The Adult Learner

2018

ADULT LEARNER 2018

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Editorial Comment

As the new Editor for *The Adult Learner Journal*, I would like to begin by thanking our previous Editor, Rob Mark, for his hard work and commitment to the journal over many years and we wish him well in his future endeavours. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our new members to the Editorial Board, particularly our first international board member, David Mallows.

The past year has been one of change and uncertainty on many fronts. Across Europe, the United Kingdom and Ireland, discussions on Brexit have dominated much of the political landscape, bringing the stark reality of how social policy impacts the lives of ordinary people into casual kitchen conversations and pub chats. Concerns around the UK/Ireland border, North/South relations, migration and free movement of citizens across Ireland and Europe for study and employment, serve to highlight the need for coherent joined-up strategies, which improve the lives of everyday citizens.

This year's call for contributions welcomed articles which looked at 'Taking the Temperature of Adult Learning in 2018'. This forward-looking edition of the Adult Learner Journal focuses on analysing the changes from the perspective of policy and practice since 2010 with recommendations for the future. We are delighted that David Mallows kindly agreed to write a guest foreword on this topic. He provides a rich insight into the ways in which policy shapes society and the need to develop coherent adult learning policies at all levels which do not limit its potential to benefit the many and inter-related aspects of modern life. This theme is taken up by a number of articles presented here, both directly and indirectly.

The journal is divided into three sections: section one contains five articles which adopt a more theoretical approach and include new research; section two contains four case-studies which reflect on adult learning practice across a wide range of spheres. Finally, we have expanded our book review in section three to include policy reviews, in keeping with the theme of the current edition.

In section one, both Kyle and Maunsell argue that the views of adult educators are crucial to inform the direction of adult education policy. Kyle's article provides a comprehensive examination of the impact of adult education policy on community education practitioners. She argues against reductionist strategies, which limit discourse on adult and community education to further education and training (FET), highlighting instead the real contribution that community education makes towards tackling social inequalities and promoting inclusion. Maunsell provides an interesting viewpoint from the life histories of six Irish adult educators, reflecting on how adult education has changed over their 40 years of practice and their views of the possibilities and challenges ahead. A third article in this section, by Elftop, Coughlin and Hearn, focuses on the experiences of adult learners with dyslexia and highlights how government policy has led to the lack of a national infrastructure of support for students with dyslexia in the FET sector. They argue for children's right to dyslexia assessment to be extended to all learners, as well as a national strategy for supporting dyslexia across the FET sector.

The remaining two articles in section one offer theoretical contributions to specific areas of adult education. Connolly's article on the promotion of reflective practice in teacher education argues that adopting a feminist lens encourages reflexivity and she argues that this is necessary if reflective practice is to move beyond an individualistic, technocratic activity to one, which can provide opportunities to create a more equal and just society. O'Sullivan examines the effects of negative stereotypes internalized by early school leavers and highlights the benefits of educational programmes aimed at building self-confidence and promoting positive self-images.

Section two commences with a case-study by Breen, Kelleher, Ring and Stapleton on the LINC programme, which trains graduates as Inclusion Coordinators, in order to facilitate the inclusion of children with additional needs at pre-school level. Hawthorne-Steele, Trotter, Byrne and Morgan present a community education case-study, designed to tackle prejudice and racism, whilst building the capacity of participants from ethnic minority backgrounds who are

migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The third article in this section makes a compelling argument for the recognition of herbal medicine as an aspect of adult education practice. O'Brien draws on his own experience, both as adult educator and herbalist to highlight the oppressive structures which surround biomedicine and the empowering potential of herbal medicine, particularly in the area of mental health. The final article presents a case-study on the use of enquiry-based learning to encourage adult learners on a Masters' programme. Wright argues that more widespread use of enquiry-based learning within Higher Education would encourage more adult learners to participate in lifelong learning.

The all too familiar analogy of adult learning as the 'Cinderella' of education is highlighted in David Mallows' article and a number of the other articles presented here. Perhaps it is time for Cinderella to stop waiting for Prince Charming to save her? Taking up David's call for gathering evidence on the wider benefits of adult learning, it is incumbent on all adult educators to not only gather the evidence, but share it and ensure that it reaches those who decide on the future of adult learning! We trust this journal plays a small part in that endeavour and we hope you will enjoy reading the articles herein.

A final word of thanks to all those who have contributed to this edition and to the members of the Editorial Board, who gave so freely of their time to review articles and attend meetings. Thanks also to Niamh O'Reilly and staff in AONTAS, for their wonderful support and to our funders SOLAS, without whom this journal could not be published.

ROSEMARY MORELAND, *EDITOR*

Guest Foreword

Adult learning, Upskilling Pathways, and the Adult Learner

DAVID MALLOWS, *EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER*

Introduction

The *European Agenda for Adult Learning* (EAAL) highlights the need to increase participation in adult learning of all kinds (formal, non-formal and informal learning) whether to acquire new work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment. And yet, in many European countries, adult education is being more and more narrowly defined, with skills acquisition as its primary driver. This is, it is argued, in response to the financial difficulties of recent years. However, I would suggest that the current focus on producing skilled workers, rather than well-educated adults, can lead to policy that undervalues adult education, missing the benefits that it can bring to individuals, communities and society.

Upskilling Pathways

The European Commission's *Upskilling Pathways* initiative incorporates two dominant views of adult learning. It is both liberal and compensatory. The term liberal adult education, largely used in the United States of America, refers to adult education initiatives developed to meet the needs of adults in changing circumstances. In the case of the USA these changing circumstances included examples like cowboys and others travelling to the New World who required new skills to be able to survive and then prosper in their new and challenging environment. In Europe the focus was on compensation, providing a second chance for adults who had not completed their basic education, due to failings of the compulsory education system, or issues in their personal life.

The *Upskilling Pathways* initiative is compensatory in that it recognises that many adults lack basic skills and need support in order to access a pathway to higher level professional skills. However, its main focus is on meeting the

economic challenges that face the European Union, and to do this it proposes a more liberal form of adult education. The initiative was initially termed the Skills Agenda and has a particular focus on professional learning, workforce development, and is largely focused on equipping adults with the new skills to meet the demands of one particular domain of their lives, the workplace.

Indeed, the major imperative of European policy in adult education is the development of human capital – the acquisition of skills in order to drive economic competitiveness. Much adult education policy is designed with that goal in mind. It is supply-driven, with formal courses leading to recognised qualifications, nationally agreed standards, and progression routes through the system. Of course, there is nothing wrong with that and many people will benefit, as will our economies, if people improve their skills and knowledge in order to help Europe to prosper. However, adult education is about so much more than equipping people with the Skills that are needed for employment. My fear is that we sometimes forget that.

The Wider Benefits of Adult Education

A recent review of the wider benefits of learning undertaken by Tom Schuller in 2017 as part of the UK government's Foresight Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning project, suggests that firstly we should be aware that adult education has both direct and indirect impacts. The former is much easier to measure, particularly the concrete outcomes of formal learning such as qualifications, new skills etc. However, adult education also has indirect impacts, such as greater confidence and improved social networks which are more difficult to measure, but perhaps no less significant.

Schuller also suggests that adult education has an impact at various different levels: individual, household, community, society. And that these levels overlap – what benefits the community will also potentially benefit the individual. He presents evidence of the impact of participation in adult education, in three specific domains: health, work, and community.

He suggests that adult learning can have a positive impact on physical health (smoking cessation, amount of exercise taken, nutrition lower risk of coronary heart disease, reduction in drug abuse); and mental health (identity, coping, a sense of purpose in life; wellbeing; life satisfaction; onset and management of dementia). It also has an impact on children's health and wellbeing as adult learners are more likely to engage in their children's education, leading to better outcomes for the child.

Adult learning can have a positive impact on the individual's working life (job-seeking, job retention, earnings, aspirations, job satisfaction) and also for the organisation (productivity, employee commitment, labour turnover, output, employment levels, tax revenues, acceptance of innovation). In terms of community, Schuller demonstrates that participation in adult learning can have a positive impact on social capital (interpersonal and social trust, social connections, community engagement); social cohesion and integration: (tolerance of diversity, higher degree of trust in people of different religions and nationalities); community involvement (civic participation, volunteering); crime (reduction in reoffending rates); democratic participation (political understanding, feelings of empowerment and levels of political participation).

Not only does adult education equip adults with skills that they need to be productive in the workplace, it also has multiple wider benefits for health and community. It generates social capital and supports social inclusion, it increases community and civic participation and should be a central element in policy responses across a range of different government departments, not just in education. Adult education has never been more important, particularly in times of Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism. In many EU Member states, the sense of exclusion and disillusion felt by large groups of people in society can, and has, lead to support for populist parties. Adult education can support adults in being informed, critical and engaged with the issues, both local and global that impact on their lives.

Understanding Adult Learners

Adult Education is a good, a positive force in these troubled times and we should be supporting its development and demanding attention. However, participation in Lifelong Learning in many European countries, including Ireland, currently falls well below the EU benchmark for 2020 of 15%. And so we need to ensure that policy makers, and the wider society, know about these benefits. For that we require good evidence and we need to craft messages from that evidence to enable adult education to compete with all of the other demands on the very stretched public purse. In crafting those messages, we should be very aware of the power of language to shape perceptions. We all know that language is important and that it can shape our attitudes.

A great strength of the European Commission's *Upskilling Pathways* initiative is the recognition that for many adults gaining vocational qualifications at Level 3 or 4 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a distant possibility

and one that requires significant investment in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. However, I am concerned with some of the language used in policy documents and in discussions around implementation. Language is important, as it shapes attitudes and we should ensure that the terms we use are appropriate. I will pick up on the use of one particular term, but there are others. However, this one I think is a helpful example.

It has become common to hear the term 'low-skilled' used to describe the target group of the Commission's Adult Skills policies. Of central concern is that this term 'low-skilled adults' is simply inaccurate. No adult lacks skills, but certain skills (usually those that are easy to measure), are more valued than others in policy rhetoric. The definition of low-skilled is usually based on two sources of data: educational outcomes and/or standardised assessments of reading and numeracy and so it recognises only a very narrow set of skills. These so-called 'low-skilled' adults might speak several languages; drive a range of vehicles; be experts in agriculture, astronomy or athletics; they may hold down jobs, raise families, manage budgets, take part in civic life, including voting, or contribute to the work of trade unions, housing and faith communities. They might be good listeners or tell a really good joke. In short, they are skilled in many ways.

Not only is the term 'low-skilled' inaccurate, it is of course disrespectful and it also betrays ignorance of the reality of adults' lives. With the consequence that it is likely to lead to adult education policies that fail to address the challenge set as part of the European Commission's *Upskilling Pathways* Agenda. By characterising this group of adults by what they cannot do rather than what they can and want to do, (a deficit approach) there is a real danger that the *Upskilling Pathways* initiative designed by Member States will alienate rather than inspire adults. Adult learning theory teaches us that adults will only engage in learning that they find meaningful and that is of immediate relevance and use to them. If we design adult learning with a predefined, inaccurate, and disrespectful understanding of the 'low-skilled' we should not be surprised if they fail to engage. If instead we listen carefully to adults and design programmes that build on their interests and their skills, we may have a chance of creating *Upskilling Pathways* that are meaningful, engaging and successful.

Policy Coherence in Adult Education

One further thought on what is needed to meet the challenge set by the European Commission is to create effective pathways for adult learning. Adult education in many countries is seen as a policy Cinderella, with scant resources

and a lack of effective long-term planning and coordination between its players. A lack of policy coherence can have a debilitating impact on the development of adult education.

Policy coherence means ensuring that policy objectives and processes in one area do not contradict or jeopardise those in another. Policy coherence can only be achieved if policy makers - and we are all policy makers at some level, in the classroom, in our relations with others and in our approach to the work we do and the way we live our lives - look beyond our own narrow areas of responsibility, or frames of reference.

Within national governments, we should seek cross-organisational policy coherence: coordination between different types of public policies, between different levels of government, and between different stakeholders within and outside government. We can think about cross-organisational policy coherence in both vertical and horizontal terms.

Vertical coherence requires that the different levels of government – national, regional, and local – follow common policy objectives and align systems of funding, accreditation and quality assurance. This can be complicated, particularly if responsibility for adult education is distributed or devolved, leading to uncertainty about which layer of government is responsible.

We can also think of vertical coherence within a learning provider. Do leaders within learning providers effectively communicate and implement policy all the way down to the classroom? And do classroom teachers communicate effectively up the system? Within learning providers, the involvement of curriculum managers and teachers in formulation of policy is often limited. However, they are central to implementation of policy and there is no guarantee that the various levels of the organisation are working coherently to the same priorities.

Horizontal coherence implies that there is understanding and coordination across policy areas within national or regional or local government – for example, that the Ministry for Education and the Ministry for Employment share concepts, processes and outcomes related to adult education. Horizontal coherence can also be sought in the learning offer in a particular region – do providers A, B and C offer complementary courses with pathways between them?

The concept of a Learner Journey is helpful in conceptualising policy coherence. At each point of the learner journey, the adult learner interacts with the system. Each of these points is, in turn, influenced by policy made at national, regional or local level within the system and by leaders and curriculum managers and teachers within the learning provider. For this we should consider how an adult engages with the adult education system and ask whether it meets his or her needs in a coherent way across the life course. We should ask if there are stepping stones from one educational stage to the next, and are these established and functioning, providing a route to higher levels of qualifications for those who want this? Filling the gap between institutional levels of education and ensuring local access to and progression through these levels is key to policy coherence in adult education. At a national level, qualifications and entry requirements of adult education should be closely aligned. And at a local level the offer of providers should be aligned in such a way as to provide a coherent and explicit learner journey.

