vulnerable, disenfranchised and oppressed. It is an area that perhaps the book could have expanded upon even further.

These chapters form the bedrock of the book as Illiris unfolds the various approaches taken within a global perspective and gives an exacting account of the various working definitions of Transformative learning. The jewel in the crown is chapter three. For anyone who is seriously involved in providing safe spaces for individuals to engage in a Transformative learning journey, this chapter brings together the approaches in chronological order that have informed change-oriented learning.

Knudd closes this section with a serious attempt to define transformative learning in terms of self, personality, identity and biography. This whets the appetite for the reader to engage in the following section on 'identity'.

This section particularly looks through the lens of Erik Erikson's concept of identity and his model of 'epigenic' human development. The importance here

is to draw upon the key principles that Erikson implies, that of the concept of adaptation, where the individual can successfully be involved within current structures of society and begin to change what they find wrong. Illiris goes deeper into the psychology of understanding identity and the complexities of fitting life challenges together and thus making sense of one's existence. This is where Knudd's model of identity development and change within a Transformative learning framework lends itself towards providing some coherency and clarity to the individual. This helps them to join the dots and make sense of their world and the world around them. It presents the challenge of how they have the propensity to actually begin to change the things they perceive as wrong and oppressive.

Illiris has creatively laid the context for the climax of his book that addresses key questions around theory and the practical application of his model. He draws attention to context and definition especially looking at regressive Transformative learning and providing a vehicle to steer a way out of this milieu. He explores hard issues of motivation and defence within Transformative learning. He probes further the essence of personality and competency issues and he takes a brief look at Transformative learning within formal institutions and the workplace. Knudd concludes his book looking at current trends and future perspectives with a keen eye on the spaces where his model of identity and Transformative learning may occupy and agitate further discussion and exploration.

Knudd has very successfully knitted together the threads of identity and Transformative learning. He has woven these into a rich tapestry that both informs and reminds one of the roots of learning processes. His model brings out the richness of the potential of applying theory to practice.

I would recommend this book to those who are cognisant of their own Transformative learning journey, and who are struggling to find ways to evidence both macro societal and micro community and individual change that has occurred. I believe that a possible way forward to build upon this book would be to take each of the identifiable aspects of self, the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional levels of existence, and to critically reflect on how these relate to Transformative learning journeys.

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Men Learning through Life

EDITED BY BARRY GOLDING, ROB MARK AND ANNETTE FOLEY

NIACE LEICESTER, 2014

ISBN: 978-1-86201-828-0

In some respects the title of this book seemed like a misnomer as it might have been entitled “Men Not Learning through Life” – such is the level of exclusion of some men and boys from the formal education system. It contains some shocking statistics on particular groups of boys and men who are adversely affected by educational preclusion in diverse international contexts. These particularly include men of all ages who are beyond paid work for a range of reasons, such as: early school leavers, unemployment, disability and in age retirement. Many of these problems stem from early age aversion and exclusion from formal education. They are often associated with social class, poverty and other forms of disadvantage.

The editors have amassed a formidable range of contributors from across the globe. These are overwhelmingly from an academic and higher education background and this gives a clue to the intended readership. Persons with an interest in research, teaching on masculinity and students in relevant higher education courses will be attracted to it. The standard of writing and structure of the book is very good throughout. Albeit that some writers adopt an overly academic technical style that takes a bit of reading, I found myself having to re-read some sentences several times in order to get the meaning. Nonetheless, I can truthfully say that I found something of interest and new learning in every chapter.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one provides a critical analysis of the international research evidence around men’s learning. A number of themes are examined; these include health and wellbeing, men’s literacies, the need for places and spaces for learning to take place beyond paid work at different ages and stages and in community settings.

Part two has seven articles, each focused on men's learning across seven nations in three continents Europe (UK, Ireland, Portugal and Greece), Australasia (Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand) and Asia (China). The reasons for choosing these countries are not entirely clear. The editors recognise that what they are providing is only a partial snapshot of men's learning for life across the world. But it would have been interesting to have included material from North and South America, former eastern bloc, Islamic and African countries. This could have provided a better picture of worldwide developments. As it stands the book could be accused of being too Euro and Australasia centric. Perhaps these are topics for another book!