Conclusion

There are many factors that appear to be significant in designing effective, coherent policy. However, above all, effective cooperation between all stakeholders is key and for that to happen stakeholders need to be clear about their own responsibilities and what they stand to gain and there needs to be trust between them. Trust is built through successful joint working and the consequent increases in shared knowledge and understanding. Organisations such as AONTAS have a huge role to play in building that trust and shared understanding. Adult learning at its best is contingent and responsive. It helps adults to meet the challenges that they face. And it should be driven by the needs of adults. For that to happen we have to place learner voice at the centre of our discussions and ensure that their voices are not just heard but heeded.

Contributors

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SECTION ONE

Perspectives on Community and Lifelong Learning

Reflective Practice and the Feminist Lens: The Other Side

BRID CONNOLLY

Abstract

This article aims to explore the recent promotion of reflective practice in teacher education and to draw on the thinking that has developed in adult education, particularly in feminist community education. It endeavours to unpack, briefly, the foundational theories that are promoted in teacher education and identify the failings inherent in these traditional constructions. Finally, it proposes a feminist reflective practice that draws on de Beauvoir's concept of the Other, as a key route to enabling educators to understand the multifaceted dimensions of inequality.

Keywords: Reflective Practice, Critical Pedagogy, Epistemology, Feminisation of Education, Feminist Education, The Other

Introduction

The surge in interest in reflective practice in education is welcome on many fronts. It is now promoted as an essential element in the education of teachers in all aspects of the system. On the one hand, reflective practice as praxis, the cycle of reflection and action as proposed by Freire (1972) is a key element of conscientization and critical education. But on the other hand, it sets off a set of alarm bells when a process is embraced so wholeheartedly by professions and institutions which are basically conservative. Thus, I want to explore briefly the underpinnings of reflective practice to unpack those conservative leanings, in order to position feminist critical pedagogy as the key route to challenging those leanings.

In this article, I'll consider the ways which positions reflective practice in the context of feminist pedagogical practices. Through this lens, I'll look at the site of struggle between the wider social forces, particularly class, gender, ethnicity

on the one hand, and individualised, subjective practice on the other. In this, I'll endeavour to scrutinize the iterations of critical reflection, reflexivity and reflective practice and develop the core concepts that underpin my argument for a feminist critique in the discussion that is crucial to this scholarly project. That is, I propose to explore the Other side, (de Beauvoir, 1953) and propose that a feminist critique is essential in this discussion. I argue that the revelation of these Other sides is essential for those who experience oppression and subjugation, as well as the self-awareness of educators who live and work in this world. As such, the Other side enhances and extends the practice.

Foundations and New Ways of Knowing

When Dewey (1933) proposed reflection as a route to problem-solving in education, he was opening a new portal to the creation of knowledge with the potential to transform the experience of the educative process. In particular, the focus on experiential learning was ground breaking. Dewey argued that, however people arrived at new insights emanating from reflection, those insights lead to the newer position, more advanced than the starting point. And crucially, this advanced position is new knowledge. Reflection, in Dewey's terms, was both an intellectual process as well as an inductive logical process. That is, rational, logical argument, on one hand, leaving room for almost intuitive leaps, where suggestion and imagination play vital roles in arriving at that advanced state, (Dewey, 1933). Indeed, imagination is the great bulwark against narrow ways of knowing, (Finnegan, 2016). This proposal challenged the status of the scientific, positivist approach to creating new knowledge, which prevailed at the time and which prevails today in many disciplines, even in education (Connolly, 2016).

Dewey (1916) was the foundation for Schön's developments. His contribution placed reflection in the centre of practice, with his discussion on what practitioners can do, and, further, *ought* to do, allowing themselves to be surprised, puzzled or confused (Schön, 1983). Thus, the openness to uncertainty and vulnerability that Schön proposes is at odds with the ways in which many professions are framed. The status of professional development is gaining traction with Continuous Professional Development (CPD). But CPD is more likely to be undertaken to keep the professional up to date with new discoveries or new explorations, and the aim is to improve their practice, rather than to admit to uncertainty. Nonetheless, the promotion of reflective practice has the potential to interrogate this steadfastness. And, both Dewey and Schön have contributed to the understanding that reflective practice is a rich source of

new, self-created knowledge, challenging the view that knowledge is created in the vacuum outside of applied practice.

Interestingly, Freire's work in 1972, also promoted reflection as a prelude to action in his formulation of praxis. Freire contends that praxis is essential to create an alternative epistemological position, with the imperative to start with experience and continue with a critical inquiry into the social, cultural and political significance of the experience (Freire, 1972), notwithstanding the deficits that Freire acknowledged subsequently.

Thus, the foundations of reflective practice in education rest on the major contributions of Dewey and Schön. Reflective practice is viewed as intellectual and rational, rather than an emotional and consciousness raising process. In addition, it completely lacks gender and social analysis, thus promoting an individualistic model of teaching and learning.

The Warzone and Critical Pedagogy

Education is in the frontline of the warzone within conflicting social forces (Connolly and Hussey, 2013). The battle is between critical educators who maintain that critical pedagogy has the capacity to work towards the common good, democracy, social justice, civil society and social and personal emancipation, on the one hand, and the neo-liberal economic discourse which has deepened the ways in which education performs as an instrument of the social, cultural and economic elites on the other hand.

Bourdieu argues powerfully that education maintains the status quo, with his framing of capitals, social and cultural. He considers that the reproduction of the norms and values in society, essentially an exercise of power (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, 1990), continues the entire social system using education as the conduit. That is, inequality, hierarchy, poverty and all other oppressions are maintained through the education system in the wider picture, regardless of the commitment of individual teachers at classroom levels. When we look at main trends in education in Ireland, we can see that these aspirations for the public good are overshadowed by reductionist neo-liberal, economic agendas. This is particularly pertinent in the ideas that underpin the framing of further education which has been conflated with training (Government of Ireland, 2014). This inherent link with occupational training and education is evident in all aspects of the field, not just the specific programmes on professional development, such as law, business, medicine and engineering. The status of

these disciplines drives the curriculum in Higher Education, rather than any aspirations towards the public good, through social justice, community and democracy. That is, human and social development capacities are channelled into constricted lifeworlds (Williamson, 1998), as Further Education and Training (FET) loses Freirean philosophies and critical practices that developed in adult and community education. Freire's pedagogical approaches were firmly on the side of educators and learners as activists and agents of change, pitted against the deeply embedded structures of inequality (Freire, 1972). This is probably the greatest divergence between critical pedagogy and reflective practice. That is, that educators are part of the learning community, and that both the learners and educators are agents, potentially if not actually, in their own lives. The nexus between structure and agency is exemplified in groupwork for learning.

Groupwork and Dialogue

Groupwork in adult learning is framed in many ways, from the individualist, psychological perspectives to the more communitarian, cooperative ways. That is, groupwork is a key process in enabling people to become more agentic in their own personal and social lives, equipped to challenge social structures (Connolly, 2008). Praxis is allied to the connections between structure and agency. Without this framing of agency, the fundamental elements of action and reflection are meaningless. The practice of working with groups in adult education is a model of participative democracy. The ways in which this practice can encompass a diversity of positions is the first principle in creating a more tolerant learning environment. That is, this model can embrace differences rather than perpetuate homogeneity and narrowness. In addition, adult learning groups are in the front line of countering the industrial model on which schooling is based, with the passive, individualist acceptance of rules and regulations, learning by rote, sitting in rows, and working so hard for a perceived reward that education promises to everyone, but which only rewards those who have power and privilege in society already.

This necessarily infers the continuous, reiterative dimensions of reflective practice in the moment and subsequent to the moment, through writing, discussion and groupwork. However, a central concern about reflective practice persists in the concerns about groupwork and reflection, that is, that it cannot, of and in itself, interrogate gender, social and multi-cultural inequality, because it doesn't have the breadth of vision to encompass these inequalities. A feminist lens is a vital way of addressing this blind spot. Moreover, feminist theory is not

unitary, as a basic introductory text book can readily show. It would be more accurate to say that *feminist theories*, as the scholarships are multidisciplinary, multi-layered and dynamic, with constant dialogue and discussion, arguments, tensions and new positions emerging in the vibrant field (Braithwaite and Orr, 2017). This has the impact of unsettling, upsetting and problematising knowledge as we understand it, not only in terms of what is considered knowledge in the first place but also in addressing ways of knowing and ways of being in the world. This opens up conversations about epistemology per se, but pertinently for this discussion, in adult and community education as well. Thus, for this article, I'm underpinning my use of the concepts *feminism* and *feminist* with this understanding: living, breathing, questioning, transforming, and these dynamics are congruent with the field of adult and community education itself.

Feminised but Not Feminist

Clegg maintains that reflective practice is promoted and valorised in feminised professions such as education, counselling, nursing and social work (Clegg, 2010, p. 167). Quite often, feminised occupations are seen as feminist. However, these areas are more likely to promote traditional perspectives about gender, for example, that women are better at caring than men, and men are better at logical, rational work. It is notable that reflective practice is almost absent in traditionally masculinist or patriarchal professions, such as management, business, engineering and construction, with a reliance on professional identity and autonomy. But, notwithstanding this debate, the feminised applications of reflective practice is open to the inherent risk of self-monitoring and self-censoring within a closed circuit, re-enforcing the gender stereotypes, when it could, potentially, be the enactment of radical practice.

This is perpetuated through the internalised constraints that gender stereotyping imposes. These include the internalised norms and values of traditional gender dichotomies which bring lower terms and conditions in work, paid and unpaid. The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) clearly identifies the gender pay gap, which is narrower at the basic skills levels, but widest at the highest pay levels, which the Council attributes to the glass ceiling and indirect discrimination (NWCI, 2017). A further implication of the *feminised* but not *feminist* practice is the deepening of essentialist positioning. Feminised professions and occupations perpetuate the essentialist assumption of the way women ought to work together in the workplace, but which reverts to individualised private sphere work. In the workplace, women workers are

expected to be flexible and have the capacity to multitask, in work that centres on caring (Clegg, 2010) while in the private domain women do take most of the responsibility for housework and caring work, whether of children, spouses or elders (OECD, 2014).

Epistemology and the Wider World

Another issue that is raised by the feminist critique is the absence of content. When Schön proposed reflective practice, his intention was to challenge fundamentally the approach that prevailed - and still does - in education, the technical-rational perspective, that is, the positivist approach to the epistemology of learning and education, which renders it measurable, logical and neutral. This framing of knowledge limits it immeasurably, and promotes canonical knowledge to the detriment of lived experience and all of the arts, as well as innate and intuitive knowledge, what Thompson called 'really useful knowledge' (Thompson, 1996, 2006). Knowledge for political consciousness is missing from reflective practice, even as Schön proposed it, as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). Thus, for feminist practitioners, the promotion of reflective practice is problematic on two fronts, that of self-censorship and fragile identity on the one hand, but on the other, the absence of consciousness raising knowledge.

Thus, I argue that reflective practice has to address this fundamental inequality through the interrogation of the creation of knowledge. However, the danger is that in a field of practice that is predominately feminised, but not necessarily feminist, the new knowledge is framed as a kind of *women's ways of knowing* (Belenky *et al.*,1986) which was ground-breaking in its way and day, particularly with regards to the social aspect of the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge. However, I want to examine this difference between women's ways of knowing and feminist ways of knowing.

Feminist Ways of Knowing

Anne B. Ryan's significant and influential work reframes these assumptions about the essentialist nature of epistemology (Ryan, 2001). Her interrogation of the liberal humanist perspectives that are influential in adult and community education is vitally important, particularly when it comes to the theory of the person in adult education and how adult education can hope to bring about social change if it relies on these liberal humanistic philosophies.

This tenet is central in the argument that education can envision and work towards profound social change. On the face of it, starting where people are at, that is, the Freirean and Women's Studies approach, looks like the person-centred approach developed from Rogers' ideas, from counselling and therapy and which he applied to education and community (Rogers and Freiberg, 1993). Rogers' stance, though compassionate and caring, is underpinned by an inescapable individualism. This means that he adheres to the liberalism that is inherent in the quests for freedom, based on the ideas of freedoms that emerged during the Enlightenment, and include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. It also, incidentally, embraces the free market, and the rights to property (Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2012). Rogers joins Maslow in humanistic psychology with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1968) which again, promoted the individualism that inevitability followed from a narrow world-view of liberalism.