Personally, I found two chapters particularly interesting. The first was the paper by John Macdonald in part one entitled "Men's health and wellbeing: Learning through the life course". It provides strong evidence about the *social determinants of male health*. Health and illness can no longer be reduced to biological functioning or malfunctioning, or, indeed, to personal behaviour. Macdonald argues that there are links between diseases, such as diabetes or cardiovascular problems, and social context. The Australian Male Health Policy is funding the first national male health study, consistent with a social determinants approach, which will follow boys and men over the lifespan. This is based on the belief that many of the contextual influences on people's health start in early childhood and develop and are enhanced or diminished by their ongoing life experience. The world literature on the subject helps to show that health consists of positive interactions with our total environment: familial, school, community, political and physical. Managing these interactions well makes for strong health, whereas lack of good interactions with these factors in our environment, especially if these difficulties accumulate, has a deleterious effect on our health. It is important to stop thinking that health is restricted to what goes on in hospitals and through health service provision. The lifecourse perspective encourages seeing "learning for health" for men as having to do with creating positive environments which allow men not only to learn the facts about health, but also to acquire skills and confidence to navigate through life's changing circumstances. Much of this skills acquisition goes on in non-formal and informal learning environments such as men's sheds.

There is a clear argument drawn from research on men's learning and wellbeing that lifelong learning, including incidental learning delivered through learning spaces and opportunities that cater for the different needs of particular groups of men, develop capabilities through the development of friendships, social

participation and learning new skills that, in turn, develop men's agency. These benefits are significant for partners, families and carers as well as the health and wellbeing of the men who participate.

The second paper which really spoke to me was chapter seven by Annette Foley and Barry Golding entitled "Men and boys: Ages and stages". This looked at the problem of disengaged youth and particularly the negative impact of leaving school early. Many of the men who now participate in men's sheds have negative recollections of school that have prevented them from seeking to gain qualifications beyond their school years and have effected their perceptions of formal education all their lives. The authors argue that with the current issue of boys withdrawing from school, at risk and at odds with the school system, the potential for boys today to face negative perceptions which are carried throughout their lives is a significant issue for education policy makers.

The chapter then goes on to describe a couple of Australian examples of where men's sheds have partnered local schools in providing non-formal education to boys at risk of dropping out of school and getting involved in the criminal justice system. These intergenerational programmes showed that the mentoring relationships with men can provide boys with positive emotional, social and cognitive benefits.

The chapters on Ireland, Greece and Portugal demonstrate just how badly the recent global economic downturn has affected these countries. Men of all ages, particularly unemployed men, have been very much affected by the crisis. Too frequently, the governments concerned have adopted a neo-liberal policy agenda and have focused too strongly on work related learning programmes to the exclusion of other more informal learning opportunities which could have impacted positively on social, family and community relationships and the mental and physical wellbeing of participants.

The book concludes with a useful discussion and conclusion paper authored by the three editors. It picks up major themes. It points to just how much social and economic change which has taken place in the countries concerned in recent years, the changing roles of men, their under participation in higher education and the importance of learning beyond paid work. It observes that, despite a growing concern about men's participation, the opportunities for men to participate in informal and non-formal learning is quite limited and in decline. One of their most pertinent findings is that certain forms of education can

(and do) have the unintended consequence of turning boys and men away from learning, thus adversely affecting men and the wellbeing of their families. One of their overarching conclusions is that those men of all ages who stand to benefit most from lifelong and lifewide learning are those least likely to access it, particularly if packaged and presented in a manner which is patronising from deficit models of provision. It concludes from their research that the most effective learning for most men with limited prior experience of learning is informal, local community-based, which builds on what men know, can do and are interested in.

BILL LOCKHART

Forensic psychologist and Hon Secretary of the Irish Men's Shed Association.

How to be a brilliant FE Teacher: A practical guide to being effective and innovative

VICKY DUCKWORTH

ROUTLEDGE, ABINGDON, OXON, 2013

ISBN: 978-0415519021

This book is presented as a friendly guide to being an effective and innovative teacher in post-compulsory education, offering insights and challenges for both the new and the experienced teacher. It arrives at a time when Further Education (FE) in Ireland (as elsewhere) is undergoing rapid and sometimes unsettling change, with expanding administrative workloads for teachers and an increasingly technocratic view of their role. In this context, I approached this book with a certain unease, not helped by the title of the book. Firstly, I dislike acronyms, so to find one in the book title was not promising. In addition, I grew up in a time when humility was a virtue much admired (if not practiced!), so the idea of aspiring to call oneself a “brilliant” teacher did not sit easily with me. Most importantly, however, I wondered what a book like this could offer that might help teachers in the current climate. The last thing they need is to be told how much better they could do if they worked much harder!

My concerns proved unfounded. The book provides a very well rounded overview of the Further Education scene at the present time from a teacher’s point of view. It is underpinned throughout by a conceptual and theoretical framework which values human interactions as central to effective teaching and learning. This is a model of professionalism which I believe teachers will find affirming. Early on, the book explores some policy and legislative developments which have driven the changes in Further Education, linking these to the social and political environment from which they sprang and helping to make sense of them. It argues convincingly that teachers should be aware of this wider background which affects their learners’ lives as well as their own workplace, and that they would find such awareness empowering. While she describes the UK situation, there are sufficient parallels to be of interest to the Irish reader.

Subsequent chapters deal with practical issues and questions that will be of interest to new teachers, but which also remain challenging and relevant for all teachers. For example, in the chapter entitled “Who are the learners?”, the author provides a broad overview of the diversity of learners in FE, and of the important role the FE teacher plays in creating an environment where learners’ creativity and self-awareness will flourish or decline. She highlights the need for equality and inclusivity in the classroom to cater for this diversity. She encourages the readers (practitioners) to evaluate their own practice, proposing activities and reflections which might help in this exercise. She suggests ideas as triggers for this evaluation, ideas which might also be useful for improving practice, and she illustrates these by use of case studies.

In this way, the author uses a number of techniques and approaches to try, not only to engage the reader, but to make the book a useful reference and work-book for the teacher. I found some of the approaches more enjoyable than others, but I was certainly engaged throughout. And this, perhaps, is the very point of the book; throughout, the author rightly emphasises the need for the “brilliant” teacher to use a variety of methodologies in her/his lessons so as to cater for the various learning styles of *all* students. And this is what she succeeds in modelling in this book.

Subsequent chapters are laid out in a similar manner, and deal with issues such as: How can I become an inspiring teacher? How do I structure my lessons? How will I keep their interest? Assessment and Feedback and, finally, Evaluation and Quality Assurance. Then, the final chapter focuses on work/life balance, continuing professional development and staying fresh as a teacher. Each chapter maintains a balance between understanding, practical ideas and the challenge to reflect on and develop practice.

Overall, I believe that this is a book which will contribute significantly to the continuing professional development of FE teachers. Furthermore, I suggest that its particular layout, with its theoretical framework, suggested reflections, ideas for consideration and case studies would make it a very useful tool for principals or senior managers in promoting a shared vision and in facilitating collective staff development in a Further Education college or centre.

DAN CONDREN

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The Adult Learner

The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education

CALL FOR PAPERS 2015 EDITION

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, policies 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 NOT exceed 5,000 words in length including references.
2. **Practice-based contributions** including case studies which exchange 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 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. (600–1,000 words)
4. **Responses/Critiques.** The journal will consider publishing critiques of articles or responses to topics/articles in the previous issue of the Journal. These should be written in academic style and should be backed up by evidence. They should be no more than 1,000 words in length.

Please state clearly on your submission which section you are submitting to. We will not accept papers which exceed the word limits. Please note papers which exceed the word limits will be returned.

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 international readership (e.g. explain use of acronyms)*
- *Be submitted in the format outlined (see separate guidance, available online)*
- *Begin with a short abstract (not more than 100 words)*
- *Include a reference section which refers only to articles mentioned in the text.*

Papers and responses should be in Microsoft Word document (or compatible) format, 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 reference 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, available online)*. Only books/articles/web-sites referred to in the text should be included in the references.

The name, address, a short statement and email address of the author, or the corresponding author in case of multiple authorship, 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 included 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.

30th January 2015. Please note that contributions cannot be accepted after this date.

Please mark for the attention of:

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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