The Other

This belief and trust in individualism completely ignores the structural dimensions to inequality. De Beauvoir develops the concept of the Other to demonstrate the dominance of an androcentric social outlook, in which women are perceived not in their own right but only in relation to this androcentric perspective (1953). The importance of this concept is hard to overestimate in terms of enabling the understanding of persistent *second sex* status of women in social life. The Othering of women is not based on biological differences. Rather it is created out of the socialisation of one half of humanity, not only by the dominant other half, but by the whole of society, through the internalisation. *One is not born but rather becomes woman* challenges essentialism fundamentally, that is, the assumption that there are essential qualities of femininities, and by implication, essential qualities of masculinities, inextricably linked to biology. The internalisation of the social construction of gender means that it is monitored and controlled by heteronormativity, that is, androcentric social norms and values based on the idea of complementary - albeit primary and secondary - gender and sexual roles, which rewards compliance and punishes deviance. But further, de Beauvoir asserts that the quest for freedom and liberation is not to become more like the Subject, the masculine norm which is the opposite of the Other, but rather to fight for equality through discovering an alternative to heteronormativity in the public as well as the private domains. This has profound implications for feminist ways of knowing. By acknowledging that these assumptions are ubiquitous and so-called *common sense*, feminist ways of knowing avoids the risk that Belenky

et al. (1996) take, that of the ascribing essential, rather than experiential and constructive qualities to women's ways of knowing. De Beauvoir is clear that the lens provided by the concept of the Other enables the analysis of experience, and is the key to uncovering those ubiquitous assumptions.

Othering also serves as a vital concept in the analysis of other inequalities and oppressions: class, race, ethnicity, ability, culture. By applying the Other lens, it's clear to see androcentrism, but it also makes the Eurocentric, Western, Northern, able, classist, mainstream, normative, and so on stand out in stark relief. Gender, class, race, sexuality and ethnicity are dimensions of personal, individual identity, while simultaneously being a part of macro social categories which carry various weights, depending on the social power of the normative. This power and influence is not simply about individual agency, but rather it is conferred by the status of the social. While agency can be enhanced through education, it still has to acknowledge and battle against those structural barriers. The Other lens is a crucial educational and reflective means for connecting the personal experience of oppression and the social structures which perpetuate it.

Starting where people are at is just that: the start. The whole idea of starting from that point is to move beyond it and in particular, to transform the personal, the 'I', to the political, the 'we' is fundamental. This is the basis of women's studies, it is implicit in Freire's work and it and the *raison d'être* of critical adult and community education and hopefully, optimistically, it will count substantially in Higher and Further Education, while it may lag behind in training contexts.

The point about feminist ways of knowing is to insert it into the knowledge created through reflective practice. And it points up a glaring deficit, in addition to the absence of social and gender analyses, that of standpoint.

Standpoint theory, as explored by Harding, refers to the value of the knowledge derived from the experience of belonging to a sub-ordinate or marginalised group, particularly women, in the production of knowledge and the practice of power (Harding, 2004). While Harding acknowledges the controversies within the debates, it remains a clear position to shed light on all occurrences of inequality and inequity. Thus, the feminist standpoint is immeasurably valuable in reflective practice, succeeding in linking, not only the action or practice to reflection, but also, more importantly, the personal to the political.

Further, this focus on the personal and standpoint brings in another element, that of the self-awareness that is absent from other frameworks. This necessarily infers a significant shift from *reflective* practice to reflexive practice. Reflexive practice focuses on our being in the world, how we, as agentic practitioners in a stratified world, see that world. Reflexive practice has to encompass a consciousness raising element, rather than simply improve practice. Reflexive practice brings the critical into the process and the knowledge that is created in that critical process is thus closer to knowledge for emancipation. And this has implications for the models of practice that are created.

Models and the Missing Lenses

The existing models of reflective practice are derived from the work of Dewey, Schön in mainstream education and other professions, and Freire in critical pedagogy, adult and community education and community development. Brookfield explores his own model, in which he promotes the idea of four lenses in the process, namely, the autobiographical, the students', the colleagues', and finally, the theoretical lenses (Brookfield, 1995). Brookfield inserts criticality into this process, with the reflexivity that I have discussed above. And as an extremely influential adult educator, his work shaped the practice in very significant ways.

In addition, Kolb's reflective learning cycle is freely used in reflective practice, following a similar process, moving from concrete experience, to reflection, to conceptualisation, to action, (Kolb, 1984). Both follow the pattern of the description of the experience, followed by an evaluation, followed by an analysis, and finally, the plan for future practice. While both these contributors have added substance to the field, they are not alone.

Bolton argues that writing is a key element in reflective practice and the process of writing shifts reflective practice into a formative, tangible, creation. The result of written engagement provides a more profound and multi-layered account of thinking (Bolton, 2010). That is, it makes thinking overt and explicit, rather than an abstract, cognitive process that becomes evident in practice only, at best.

Hillier argues very cogently for the critical consciousness that critical theory generated, that fundamentally challenged traditional ways of knowing. And she highlights the role of that the women's movement in that elemental questioning. Further, when ethics are included in the process, she goes deeper still in the

interrogation, to urge practitioners to search for the real issues that are part and parcel of critical practice, taking culture, tradition, our socially situated selves into the picture and problematising the 'taken-for-granted' common sense and assumptions that characterises our everyday lives (Hillier, 2005, pp. 13–15). That is, Hillier acknowledges implicitly and explicitly the centrality of critical theory and the debt to feminist thought and, by implication, the Other side of our socially situated selves. And further, how our socially situated selves necessarily demands reflexivity. This brings us to the centrality of the feminist lens.

The Feminist Lens

The feminist lens extends everything, from the analyses of the self and identity to high art; from interpersonal relationships to the power relationships in globalisation. And all spaces along these spectra. In this context of reflective practice, it is the crucial missing link. If we adopt Freirean praxis in our critical pedagogy, we have to include the feminist lens. Freire was clear that his blind-spot was gender. He had a clear grasp on class oppressions, north-south colonisation and urban-rural divides but not gender. The feminist lens enabled his work to become clearer about whose side he was on, and it adds a dimension that it would miss others. And feminist pedagogy acknowledges the inter-relationships with his vision for education.

A feminist lens creates a fundamental disturbance in scholarship and in the social world. In terms of education, feminism had disrupted epistemology, ontology, research, practice and engagement, to name but a few dimensions. It has also disrupted the disciplinary demarcation and curriculum studies. It has created space for new areas of interest, particularly intersectionality and subaltern studies, as well as disability studies, equality studies and LGBTQ studies. And it has even disrupted the ways in which education is offered, particularly adult and community education, with the diverse, non-traditional emphasis in participation, dialogue and facilitation of learning.

With reflective practice, the model that the feminist lens reveals is congruent with the social movements that feminisms are based on. That is, it is firmly rooted on real experiences and real analyses of real oppressions and real commitment to profound social change for emancipation. A feminist lens starts with the interrogation of where you stand with regards to socially situated lives, in particular lives that are lived in oppression and degradation. It questions how this influences your practice and asks what your commitment to emancipation is? And how do you turn this into knowledge? Finally, feminist reflexive practice

asks you to reflect on the implications for your practice and to start a new cycle of reflection.

This model recognises the missing lenses in the work of Brookfield, (1995) Schön, (1983) Boud *et al.*, (1993), Bolton, (2010) and many others who are committed to improving education through reflective practice. It also compensates for all the deficits in previous models, even within critical pedagogy. It starts where the educator is at, the educator's standpoint, which is the starting point for Freirean and feminist education. It also recognises that both practitioners and learners ought to be equally open to the creation of new knowledge. Above all, this model contains the possibility of creating an environment in which real transformation can happen. This takes education out of the hands of the powerful and into the hands of the population as a whole for the public good and social justice. And of course, it is the model to open the possibility of creating a better world, for everyone.

Conclusion

In this article I endeavoured to address the recent promotion of reflective practice in teacher education. I have reviewed the foundations of reflective practice and shown how these foundations have persisted throughout the roll-out to the present day. I identified the missing lenses, particularly those overlooked by those who do not connect the personal with the political, but also missing in those models drawing on critical theory, but afflicted by gender blindness. And when the gender blindness is acknowledged and redressed, it opens the floodgates for other analyses of inequality. If this is to become mainstream in teacher education, it has to embrace the full scope that has been developed in adult and community education and to guard against practices that maintain the individualist status quo.

In writing this article I recognised my own ignorance and all that I needed to learn. In particular, I saw the hope and commitment to creating a better world by so many adult and further educators, as well as allies in mainstream education. I also learned about the ways in which the potential, as proposed by Dewey and Freire, were drained of criticality, with a reductionism that simplified it into a series of steps that kept everything in the classroom, echoing Murray's contentions about the limits to transformative learning (Murray, 2013).

My vision for feminist reflective practice is to have an impact in people's lives, to bring about real change to real experiences and to real social constraints. If

we are going to promote reflective practice as critical educators, it cannot be unquestioned or reduced to a series of simple steps. It has to have a real impact on practitioners as well as learners, but also on education as a social institution. And a feminist lens enables us to see the Other side, to review our blind spots and to develop our agency against the might of structural inequality.

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What Adult Learners with Dyslexia Can Tell Us about the 'Temperature' of Adult Learning

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Abstract

This paper draws on the qualitative findings of a PhD study which focused on the lived experiences of adult learners with dyslexia in Ireland. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 adult learners with dyslexia in 2014 and these findings, with particular relevance to adult learning in the recently restructured Further Education and Training (FET) sector, are discussed in this paper. The findings relate to the struggle the adults have experienced throughout their lives and the support and accommodations they need as adult learners. Finally, recommendations are made in relation to creating a more equitable FET sector for adults with dyslexia.

Keywords: Dyslexia, Further Education and Training, Adult Guidance Counselling

Introduction

Dyslexia is not a new phenomenon or condition. Knowledge about dyslexia within an Irish education context has increased over the years, with key publications such as the *Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia* (DES, 2001) and the follow-up report by McPhillips *et al.* (2015). Nonetheless, there are still prevalent misconceptions about dyslexia where literacy skills are being linked to intelligence, and many individuals with dyslexia experience social stigma (Evans, 2015; Riddell and Weedon, 2014).

The Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI, 2016) defines dyslexia as:

> …a specific learning difficulty which makes it harder to learn how to read, write and spell accurately. It is not caused by lack of education or by lack of intelligence. Adults will often have developed ways of coping with these

difficulties and even ways of hiding it. Dyslexic difficulties occur on a spectrum from mild to severe. (DAI, 2016, p. 2)

Additionally, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011) offers a useful approach to understanding disability which can be described as a merger of the medical and the social models of disability. Consistent with this approach, dyslexia can be described as the result of dynamic interactions between biological, psychological and social factors (WHO, 2011). Based on this approach, adult guidance counselling can be described as one of the key support activities for adult learners, which was the particular focus of this study (Elftorp, 2017a). This approach also means that considerations of appropriate support for learners with dyslexia need to be multi-layered, particularly in the context of research which suggests that dyslexia is associated with poor educational retention, anxiety and low self-esteem (McGuckin *et al.*, 2013; Pino and Mortari, 2014; UCC and CIT, 2010).

This paper will outline the context of the study, the methodology used, the findings and a discussion of those findings in relation to previous research. Finally, a number of recommendations conclude this paper.

Context

In Ireland, Higher Education (HE) is gradually becoming more accessible to individuals with dyslexia and other disabilities (AHEAD, 2018). A number of national initiatives and an infrastructure to support access and participation in HE have been established, such as the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) scheme and Disability Support Services (McCarthy *et al.*, 2018). This infrastructure has been put in place thanks to clear targets and a focus on 'widening' access to HE in public policy (Fleming *et al.*, 2017; HEA, 2015). However, such efforts have not been replicated in the FET strategy, and consequently, there have been no means to measure participation, no clear targets and no national approach or disability support structure established to date (McGuckin *et al.*, 2013).

It is estimated that there are nearly twice as many learners with disabilities in the FET sector compared to the HE sector (AHEAD, 2018; SOLAS, 2016) and these learners may have limited access to appropriate support. It is important to emphasise, however, the dispersed nature of FET provision as there are examples of good practice (McGuckin *et al.*, 2013). For example, the Adult and Community Education (ACE) strand of the FET sector have core principles

of learner-centeredness, inclusiveness and social justice, with the aim to foster empowerment and to recognise and accommodate diversity (AONTAS, 2010). ACE providers vary in relation to the specific courses and supports they offer to learners with disabilities such as dyslexia. Nonetheless, the structure of ACE includes aspects which may be particularly suitable for learners with dyslexia as many have previously negative schooling experiences (Riddick, 2012). The structure typically involves: individualised study programmes which are adopted based on the learner's needs; a welcoming and 'non-school' environment; and a culture which aims to ensure experiences of dignity and respect for the learners (AONTAS, 2010). Although this support structure has many advantages, this kind of embedded approach demands highly knowledgeable tutors, particularly in relation to dyslexia being a 'hidden' disability (Couzens *et al.*, 2015).

However, whilst ACE has a strong emphasis on the social and personal development aspects of adult learning, other FET programmes and the FET strategy are informed by a neoliberal agenda which focuses on employability and skills development (e.g. SOLAS, 2014; Action Plan 2018). As such, there appears to have been missed opportunities to adopt a social justice approach and to develop an infrastructure of disability support, during the restructuring of the FET sector in recent years.

In relation to the rights of adult learners with dyslexia, Irish legislation establishes that educational institutions are required to actively prevent discrimination and to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that learners do not experience any disadvantage as a result of their disability (i.e. *Disability Act 2005; Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act); Equal Status Act 2000; Equality Act 2004; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*). All adult learners, regardless of the programme they are enrolled on, have the same legal rights. However, the State Fund for Students with Disabilities, which institutions can use to finance reasonable accommodations, is only available to HE and PLC students. Although the eligibility criteria for this Fund is due to be broadened, the recent review by the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2017) does not seem to have considered the exclusion of learners on Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 1 – 4 programmes. Furthermore, there is a legal requirement for public bodies to have an access officer with responsibility for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities (*Equality Act 2004*, Section 26(2)), but the visibility of 'access officers' and disability supports is poor in many Education and Training Boards (ETBs) (McGuckin *et al.*, 2013; NCSE, 2014). In light of this legislation and the gaps

identified in the FET provision, this study aimed to examine the experiences of adult learners with dyslexia. The next section outlines the specific methodology and methods used in the study.

Methodology

As the aim of this study was to investigate the guidance counselling needs of adults with dyslexia and four research questions guided the study. The overarching research question for this study was: What are the guidance counselling needs of adults with dyslexia? The three subordinate research questions were:

(1) How do adults with dyslexia experience and make sense of 'being dyslexic'?

(2) What challenges and social injustices do adults with dyslexia experience in relation to their personal/social, education and career development?

(3) What factors facilitate the education and career progression for adults with dyslexia?

To address these research questions, a mixed methodology, underpinned by a critical pragmatic research paradigm, with two phases of data collection was employed (Midtgarden, 2012). The benefits of this methodology relate to the methodological pluralism which resulted in complementary and comprehensive findings (Perry, 2009). Pragmatism allows for flexibility and inquiries into practical and social problems and this study drew primarily on some of the more critical works on pragmatism by Dewey (1973), where human experience is the focal point. Therefore, it was important to gather rich contextual data in relation to the self-perceptions and experiences of the adults with dyslexia in this study.

The quantitative phase of the study included an online questionnaire to guidance counsellors working in the Adult Education Guidance Service in 2012 (Elftorp and Hearne, 2014). However, the weight of the study was on the qualitative phase, which explored the experiences of adult learners with dyslexia through interviews with 14 adults in various national locations during 2014. In total, ten men and four women were interviewed, aged 18 to 67, and their education level varied from QQI Level 3 to 8. A strength of this study is that the findings are context-rich and experience-near because, as one of the participants argued:

The best source of information is not from the tutors, it's not from the teachers, it's not from the education system ... It's from the people with dyslexia themselves (Ciaran, 40's)

Findings

Although the characteristics of the 14 adults with dyslexia in this study vary in terms of severity of dyslexia, gender, age and socio-economic background, a number of recurring themes were identified in their narratives. The particular features of their experiences are presented here under the two themes of Struggle and Progress and Support in the FET Sector.

Struggle and Progress

The most prominent theme in the narratives of all of the adults was a sense of struggle. In terms of the typical dyslexic symptoms, some of the adults in this study were keen to emphasise that although their reading was slow and laboured and they struggled with accurate spelling, they were still able to read and write at some level. As adult learners, dyslexia primarily translated into difficulties with note-taking during class and completing written assignments and examinations within the specified timeframe.

However, to a greater extent than the dyslexic symptoms, the term 'struggle' related to experiences of being subjected to pejorative labels such as 'slow' or 'stupid', segregated treatments and lowered expectations in their earlier schooling, all of which had a negative impact on their self-esteem. For example, one participant articulated:

There was one [teacher] that used to throw me a sewing basket and say 'here, do that! That's all you'll ever be able to do in your life!' (Catherine, 50's)

For those who had negative experiences in school, dispositional barriers often impacted on their decisions to engage in education as adults:

I kind of stayed away from theory stuff you know. I actually have a massive fear of classrooms and stuff like that … It's like being at school all over like, you know. I'd be thinking that everyone is looking at me … eh, more … it's just pure shameful, like you know. And no one is probably taking notice of me, it's all in my own head you know. (Peter, 20's)

Poor educational retention also featured in the narratives of many of the adults as some had not completed education courses due to exam anxiety and difficulties in accessing accommodations:

> Then I had to sit an exam. And like that then, I completely panicked. So I rang up and said that I wasn't available to sit the exam and could I put it off. (Dolores, 50's)

Nevertheless, five of the adults in this study had completed the one-year Career Paths for Dyslexia (CPfD) Programme and found it to be hugely beneficial, particularly in relation to increased self-esteem and self-efficacy in their learning capability. The programme was described as a 'stepping stone' to further educational and career progression.

Another key to the progression of the adults in this study was a proper dyslexia diagnosis. This was instrumental for some in relation to both their emotional wellbeing and their educational progression. For some, receiving a dyslexia diagnosis after years of wondering 'what's wrong with me?', was a momentous experience:

> I remember when she told me I had it, it was like somebody hit me a kick in the stomach. And I actually couldn't believe the shock when she was telling me. I felt like getting sick. I remember feeling like getting sick. And then I just started crying and all of a sudden I felt this relief. (Catherine, 50's)

The diagnosis also increased the adult's levels of self-esteem as it validated their intelligence, personal strengths and ability to learn:

> For me, when I did that, it was to find out, you know, what can I do for the future? What can I do to help myself to minimise the effects of dyslexia? And where are my strengths as well? So I can focus on my strengths. (Ciaran, 40's)

Overall, the experiences of the adults in this study suggests that despite adverse and traumatic experiences of being labelled as 'stupid' or being pushed to 'the back of the class', positive experiences and a formal dyslexia assessment can help adults to successfully reframe their self-perceptions. However, in the context of FET, they may still require different forms of accommodations to support their learning, as presented next.

Support in the FET Sector

Whilst some of the adults in this study had accessed reasonable accommodations or had well-developed coping skills and compensatory strategies, others had not accessed support and were unaware of their legislated rights to reasonable accommodations. Their experiences indicate that the level of support on offer in the FET sector varies significantly. Whilst there were examples of good practice, the nature of support in most ETBs was informal and the provision of accommodations was generally at the discretion of individual tutors. Some adults in this study felt that there was reluctance amongst some staff to provide basic support and reasonable accommodations, such as access to lecture notes or assistive technology (AT).

In relation to the types of support the adults in this study had availed of, half of them had been advised to attend general adult literacy training through their local ETB's literacy services, both before and after being diagnosed as dyslexic, in order to improve their literacy skills. However, on doing so they experienced severely limited progress. This was a source of great frustration for some as it was experienced as 'another failure' and as a result some of them had 'written themselves off' as learners. In hindsight, some of the adults felt that general literacy training was a way of trying to 'fix' or 'cure' dyslexia. Instead of more literacy training, most of them wanted help to develop alternative strategies and skills which could facilitate independent learning and living:

> They're [adults with dyslexia] always going to have dyslexia. So even if they do learn to read and write, it's going to be a struggle for them to do it … So I think that what most people want is, they want to find ways to help them to live their lives. (Ciaran, 40's)

Some of the identified strategies in this study relate to technology, both general ICT (Information and Communications Technology) and specialised AT. Whilst AT can be expensive and time-consuming to learn, some technology is readily available in smartphones and laptops. For example, rather than trying to copy notes by hand from a slide or whiteboard during class, some of the adults took photographs of notes with their smartphones, and they used free text-to-speech software.

Other factors which facilitated a positive learning experience appeared to be linked to the types of supports available and the culture and attitude towards dyslexia in the particular FET institution. For the adults who had participated

in the CPfD programme, the positive attitude towards dyslexia and the rare experience of being in an environment where being dyslexic was the 'norm' was of great benefit to them:

> I just got that acceptance in myself then that 'I'm actually alright, I'm not stupid'. There are some very clever people here, you know … I had that embedded belief that I was stupid or wasn't going to get it. And then when I came here and got into the mix and everyone just accepted me for where I was at. (Ben, 40's)

Another positive aspect of the CPfD Programme was the holistic approach where the psychological and social aspects of dyslexia were acknowledged.

For those who had availed of adult guidance counselling, it was evident that the personal and social dimensions of the client-centred guidance were valued:

> She [adult guidance counsellor] does the whole lot … she would talk to me about how I'm actually feeling you know. When I'm not myself, what's my confidence like? (Ben, 40's)

Finally, one of the implications of dyslexia being a 'hidden' disability was that the adults in this study were continually faced with the dilemma of disclosure of their dyslexia. Whilst some of the adults were comfortable with disclosure, most of them found it emotionally difficult and spoke of high levels of anxiety and stress. In relation to FET settings, disclosure was sometimes associated with a 'fear' of being judged. However, although many felt anxious due to anticipated negative consequences, some regarded it as necessary to access appropriate support:

> Yea, I do feel a bit awkward and a bit uncomfortable. But I mean, even when I was telling them in the college … I said I have it, it didn't feel good, but like … it is something I have to do. (Phillip, 20's)

Whilst disclosure can be a prerequisite to accessing supports, it is not guaranteed as there may not be a formal support structure in place within the FET educational institutions.

Discussion of Findings

The findings are discussed in relation to previous research and with regards to implications for policy makers and stakeholders within the FET sector under

the two headings of *(Mis)perceptions of Dyslexia and Varied Levels of Support for Adult Learners with Dyslexia.*

(Mis)perceptions of Dyslexia

One of the key issues that emerged in this study were the adults' experiences of misrecognition and feelings of shame, anxiety and low levels of self-esteem amongst many adults with dyslexia. These issues appear to be partly related to a prevalent misconceived view that dyslexia is linked to intelligence (Evans, 2015; Riddick, 2012; Young Kong, 2012). This misconception also informs how both children and adults with dyslexia are 'labelled' by others, with examples like 'slow' and 'stupid' (Birr Moje *et al.*, 2009). To address this, the adults in this study suggested that a strengthened awareness of dyslexia is essential, not least in relation to ensuring that younger generations will not be faced with the same level of adversity they experience. The implications, therefore, are that training is needed for education providers to increase their level of understanding of dyslexia and the particular needs of learners with dyslexia (McPhillips *et al.*, 2015).

Another key issue for the adults who were diagnosed as dyslexic in adulthood relates to the necessity for them to reframe their negative self-perceptions towards a new type of learner identity. The importance of 'reframing' has been noted in a number of Irish and international studies (Claassens and Lessing, 2015; Evans, 2015; Young Kong, 2012). The factors which were identified in this study as facilitating this process included: dyslexia-friendly environments, recognition of personal strengths, and validation of intelligence and learning capacity. One example of good practice in the FET sector, which was identified in this study, was the CPfD Programme in Co. Kildare. Its holistic approach encompasses both educational and personal support including literacy training, emotional wellbeing, preparation for further study or work and peer engagement with other dyslexic learners.

The current findings also strongly suggest that a dyslexia diagnosis has the potential to be transformative as it provides a sense of recognition of intelligence and capability, and likely increases access to support and accommodations in educational institutions (Claassens and Lessing, 2015). However, the benefits of being diagnosed are often contingent on the individual developing a strong knowledge of his/her dyslexia and own personal strengths (Long and McPolin, 2009; Pino and Mortari, 2014). The implications, therefore, relate to the need for support post-diagnosis to ensure these positive outcomes are maintained

(Sandell *et al.*, 2013; Young Kong, 2012). However, the financial barrier to accessing assessment services, in combination with a prevalent diagnosis criteria for access to support, are significant social justice issues which need to be addressed within the FET sector (Elftorp and Hearne, 2014; Harkin *et al.*, 2015).

Varied Levels of Support for Adult Learners with Dyslexia
With regards to the levels and types of support learners with dyslexia in the FET sector appear to be at a particular disadvantage compared to those in primary, post primary and HE due to the lack of a national approach and commitment to supporting these learners (McGuinness *et al.*, 2014). Whilst there are examples of good practice where a high level of disability support is offered through a special disability support office and by tutors, the findings suggests that support provision in the FET sector is more often left to the discretion of individual tutors, who may have insufficient knowledge about dyslexia, or may be reluctant to accommodate adult learners with dyslexia (McGuckin *et al.*, 2013; NCSE 2014).

From the findings of this study, it is evident that the varied level of support in FET institutions has negative implications for learner progression, leaving some learners feeling discouraged and anxious, or dropping out of their courses and thus perpetuating the cycle of incompletion and failure. Similarly, poor retention rates amongst students with disabilities have previously been linked to limited support provision, in Ireland and internationally (McGuckin *et al.*, 2013; Pino and Mortari, 2014; UCC and CIT, 2010). Guidance counsellors have an important role in supporting learners with dyslexia who struggle. For example, guidance counsellors may need to advocate on behalf of learners with dyslexia or enable them to confront discrimination and to assert their rights and entitlements (Blustein *et al.*, 2005).

In relation to effective accommodations for learners with dyslexia, many provisions incur little or no financial cost, such as additional time to complete an assignment or exam or allowing the learner to use mobile applications to support their learning (Nguyen *et al.*, 2013; Pino and Mortari, 2014). As such, education providers could potentially comply with their legal obligations with little additional resources and these accommodations may also be of benefit to individuals who struggle with literacy but who score outside the cut-off points for a dyslexia diagnosis (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014). Nonetheless, a further expansion of the Fund for Students with Disabilities to include learners on QQI

Levels 1 – 4 could increase access to more specific accommodations and AT in the FET sector. However, the literature suggests that best practice should also involve an embedded approach, whereby the inclusion of learners with dyslexia is 'everyone's job' not just that of an access officer or a disability support service (McCarthy *et al.*, 2018, p. 6).

Conclusion

So what can we learn from adults with dyslexia about the 'temperature' of adult learning? Taking both the identified gaps in provision and the individual positive experiences into account, it may be fair to call it 'lukewarm'. Whilst the core principles of both ACE and adult guidance counselling are person-centred and focused on the promotion of social justice, there are a number of key issues which need to be addressed. Based on the findings of this study, the following three recommendations are put forward:

1. Training and continuous professional development for FET staff is needed in order to strengthen their understanding of dyslexia, their knowledge about their obligation to support dyslexic learners, and awareness of how to support them within the classroom (Elftorp, 2017b; McCarthy *et al.*, 2018; McPhillips *et al.*, 2015).

2. In light of how important a dyslexia diagnosis can be for the educational progression and emotional wellbeing of individuals with dyslexia, children's 'right' to assessment (EPSEN Act 2004) should be extended to adults. Due to the cost of a dyslexia assessment, funding should also be made available for adults with suspected but undiagnosed dyslexia. However, standardised internal needs assessments for those with a previous diagnosis should give access to support and accommodations in FET institutions (see proposed approach by Harkin *et al.*, 2015 in relation to HE).

3. Clear guidelines should be developed for providers of FET which outline a national approach to ensuring that learners do not experience any disadvantage as a result of their disability (Equality Act 2004). Such guidelines could be based on existing good practices, which employ an embedded approach and collaborative support structures (McCarthy *et al.*, 2018; McGuckin *et al.*, 2013).

4. Finally, the restructuring in the FET sector in recent years can be seen as an effort to dislodge old perceptions of the FET sector as the 'Cinderella sector' (McGuinness *et al.*, 2014). However, in order to do so, and to 'raise

the temperature' of adult learning for all learners, there also needs to be an infrastructure put in place to ensure that learners with dyslexia and other disabilities are accommodated and sufficiently supported.

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Assessing the Health of Community Education: The Experience of Change from the Perspective of Community Education Practitioners

SUZANNE KYLE

Abstract

This paper examines the changing adult education landscape in Ireland from the perspective of community education practitioners. It draws on qualitative research which highlights the challenges faced by practitioners in terms of their practice, their relationship with adult learners, and their sense of professional identity. The findings of the study indicate a tension between current adult education policy and the principles and practice of community education. The paper highlights the role community education plays in addressing social and educational exclusion and recommends that practitioners are recognised as key partners in adult and further education policy development.

Keywords: Community Education, Discourse, Status, SOLAS, ETB's, QQI, SICAP, social inclusion

Introduction

Community education provision is 'amongst the most dynamic, creative and relevant components of Adult Education in Ireland' according to the *White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life* (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p. 112). Such an acknowledgement, along with the fact that a full chapter was devoted to this area of adult education provision, inspired much hope for community education providers across Ireland at the time of its publication. However, since the collapse of the Irish economy in 2008 and the imposition of harsh austerity measures, community education has been experiencing considerable temperature fluctuations. This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the many significant changes brought about by the recent establishment of the following bodies: SOLAS (the new further education and training body); sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs), replacing

thirty-three Vocational Educational Committees (VECs); and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), a merger between four qualifications bodies including the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

Assessing the current temperature of community education involves an examination of contemporary policy, principles and practice, as well as the extent to which these are impacting on community education practitioners and their engagement with adult learners and local communities. This paper is based on a study which sought to do just that.

Social Inclusion

The 'Matthew' effect of accumulated advantage exists in adult education in Ireland, where those engaging in lifelong learning are largely drawn from higher socio-economic groups (AONTAS, 2016). Those who arguably would benefit most are least likely to participate. This highlights the need for an inclusive approach which tackles entrenched inequality in Irish society. Inclusion, as a feature of community education, does not mean increasing engagement in existing societal structures, or what Freire called integrating perceived 'marginals' in to the 'healthy society' that they have forsaken (Freire, 1970). Fejes cautions against this 'them and us' approach to adult education in which those who do not participate for whatever reason 'become constructed as "others" who are in need of normalisation through social policy' (Fejes, 2008, p. 89). A more radical approach focuses on an emancipatory practice which acknowledges inequities inherent in existing structures and tackles structural inequality and political decisions which favour one group of people over another (Hurley, 2014).

Social Justice Ireland highlights the role of community education in this regard recommending that:

> The further adult and community education sector achieves parity of esteem with other sectors within the formal system. This is particularly important given that is it expected to respond to the needs of large sections of the population who have either been failed by the formal system or for whom it is unsuitable as a way of learning. (Social Justice Ireland, 2015, p. 198)

Responding to such educational needs involves sensitivity to context (Russel, 2017). The recent changes to the adult and further education landscape are contextualised within a society experiencing increasing pressures as a result of

austerity, the ever widening gap between rich and poor (Social Justice Ireland, 2016), severe and disproportionate cuts to the community sector (Harvey, 2012), and a prioritisation of skills development over a broader view of education as a tool for strengthening democracy. The phasing out of government support for community development has compounded such challenges for community education providers. This phasing out began with the first wave of closures of community development projects (CDPs) in December 2009, when 14 of the 180 CDPs were informed of their closure by a Christmas Eve fax message from the Department of Education and Skills. In the following year, most of the rest of the projects were transferred to local partnerships (University College Cork, 2015). The Community Development Programme was replaced with the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Access to funding for this involves a competitive tendering processes for management of community development budgets, resulting in the co-option of the sector (Fitzsimons, 2017) and a reduction in community autonomy over project activities.

A recent ESRI study, which evaluated the impact of SICAP, emphasises the importance of community development in adult education, finding that outreach and involvement through local community groups had the greatest record in terms of engaging the most marginalised people. It also highlighted significant disquiet about the current policy approach, which has moved away from acknowledging community work and community development as an internationally recognised approach to social inclusion (Darmody and Smyth, 2018).

A key feature of the current SOLAS Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy is its prioritisation of adult education as a tool for skills development. This has also created a challenge for community education providers who view the purpose of education more broadly. This concern is acknowledged within the FET strategy itself:

> Interviews with stakeholders revealed important challenges in combining the maintenance of the inclusive ethos of the community education sector (for example), and at the same time matching the needs of employers. (SOLAS, 2014, p. 26)

Quality Assurance in Community Education

There is no argument between policy makers and practitioners about the need for quality in community education. Numerous quality assurance resources

have been produced and utilised by the sector over the years (Fitzsimons, 2017), for example the *Guide to Best Practice in Women's Community Education* (AONTAS, 2009). In recent years, significant reform has taken place in the area of quality assurance in adult education, most notably since the establishment of QQI. However, it is worth bearing in mind the view that much reform in education 'emerges out of a struggle between groups to make their bias (and focus) state policy and practice' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 65) and that quality is interpreted differently depending on values, judgement and cultural context of the interpreter (Fitzsimons, 2017). The extent therefore to which new QQI quality assurance and programme validation policies amount to an improvement in the learning experience and outcomes for people who are socially excluded is open to debate.

The White Paper acknowledged the role of the community sector in 'curriculum planning and design and in decisions regarding pedagogical approaches' (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p. 118). However, the temperature of community education in terms of its capacity to participate in this work, and to continue to offer 'quality assured' accredited courses will be more measurable over the coming years, as community education providers manage the challenges of 'reengagement' with QQI and navigate new programme validation policies and procedures (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2017). Furthermore, the current QQI fees structure will add a significant burden to an already struggling sector. Such fees amount to a double, hidden cut where funding provided to community groups by one government department is being taken back by another agency of the state. Such concerns are adding to a climate of uncertainty for community education providers who wish to autonomously continue to develop and deliver programmes leading to QQI awards, as many had done in partnership with FETAC.

Discourse

An examination of policy in adult and community education would not be complete without an acknowledgement of the influence of discourse in its development. Discourse involves the production of knowledge through language, or the practice of 'producing meaning', which enters in to and influences all social practices (Hall, 2006). This is in line with the ideas of French theorist Foucault, who highlights the disciplinary and regulatory power of discourse (Edwards, 2008). Italian philosopher Gramsci calls this influence 'common sense', or a collective knowledge that becomes accepted as beyond question, and therefore a powerful force in shaping society (Crehan, 2016).

Bernstein suggests that discourse can provide 'the means whereby external power relations can be carried by it' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 4) and therefore promotes the importance of analysing the structure of discourse. Doing so, in the context of current policy will highlight the predominant use of certain language such as the term 'further education and training' which has replaced that of 'adult education'. Where this former term had originally been used to describe a specific type of provision within the broad adult education sphere, it is now being used to name the entire sector (Murray *et al.*, 2014). Murray suggests that the use of specific types of terminology in adult and further education policy and practice represents an 'attempt at legitimising a particular approach or philosophical position in relation to learning and professional practice' (Murray, 2014). This approach, which is primarily concerned with the acquisition of skills, shies away from questions about systemic change and an analysis of the structures which perpetuate inequality (Ryan, 2014). Where acquisition of skills leading to employability is the primary goal of educational policies, the learner becomes perceived as a commodity to be bought and sold in the market place (Doyle, 2017).

Economic historian Karl Polanyi challenges these contemporary 'common sense' notions of market driven societies through an examination of the social and economic history of mankind. He found that the market economy, rather than being an inevitability, is an entirely unprecedented venture in the history of the race and that 'gain and profit made on exchange never before played an important part in human economy' (Polanyi, 1957, p. 45). He makes the crucial point about the changelessness of man as a social rather than an economic being, a point that is frequently raised in contemporary discussions about the purpose of education.

'Activation' is another term to become more prevalent in recent policy discourse. The phrase 'social inclusion' has been replaced with that of 'active inclusion' and, as previously mentioned, the Community Development programme was replaced with the Social Inclusion *Community Activation Programme*. It is accepted in social sciences that our values enter in to all our descriptions of the social world, and that most of our statements, however factual, have an ideological dimension (Hall, 2006). The concept of 'active inclusion', rather than being informed by practice on the ground, emerged on the European arena in 2005, under the UK's EU presidency (Durnescu, 2015). Implicit in such terms as active inclusion and community activation is an underlying assumption that if people are not contributing in an explicit way to the economy, they are in

need of 'activation'. This assumption disregards the other familial, community or societal roles they may be fulfilling.

The FET strategy defines active inclusion as 'enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society and this includes having a job' (SOLAS, 2014, p. 7). Furthermore, the ESRI report *Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future* states that the 'main priorities and rationale of provision are to promote economic growth and development and to address social exclusion arising from economic inactivity' (McGuinness *et al.* 2014, p. 111). Rather than acknowledging the complex societal and political factors which contribute to social and economic exclusion, this language suggests only a sense of personal culpability. Not only does the use of such language indicate an ideological position on the part of policy makers, it also influences how policy makers respond to the needs of people who are socially excluded.

Methodology

The study on which this paper is based was framed within an interpretive paradigm, through which the researcher strives to understand and interpret the world in terms of its people (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). In keeping with the community education aim of providing a forum for the voices of otherwise silenced people (Connolly, 2003), and bearing in mind the difficulty for the sector in developing a collective voice (O'Neill and Cullinane, 2017), the purpose of this study was to give voice to participants. A qualitative methodology therefore was chosen, drawing on the Freirean principles of dialogue.

The chosen data collection technique was semi-structured interviews. Such an approach is ideal for interviewing participants who are articulate, are not hesitant to speak and who can share views and ideas comfortably (Creswell, 2015), as was the case with participants of this research.

The study is also influenced by critical theory, the intention of which is to emancipate the disempowered, redress inequality and to realise a democratic society based on the promotion of individual freedoms (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). The research is characterised by joint efforts and commitments of participants and researcher to change practices (Charmaz, 2005) .

Community education is characterised by considerable diversity in terms of personnel, structure and funding. In order to reflect this diversity, three

categories of community education practitioner were interviewed for this study: 1) community based practitioner, 2) community education tutor, and 3) community education staff employed by an ETB. The breakdown was as follows:

Category of practitioner	Number of practitioners interviewed
Community based practitioner	6
Community education tutor	3
ETB employed community education practitioner	4

Of the four ETB employed participants, three were Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) and one was a community education resource worker. The participants represented diverse geographical locations as they were based in a number of different counties including Limerick, Waterford, Kerry Wexford, Dublin, Kildare and Galway.

Convenience sampling was used and participants were chosen on the basis that they had at least five years' experience working in the area of community education. This experience allowed for detailed exploration of the key themes (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

Data analysis involved detailed examination of the data and a dissection of the text in order to identify key concepts. These concepts were then coded and clustered in order to allow patterns and key themes to emerge (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Findings

The study highlighted the role that community education plays in addressing the complexities and issues associated with poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. It also built on previous studies acknowledging the wider social, personal and intergenerational benefits of community education. However, a key theme to emerge was that policy developments have indicated a lack of acknowledgment of this and that community education is in danger of losing its identity within the current policy framework.

The contributions from participants highlighted frustration and anxiety associated with increased social problems as a result of austerity, budget cuts,

increased bureaucracy, and labour market activation policies at the expense of an acknowledgement of the broader purpose of community education. A sense of professional dissonance among research participants is also evident within the study.

Community Education and Social Inclusion

A dominant theme to emerge was that community education has a wider focus and broader outcomes than labour market activation. All participants highlighted the role of community education in increasing community and civic engagement, reducing isolation, the promotion of interculturalism, improving mental and physical health, and progression to further education and training. The following comments from participants illustrate these points:

> I think the more we support adults in education, the better the chances are for their children and grandchildren, for the next generation, so that investment pays dividends for the next generations coming. It's so short-term or short-sighted of us to ignore. (Community based participant)

> Getting a job isn't the end game. It's getting out of the house, it's getting off medication for depression, it's being able to raise their children, it's all sorts of other outcomes that are hugely valid and also save the country a serious amount of money. (ETB participant)

> I think here in [names city] … where there have been lots of divisions between communities … having people learning together, has had a positive effect, in terms of cross-city, local development. (ETB participant)

> [The adult learner] was doing a nails [beauty therapy] class … she's [now] on the parent's council, she's organising an event for the school, that's how lots of groups operate. (ETB participant)

The role of community education in terms of tackling intergenerational inequalities and reducing the costs to the economy associated with poverty was also promoted:

> [The] women say it encouraged their own children to continue their education or to do their lessons or their exams. (Community based participant)

There's a lot of talk now about … pumping money to the health system and I often think to myself 'well what about prevention?', I often think community education actually plays a part in that. (Tutor participant)

I see it hugely as a gateway to further education. (Tutor participant)

However, it was clear from the study that when community educators seek to contribute such perspectives they are often met with a neo-liberal outlook which is difficult to challenge (Fitzsimons, 2017). One participant sums this sentiment up as follows:

There isn't that vision of education that would enable the community education sector to be valued as having a real contribution to make to the quality of life, within the current discourse. (Community based participant)

This discourse was highlighted by participants who struggled to align it with their own values. For example, the term 'learner-centeredness' arose as a discussion point in the study. It is defined by one participant as follows:

It starts off with outreach, it starts off with talking and listening to people, what they want. The second thing then, is designing the programme around the learners. (ETB participant)

However, concern is expressed about the change in the interpretation of the term:

That understanding of learner-centred has changed … from the learner being the starting point, the centre, the one that determines, to being the learner as the individual, moving up through a system of education ... about the progression of the individual learner … I think it's related a lot, to the labour market activation, job readiness, employability. (ETB participant)

Definitions of this term are considered within the literature. Where current policy discourse offers a view of learner centeredness as being either equated with consultation, or independent learning and having access resources, Murray (2014) suggests that learner centeredness is an exercise in democracy and equality, which ultimately benefits society by encouraging active, and most importantly, critical citizenship.

Despite the fact that the term 'learner-centred' is not defined within the FET

Strategy, there is a statement that further education and training is 'both learner-centred and participative in its pedagogical approach' (SOLAS, 2014, p. 22). A contradiction, however appears within the Strategy when it aims to 'implement a new integrated FET planning model to ensure relevant learner centred, flexible and employment-led provision' (SOLAS, 2014, p. 140) .

Bureaucracy

In times of cutbacks there is very often a rush by policy makers to impose strict 'value for money' rulings where education and learning becomes downgraded as something to be measured and transferred (O' Brien, 2016). A significant development in FET provision in 2017 was the roll out of a new information technology system the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS). One element of this new system is data collection which requires learners to provide detailed personal information (DDLETB, n.d.) if they wish to participate in adult and further education programmes. The research uncovered much disquiet about the use of this new system in community education which, by its nature is different to more structured, institution based provision, as can be seen in the comments below:

> You know systems abhor the nuances or the exceptions. (ETB participant)

> I think some of the other questions in terms of the jobless household questions or your education level … I think that's going to have a huge impact on … who actually engages with courses and how many courses we'll actually be able to run. Because by the time we do all the paperwork, you're going to have to add on hours to each course to get that done which means there'll be less courses overall. (ETB participant)

The potential implications for engagement were also expressed as follows:

> I think the implications are that people just won't engage … it puts people off. (ETB participant)

> It won't happen … they won't give them, they are so afraid of giving out the information, like what do they need the PPS number for? Again is it, to be able to count how many people are coming off the social welfare, or to go back and say 'well, you're on disability and you shouldn't be on this, and you should be available for work, and you shouldn't be doing this course'? They want you to educate them but yet if they're on social welfare they should be available for work. You know some of the things are a contradiction to each other. (Community based participant)

The challenges of quantifying the impact of the use of such data collection were also expressed as follows:

> I think the ones who actually come and refuse, you get some idea, you can quantify that. I think there's another group of people that will hear on the grapevine that if you're going up there they want to know this, this and this. (ETB participant)

A recent study highlights similar concerns among Adult Education Officers (AEOs) of ETBs, and raises a concern about the viability of such new policies and the 'lip service to social inclusion' (Russel, 2017, p. 50). The creation of the Community Education Facilitator role, following the publication of the *White Paper*, was an acknowledgement of the importance of engagement with local communities in order to promote educational inclusion. However, a side effect of such aforementioned new policies is that the possibilities for community engagement have been dramatically reduced, as one participant highlights below:

> I'm in the office more. I'm sitting in front of a computer more. I'm inputting data, I'm writing less qualitative reports. I'm doing more quantitative reporting … I'm more embedded in the ETB structure, by virtue of changes around reporting and funding. (ETB participant)

The demands of accreditation are also highlighted and how they can create a tension between theory and practice:

> You lose something in the formal aspect because … it's top down. You can't use their own experience in the way that you could if it wasn't formal. [With non-accredited courses] you have the freedom to do what interest them so you can go where they go rather than have to keep pulling them back and saying 'no we have to do this because it's the requirement'. (Community based participant)

> You spend your entire course producing evidence to show learning outcomes … there's absolutely no hope of them having progression because there's been no proper engagement. (Tutor participant)

This concern has echoes of Chomsky's warning about 'subtle mechanisms which contribute to ideological control … [such as supporting and encouraging people to] occupy themselves with irrelevant and innocuous work' (Chomsky, 2003, p. 239).

Professional Identity and Status

Despite the increased standing of FET in recent years, the study uncovered disquiet about the diminution of recognition for community education within the new policy framework. A symptom of this is evident in discussions about the current status of community education practitioners, with one participant stating:

> In the last number of years, I would have had a huge voice at the table … I'm now not even consulted about anything. (ETB participant)

This notion of reduced status for community education practitioners emerged during the study. The selection of quotes below is drawn from the data and offers an insight in to how participants believe community education practitioners are perceived:

the flaky edge

the awkward ones that want bespoke systems

on the boundary or the margins

so low down the pecking order

the poor relation

bottom dog

the great unwashed

wishy washy

It'll never be centre-stage

a bit of a pain in the neck

A bit 'out there'
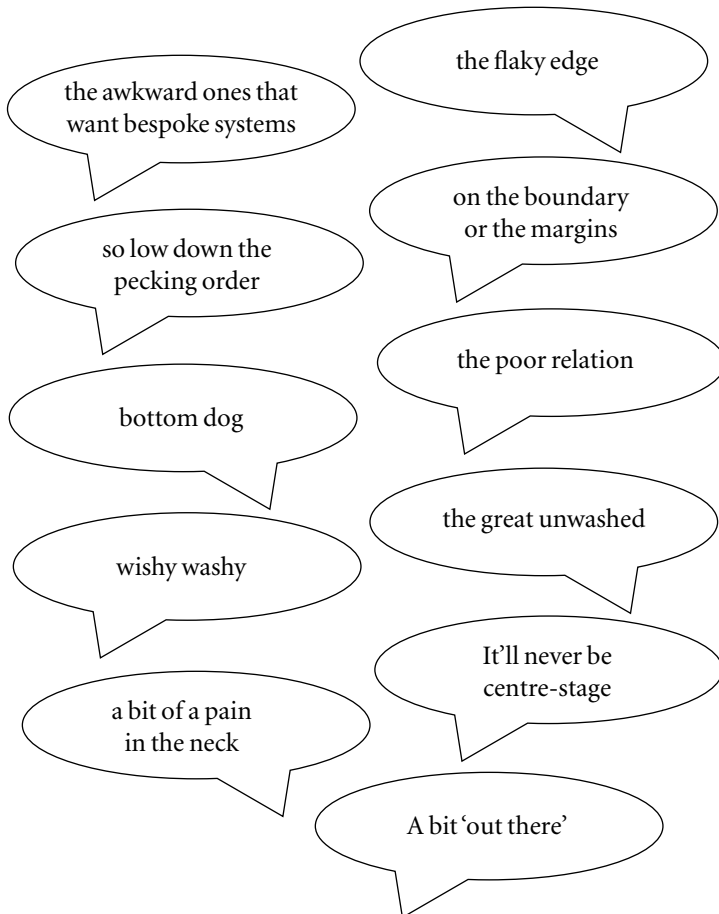
This lack of recognition has impacted on notions of professional identity and the ability of participants to work in a manner consistent with their values and educational philosophies:

> I just don't think there's enough respect for community ed and how powerful it can be as an instigator of change. I think we don't get the credibility because … we're not the job activation people. (Tutor participant)

> The social inclusion stuff over here is just a by the way, it's not headline, it's not PR. (ETB participant)

Traditionally a fundamental feature of the community education practitioner role has involved authentic engagement with participants and local communities. As with CEFs, however, the evidence suggests that maintaining this focus has become increasingly difficult:

> People have said to me recently, it doesn't feel like a community education centre because people are in their offices, closed doors, don't want to be interrupted because they've all their reports to do. (Community based participant)

Further evidence of this sense of professional dissonance among practitioners is evident in the following contributions:

> Learner engagement … all of that kind of work has gone off the radar entirely … My contact now with learners would be through class visits … it's the quick chat, but they see you in kind of a cigire [inspector] role anyway when you're coming in like that. (ETB participant)

> Things are changing at such a rapid rate. We had a full afternoon with tutors recently, we talked about PLSS … about FARR [Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting] … about DCS [Document Centric Solutions], their pay system, about reg forms, we talked about attendance forms. At no point did we talk about curriculum development, or learner support … when we're brought together as an ETB staff it's about systems, it's about procedures … Any time I've ever been at anything regionally as a cohort of staff it's been about systems. (ETB participant)

> This idea of education for emancipation, it's gone … You know, the whole idea of equality and of transformative learning, that discussion, people are very awkward around it. (ETB participant)

This sense of a challenged professional identity indicates a tension between the 'why' of the role, particularly in relation to broader social concerns, and the current focus of the 'how' – methodologies, progression routes etc. (Finnegan, 2016). This space for reflection and professional development is limited as a result of practitioners' precarity, funding requirements and resource shortages, factors which impact on any discussion around development (O'Neill and Cullinane, 2017).

Conclusion

Despite the challenges highlighted within the study, there is cause for optimism. There is evidence indicating a recognition of community education in recent documentation. For example, the role of community education in supporting SOLAS to meet its objectives, in terms of removing barriers to FET, was highlighted in a recent study, commissioned by SOLAS themselves:

> A suite of measures which are focused around outreach to communities, and particularly vulnerable groups should continue through existing mechanisms and institutions … Stakeholder organisations, such as the voluntary sector … have unique and valuable insights into the needs and concerns of these groups.(Mooney and O'Rourke, 2017, p. 55)

Additionally, within the *FET Strategy*, two of the most widely identified recommendations, within over 150 submissions to the consultation, are that SOLAS and ETBs should facilitate the delivery of community education through community groups, and that SOLAS should measure outcomes that relate to personal development as well as employment (SOLAS, 2014).

This point is reinforced by the Community Education Facilitators' Association (CEFA):

> Community education has stayed close to the grassroots communities irrespective of the institutional configuration under which it receives its funding. What is important is that its role be recognised, its contribution valued and maintained in the midst of the crisis. (CEFA, 2014, p. 5)

Furthermore, community education is closely aligned with development education and can support the government in reaching its target towards the fourth UN *Sustainable Development Goal* (SDG) which is focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNDP, 2015). Under the *National SDG Implementation*

Plan Ireland has committed to ensuring by 2030 that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2018). Working in partnership with community education providers will support the advancement of this target.

That the community education budget under SOLAS has not been reduced and is currently ring-fenced is also a cause for optimism. However, the FET strategy states that the budget will only be maintained until 'such time as the information exists that will allow for the establishment of a new funding model based on appropriate metrics' (SOLAS 2014, p. 26). What constitutes 'appropriate' will depend on value judgements and perspectives of those involved in policy development in this area. Consequently, the effectiveness of that system will be contingent on who is tasked with its development, and the motivations behind it. Bearing in mind Freire's caution against marginalising certain groups from decision making in the area of education policy, this study argues that community education practitioners should be central to this process:

> One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action programme which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a programme constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding. (Freire, 1970, pp. 83–84)

A commitment on the part of policy makers to tackling social and educational exclusion will be evidenced if there is dialogue and the full participation of community education practitioners, among others, in relation the development of adult and further education policy.

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'Tracing Our Roots: Imagining Our Future': Lessons to Learn from the Life Histories of Adult Educators in the Republic of Ireland (1970–2010)

CATHERINE MAUNSELL

Abstract

This article seeks to provide a contextual backdrop to this edition's focus on analysing the changes from the perspective of policy and practice since 2010, through presenting the findings of an in-depth analysis of the life histories of six adult educators, working in the field of adult education in the Republic of Ireland in the decades leading to 2010. Through the reflections of these six adult educators, this article offers the opportunity to trace the roots and legacies of the field and imagine the future, as they had envisioned it, at that given juncture in time.

Keywords: Adult Educators, Life History

> Our understanding of contemporary education in Ireland is greatly informed by gaining some insights into contexts and changes in the past. (Raftery, 2009, p. 9)

Introduction

Acknowledging the extent to which adult education has experienced significant change, nationally and internationally, in the recent past, this article contends that before we turn our gaze to imagining the future, we would be wise to trace the roots of adult education in Ireland at the turning point of 2010. The findings from a study of the life histories of six adult educators, captured at that moment in time, affords a valuable opportunity to reflect on the legacy of adult education in Ireland before discerning the best actions going forward.

In the context of the Republic of Ireland, and indeed internationally, it is unequivocal to state that the role and function of adult education has changed over time. Peter Jarvis, an eminent adult educator writes that 'the concept of education will always be relative and reflect the social conditions of the time

of definition' (Jarvis, 2010, p. 25). Changing population demographics and the ever increasing pace of technological developments warranting continuous updating of skills and training are some of the main challenges facing the discipline, in both a national and global context, in the 21st century.

While consensus on the value of adult education and lifelong learning has been one of the most remarkable features of the education policy discourse, both in the Republic of Ireland and internationally, it is contended that the field of adult learning and education at policy, structural and implementation levels remains fragmented and is somewhat of a 'Cinderella' character within the Irish education system (Fleming, 2012). If we accept, as given, the central role of adult education in meeting the needs of individuals in contemporary society, then such fragmentation needs to be challenged further and deeply. One further challenge, that may be seen as underpinning many of the others in the literature is that, within the lifelong learning agenda and discourse, the role and place of adult learning and education continues to be underplayed (Maunsell, Downes and McLoughlin, 2008; Holford, Riddell, Weedon, Litjens and Hannan, 2009; Downes, 2014). What then of the role of adult educators?

The Role of Adult Educators
On examination of the literature on the role of adult educators, it is clear that whether one perceives oneself to be an adult educator is a matter of context. There is no accepted taxonomy that includes all those engaged in facilitating adult learning. Even the term 'adult educator' is not universally accepted (Youngman and Singh, 2005). Usher and Bryant (1989, p. 2 as cited in Merriam and Brockett, 2007, p. 16) suggest that a spectrum exists in terms of practitioners' 'consciousness of having an educational role in working with adults. This continuum ranges from the full-time "professional" educator of adults [to] the individual whose vocational and non-vocational activities have repercussions for adult learning.'

While studies exploring the professional identities of teachers in formal education settings and higher education are more plentiful, similar explorations in terms of adult educators' identities have not been undertaken to any large extent, though there are some exceptions (Cf. Dominice, 2000).

Methodology
Given that the voice of the adult educator has been relatively absent in research undertaken and published to date, and certainly within an Irish context, the

present study, therefore, was an attempt to address this lacuna in the literature and to elicit and disseminate perspectives and voices not previously well articulated heretofore.

Mode of Inquiry: The Life History Approach

A qualitative research paradigm was adopted (Cf. Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), while the particular research methodology employed was that of life history. The life history approach aims to connect participants' accounts of their experiences to the historical, social and political contexts in which their professional lives were embedded (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000; West, Alheit, Andersen and Merrill, 2007; Merrill and West, 2009).

The research lens of this study thus focused on participants' professional lives, their becoming, being and envisioning as adult educators in the Republic of Ireland over the decades from 1970-2010. Participants' perceptions of the legacy of adult education and vision for adult education into the 21st century are the specific foci of inquiry of this article.

Participant Profile

The participants in this study were six adult educators, who, at the timing of the interviews in 2010, had been working in the field of adult education for all or most of their working lives, hence, the timeframe of 'a working life' of forty years for this study, from 1970-2010.

These six adult educators, three of whom are male and three female, while drawn from diverse disciplinary backgrounds had shared the profession of adult educator for some three decades at the least, with most of the sample having worked in the field for over four decades. At the time of interview, the participants were working across a range of adult and community education contexts: adult basic, vocational and training, community and/or higher education and were engaged in a wide range of professional endeavours *inter alia*: teaching, facilitating, advocating, networking, fund-raising, writing, researching, community development, activism, administration and policy development.

Sampling in this research study was purposive and criteria based. The sample was selected on the basis of two of Miles and Huberman's (1994) sampling approaches, namely criterion sampling and logic of maximum variation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) such a sampling strategy increases the possibility of accessing an array of multiple perspectives on a topic.

The Research Process

Qualitative in-depth interviewing is the primary method of generating data in this research study, through which the interviewer asks specific questions to obtain knowledge of the interviewee's world that relate to the study's research questions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Kvale (1996, p. 19) proposed that 'the research interview is a specific form of conversation' and furthermore suggested (*ibid*. p.1) that 'if you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them'.

As this research study involved interviewing colleagues in the field of adult education, Rubin and Rubin's (2005, p. 14) concept of 'conversational partnerships' seems an appropriate approach to the research relationships. This approach acknowledges the partnership between the interviewee and the interviewer and allows for a congenial and cooperative experience to develop as both 'work together to achieve a shared understanding'.

The research, undertaken in partial fulfilment of a post-graduate qualification received ethical clearance from a University Research Ethics Committee. Participants were ascribed an initial/pseudonym to protect identity, their real names and identifying information are not included in any documents related to the study.

Some Issues of Sampling

In the first instance, the relatively small sample size of six participants in this study limits its generalisability to other populations, fields or time periods. Thus, while the limitation of small sample on the generalisability of the findings is a valid one, nonetheless, the richness of the data collated through the use of life history methods has compensatory potential and such a methodological approach was best matched to the overall objectives of the study.

A second issue relates to the inherent bias that occurs when non-probability sampling is employed, as was the case in this study. This approach it is accepted can lead to what are termed 'cohort' effects coming into play. This study, however, does not claim that these participants are the only adult educators who might have a perspective to offer to this study rather, that given that they have matched the set criteria, their perspectives can shed light on a sparsely researched field.

In a related vein, doing research in my 'own backyard' as it is referred to by Goodson and Sikes (2001, p. 25) also raises a number of issues in respect of the

freedom with which participants will disclose to somebody they know already, and or who works in their field. It is my view, that participants had the necessary assurance as to the ethical standards being applied to data collected through the interview process to speak openly about their life histories as adult educators.

Findings from the Study

This section sets out the findings arising from the research process undertaken for this study. A decision was taken to select and prioritise particular aspects of the data, particularly those which related to the two broad themes of adult educators' perceptions of the legacy of adult education and their vision for adult education into the future.

Perceptions of the Legacy of Adult Education

In their responses to the question on what they perceived to be the legacy of adult education, participants in this study cited changes in the ethos of the education system and the learning environment or culture that is created.

> Well, schools generally are a million times better institutions than they were in my time. They're not the violent, horrible places that they were and that says a lot. There is a far better relationship, far more genuine relationship between teacher and student. (Participant D)

Participants noted that in their view the learning environment has become more learner-centred. The concept of not just accessing the 'voice' of the learner, but holding it as central to the learning process, was perceived to not be as alien as might previously have been the case.

> I would certainly say the awareness that this must be learner-centred, genuinely learner-centred. That they must be a part of everything we do. They must be a part of the decision making. (Participant E)

Infrastructural developments were also acknowledged.

> Money/Investment - which were not there in the 1980s. There was nothing. They definitely needed money and that did develop structures. That was hugely important. (Participant F)

Progress in the field of adult education in Ireland in terms of both its conceptualisation and how it had come to be were also acknowledged.

Certainly we've moved a long way. What was adult education when we started? Adult education was the night classes. There wasn't even the notion of adults studying in the daylight. (Participant E)

The transformative power of adult education, drawing on the seminal writings of theorists such as Freire (1972) and Mezirow (1991, 2000), were also reflected in participants' interviews.

I think adult and community education has allowed those people who have been so disenfranchised because of the injustice of poverty … has allowed such people to find their voice. And I think people who live in communities that have been designated as disadvantaged are suddenly, through education, highly articulate, or more than able, not only to name their experience but to engage in a critical analysis of their experience with some theoretical reflection and also then to engage in the praxis of transformation. (Participant B)

A further legacy noted was the embedding of lifelong learning not just in terms of the political and/or educational discourse but also in the realities of individuals' lives, and particularly in terms of those who, heretofore, would have been at risk of educational disadvantage and the consequent marginalisation that that engenders.

Hopefully some of that is wearing off on the young population so that when they get to be young adults or adults, even in this community, that they would want to actually have some of their adult education, whether it's their degrees or whatever, more within their own local context but it wouldn't be because the first chance was so bad. It's because maybe the first chance was better so maybe that would influence a different way of maybe conducting adult education, or at least you'd use these models that we've been talking about with people who aren't so disenfranchised. (Participant C)

Speaking to the legacy of adult education Participant A, encapsulates a range of advancements within the timeframe 1970-2010. Taken as a whole, reference is made to the scope of adult education, the role of the individual learner, the widening network, the professionalisation of the field, the body of knowledge available and the concept of adult education as a right.

We have at least established, in every area that we possibly can, the idea that learning is lifelong process, it is untenable now to think that learning ends

anywhere … I think that is the huge legacy. And I think lots of people have taken advantage of and been advantaged by their engagement with the world of learning. And I think lots of people on the ground … are better connected to each other at that human level and at that support level than there were before … there are people around who see themselves now as involved in community development and that their task is to support each other in learning. You know that was a very thin group of people thirty or forty years ago. And people have been successful in being qualified and trained and finding work and jobs as well, so there is a profession now of adult educators and even though they can be whacked or fragmented they're there. There is a body of knowledge, there are people, there are students, there are successes and all that had to be struggled for … There are people who now know that it is their right, even though the state hasn't acknowledged it yet, people know they have a right to learn. (Participant A)

A Vision of Adult Education

Arising from the invitation to envision adult education into the future, participants' responses were predictably diverse. Participant A was clear that before we can move on, in to the future we, as a society, must first undertake a clearing of the ground or catharsis in relation to the 'hurt' caused to individuals through their engagement in the education system.

We have yet to become preoccupied with how vicious our school experience is or has been. Really it is the next one … because it is not a taboo anymore. (Participant A)

This response may be located in the growing body of literature, both biographical and academic, on the adverse impact of the educational system on individuals.

Participants also envisaged a range of systemic changes necessary – particularly relating to the education system as a whole, and the position that adult education holds in relation to compulsory formal education within the lifelong learning continuum. This theme mirrors the discourse on the place of adult education within the lifelong learning framework.

And it's also maybe about creating a system and programmes of the realisation of adult education from the bottom up, as distinct from what we have now got, our White Paper that's written by the more centralised Department of Education. (Participant C).

The related concepts of participatory democracy and learner empowerment were explicitly viewed by four of the six participants as lying at the very heart of the realisation of the other objectives in adult education.

> And that is where the vision should start: educate everybody to participate fully in this society and then we can engage in the niceties and the added extras. That would be my vision … and what I'm talking about here is absolutely realisable, if there was a commitment. (Participant B)

> If you could have the decentralisation of education at all levels but where education is viewed to be a social good that ought to be encouraged in the context of local democracy. (Participant C)

A further theme emerged when participants engaged in imagining the future of adult education, related to embedding adult education more fully within a human rights and human rights education framework.

> That's, I think, a new way – when I say 'new' I mean new in the sense of, it's not that new but maybe it's 20 years or something like that – of language and practice and State obligations, so the persuasion or the motivation for the State to maintain an interest in adult education in a way that is more emancipatory, respect I think is growing in that context, which is great. (Participant C)

One participant also envisioned that we need to build and strengthen the connection between the day-to-day practice of adult education and the broader landscape of learning for life. To not lose sight or 'vision', as it were, of the bigger picture that ultimately adult learning and adult education have fundamental value.

> You're trying to get a message across to people - it isn't just the functionality of literacy, it's not just talking about the spelling and the breaking up of the words. It's like if you want to teach someone to make a boat you don't actually just give them the pages with the instructions, you give them the love of the sea. I think that's what we need to get that message out there and it's visionary. I think, at the moment, that what the country lacks, is any kind of vision. (Participant F)

While Participant E invites us to remember the past in any exercise of envisioning or create the future of adult education.

> A vision? I don't know. Well, you know, all I could say is they must keep going back. You go forward but go back, back to the future. I just hope they never lose where it began, the initial, what the whole thinking was which began it all.(Participant E)

An exercise endorsed by O'Sullivan (2008) who called for us to turn theory on ourselves as adult educators. Such an invitation to reflect on the learning from the past in a sense can ensure that each generation of adult educators are not working from what Participant D refers to as 'a blank canvas'. For this participant, however, the lens rather than turning to the past needs also to face towards the future given the ever changing contexts of our modern world (Cf. Inglis, 2008).

> We are constantly harking back to the past and we think in terms of incremental changes rather than operating on a blank canvas. The world has changed utterly and new approaches are required to address new challenges. (Participant D)

So what then did participants perceive to be these 'new' challenges in 2010 and to what extent are they ir/relevant in the current milieu of adult education a decade later?

Challenges Going Forward
A range of challenges for the future were referred to by participants in relation to how we come to conceptualise ourselves as a society broadly, and the structures and resourcing mechanisms in place in the adult education sector. Having dedicated professionals working in the field also emerged as a challenge going forward in realising the 'vision/s' elaborated upon in the previous section.

One participant, taking a broad overview, makes reference to the role that adult education can play in terms of re-imagining our lives.

> We really have to learn how to move forward from here as well, in a different way. (Participant A)

Coherent and integrated structures were also seen as a prerequisite and were perceived as posing a particular challenge to current practice:

> There has to be a plan and there is no plan. There are 25 different plans and there's jockeying for position between the people with the different plans (Participant D)

And using the imagery of the helicopter as providing an aerial overview, this participant calls for sustained and continuing leadership, within government structures, dedicated to the adult education sector.

> There is a need for somebody in the helicopter being able to see all the bits and pieces and for some clear direction being given. The first thing, however, is that the person in the helicopter must understand the system. (Participant D)

> We're looking for people with vision, who'll move outside the box, who won't say, 'Oh, that's not my job, I'm not doing that. (Participant F)

While others referred to the need for the streamlining of structures in terms of interagency networking regarding learner and programme databases so as to address the perennial challenge of duplication within the system.

In 2010, the 'hoary chestnut' of the provision of adequate and ring-fenced financial resources was perceived by most participants as the fundamental challenge to moving forward in the field of adult education.

> It's probably time for a new *White Paper* and I would say that before they begin it, the absolute campaigning should be we want on the table the percentage of the education budget that's going to be there to resource it. (Participant B)

While two participants made explicit reference to the need for predictable, dedicated funding at the service level, as opposed to funding dedicated to prescribed programmes. The grounds for this refer back to the diversity of learners' needs and it was perceived that if the criteria for funded programmes were overly restrictive, then this poses challenges for adult educators, in terms of resources being available to meet the particular needs of adult learners from diverse backgrounds.

Challenges pertaining to human resources were identified particularly in terms of the context of adult learning, the complexity of the practice and professionalisation within the field.

> It's something about this kind of warm relational context, coupled with the formality of the content. So how do you marry those? Well one of the ways you marry them is to have highly professional people. (Participant B)

While acknowledging the crucial role that volunteers contribute to the sector, the need to have an adequate body of trained and dedicated personnel was perceived as a key challenge to future growth and development within adult education. In the context of increasing moves across Europe towards professional standards for adult educators, Nicholl and Edwards (2012) in cautioning against normative discourses of professional development that such moves should be grounded in 'detailed empirical research on the pedagogies of professional development and practice in adult education' (p. 233).

Finally, concerns were raised by participants as to the impact of how adult education will respond to the changing world in which we live, particularly in terms of the impact of the economic climate and the growing neoliberal agenda.

> The tension I think now is that we would go back to a form of adult education where it is absolutely skills-based and focused on connection between this industry and what you're learning, again the dominance of the economic concerns and how to keep alive that holistic model and also the transformative education model that we've been speaking about. (Participant C)

The general concern, reflected therein, being, that the dual mandate regarding the purpose of adult education, particular to the Republic of Ireland (Mark, 2007; Maunsell *et al.*, 2008 and Holford *et al.*, 2009) would be eroded given the, then, vista of increasing financial cutbacks.

Conclusion

While there is little doubt, at the time of writing this article, that the range of reports, structures and the weight of government activity provide evidence of the pursuit of an agenda for lifelong learning, what has changed?

Recent statistics showing increases in the participation rates in lifelong learning in Ireland are a welcome development (European Commission, 2017; SOLAS, 2018). When analysed deeper, however, Ireland's participation rates remain lower relative to the EU-28 average and lower rates of participation amongst certain vulnerable groups persist. Given the robust evidence-base on the positive impact of lifelong learning in addressing personal, social and community inequalities, O'Reilly (2018), referencing the OECD (2018) roadmap for 'inclusive growth', calls for state investment to prioritise widening, as well as increasing, participation in adult learning to ensure parity of access to lifelong learning.

While nationally and internationally, adult education may be seen to be held as 'a public good worthy of public investment (UNESCO, 2016, p. 129), with Budget 2018 showing modest increases in areas of relevance to adult education (AONTAS, 2018), nonetheless, it would appear that the main competing perspective in Ireland remains 'not so much ideological as simply giving financial priority to adult education over other areas' (Maunsell *et al.*, 2008, p. 5).

Returning then to the role of the adult educator, von Hippell and Tippelt (2010), drawing on research with German adult educators, highlight the potential of adult educators' contribution to increasing participation in adult education. In politicising their role, Nesbit (2006) contends that adult educators 'have a responsibility to raise important and challenging questions and to build upon their students' lived experiences about how inequalities play out in communities, lives, and workplaces' (p. 184). The findings of Youngman and Singh (2005, p. 9), add further to this debate in that they argue for 'adult educators themselves to be proactive in shaping national and institutional policies and in promoting their interests.' While Irish sociologist Tom Inglis (2009, p. 114) centralises the role that adult educators can play in bringing about this shift in society when he speculates as to 'how adult educators and community leaders can help create a mature, learning society?'

In conclusion, this article places at the fore the argument that participation by and input of adult educators is fundamental in addressing the gaps perceived internationally between policy and its implementation in the field of adult education (UNESCO, 2010). If this view is, as it would appear to be, so central and accepted a position held by the body proper within adult education internationally, then the findings from the research study forming the basis of this article strongly endorse Youngman and Singh's (2005) contention that 'the voices of adult educators need to be given greater prominence in national and international discourses on adult education and learning' (p. 1).

When taken together, these six adult educator's life history accounts of the legacy of achievements in the field, their vision for change and their perceptions of the challenges inherent in such change, one might contend that the adult educators who participated in this study viewed themselves as agents of change and therefore intrinsically saw both their roles as adult educators and the field of adult education itself as the means by which the goal of 're-visioning' our society may be achieved.

> What I think adult education is, adult education then is the system that is put in place to help us learn our way out into beyond. (Participant A)

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Positive Youth Development and Resilience amongst Early School Leavers

DAN O'SULLIVAN

Abstract

This study examines Early School Leaving (ESL) and resilience in young people aged 15–20. It explores effects of negative internalised stereotypes on Early School Leavers (ESLs). Three Positive Youth Development (PYD) programmes were used to challenge these stereotypes in one Youthreach centre. 19 participants recruited from a Youthreach centre participated in the programmes including: Research Action Project (RAP), GAISCE, and Canoeing Skills. A cycle of discrimination, depression and drug use were important issues affecting the lives of ESLs.

Keywords: Early School Leaving, Resilience, Positive Youth Development, Youthreach

Introduction

Working with Early School Leavers (ESLs) for nearly ten years has caused me to try to gain a better understanding of the causes and effects of ESL. During this time, I observed a tendency among ESLs to conform to certain stereotypes. They seemed to have a warped sense of identity, which accentuated the negative. They lacked hope for the future, and so took no action to improve their situation or prospects. Brown (2005) comments, 'trainees often present with a profound sense of rejection, alienation, low self-esteem and behavioural problems'. When stereotypes are internalised, they may cause people to behave as if the stereotypes were true, regardless of whether or not, this is the case. At the beginning of every year, when meeting my new learners for the first time, I ask 'why is it you are all here in this room here today having left school, what is it you all have in common?' The inevitable answer provided is 'we are scumbags'. Changing this perception is the challenge for ESL educators. ESLs may believe that they have failed as a result of flaws in their character and because they

are unworthy or bad. Fannon (1952) discusses how an inferiority complex in oppressed people manifests with belief that the oppression is justified and the dominant narrative is correct. Stokes (2003) refers to this phenomenon as a 'morbid stereotype', while Lamont (2000) refers to this as the narrative of the 'working class loser', Durkheim (1893) refers to it as 'anomie'.

ESLs typically come from at risk groups within society and have experienced significant adversity, O'Mahoney (1997) and Leonard (1998) suggest that there is a strong correlation between ESL and criminality in later life. Haase (2010), Comiskey (2003) and the HSA (2008) suggest a correlation between ESL and substance misuse. Mc Garr (2010), NACDA (2014), Stokes (2002) and Barnados (2009) suggest a correlation between anxiety, depression, and lower level of mental health and well-being and ESL. ESLs who experience these difficulties need to develop life skills that can help them to deal with and overcome these issues. Resilience, which might be defined as the ability to adapt to adversity, is a key trait that can help young people from falling into a cycle of negative psychology and avoid internalising the negative stereotypes that they are subjected to.

Resilience
In environments where young people feel safe and supported by their families and wider community, they are more resilient, 'our results indicated that the combination of high home support, community support and buoyancy was associated with the most adaptive student outcomes' (Collie *et al.*, 2016 p. 13). The environment in which a young person develops plays a crucial role in their capacity for resilience, 'a social-ecological perspective of resilience would thus entail consideration of how the environment supports and/ or hinders resilience-related processes leading to well-being across various domains of a young person's life' (Lal *et al.*, 2015, p. 2). The social ecology of a young person also plays a major role in their general health and wellbeing. Schools make up part of a young person's social ecology and therefore play a valuable role in developing resilience, 'if school experiences and teacher pupil interactions can boost resilience, schools become a key site to compensate for resilience resources that are missing in students' lives' (Liebenberg *et al.*, 2016, p. 142). The school is important for young people to develop resilience therefore the teachers who work in the school and the relationships they cultivate with their students are also useful in developing resilience.

> The value of transformative youth-adult relationships is that they offer the most vulnerable youth a resource for well-being. When these relationships facilitate access to pro-social expressions of personal talents, the result is likely to be adaptive behaviour among youth who face multiple risk factors (Ungar, 2013, p. 334).

Forging relationships of trust is important when dealing with at risk youth, trust and respect help young people believe in their own self efficacy. To the individual ESL represents a terrible waste of potential. The human cost is lack of opportunity, 'education is a powerful predictor of adult life chances and those who leave school with little or no education have access to fewer opportunities in later life' (Barnardos, 2009). Lack of opportunity suffered by ESLs can have more serious implications that continue throughout a person's life by lower levels of general and mental health and increased likelihood of criminal involvement, 'Early school leavers have lower levels of general health, report more anxiety and depression and have a higher mortality rate' (Mc Garr, 2010, p. 13). Lack of opportunity, poorer mental and physical health and an increased likelihood of involvement in criminality are the costs of ESL to the individual who may have left school due to circumstances over which they have no control.

Personal development and the development of self-esteem are core values in Youthreach as are the development of independent young people who can set goals and commit to them. Though Youthreach seeks to develop practical and vocational skills, this is not the sole purpose of the programme and employment and practical skills are important to ESLs and the societies in which they live. Though they are not, and should not be, the sole focus of the ESL centre. Youthreach could itself be considered a Positive Youth Development (PYD) Programme: 'the report praises the positive atmosphere of centres, and the considerable time and effort devoted by Youthreach staff members to getting to know learners individually—their background, their parents and families' (Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate, 2010, p. v). Multiple studies confirm the importance of confidence building in PYD, (Campos, 2004; Lerner *et al.,* 2002; Lofquist, 2009; Cherubini 2014; Scales 2010; Scales *et al.,* 2011). Confidence is fostered in young people through positive thinking, treating them with respect and through the completion of tasks and goals. Young people learn that if they can do it once, they can do it again. When young people become experienced at a task their confidence grows. ESL is a symptom of social reproduction. It can damage individuals, their communities and society. The following interventions were conducted to examine their effect on resilience in ESLs.

The Interventions

Three PYD programmes offered three sets of challenges: The Research Action Project (RAP), GAISCE, and Canoeing Skills. The RAP programme involved participants researching a problem affecting their own lives and initiating a positive action to deal with the problem. The RAP programme was designed using Young People at Risk (YPAR) methodology to allow young people feel empowered to raise consciousness about social issues affecting them. This programme was of 26 weeks' duration.

The GAISCE programme involved participants meeting the requirements of the bronze GAISCE award are to commit 13 hours of community involvement, of physical recreation, of developing a special skill and a further 13 hours of either community involvement, physical recreation, or developing a special skill. The award is completed with an adventure journey in which they complete a thirty-kilometre hike over two days. GAISCE, the President's Award is the equivalent of the Duke of Edinburgh Award in the Irish Republic. GAISCE is a charity organisation run by the Office of the President, the skills the programme seeks to build in young people are: goal setting and achievement, communication, determination, collaboration as part of a team, positivity in the face of adversity, and leadership. This programme was of 26 weeks' duration.

The Canoeing Skills programme challenged the participants to learn the techniques and safety skills to safely navigate moving water as part of a group. Canoeing Skills challenged young people to navigate moving water as part of a team. As part of the Canoeing Skills programme participants had to complete two certificates: River Safety and Rescue 1 (RSR1) and Level 2 Skills leading to a level four QQI component certificate in Canoeing Skills. This programme was developed by Canoeing Ireland as part of the National Adventure Sports framework. This programme was of 8 weeks' duration.

Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)

Participants were asked to fill out the CYRM psychometric measure before beginning any of the PYD interventions. Their scores were recorded in an excel spreadsheet. After the completion of each programme participants were again asked to fill out the CYRM and their scores were recorded and entered into an excel spreadsheet. Their initial scores were subtracted from their later scores and the variance was recorded. Only 15 of the 19 participants had CYRM scores recorded at the end of their participation as they had left the centre and could not be contacted. The 15 participants had their initial score subtracted from their final score and the variance for all participants increased by 81 CYRM

points for the group as a whole. This represented a nine percent average increase in resilience for the group as a whole as the total group resilience increased from 965 to 1046. The percentage increase per group was calculated by dividing the total variance (81) by the total score for the group from test 1 and multiplying by 100. The percentage average increase in resilience for all participants was 8%[1].

Table 1. Variance in Resilience

ALL	Helen	Tommy	Mark	Harry	Josephine	Eugene	Sara	Joe	Darren	Charlie	Morgan	Clare	John	Evan	Polly	Total
Test 1	66	70	57	73	61	64	75	51	63	68	64	69	49	64	71	965
Test 2	66	86	62	67	64	69	74	67	68	80	66	77	75	53	72	1046
Variance	0	16	5	-6	3	5	-1	16	5	12	2	8	26	-11	1	81

Participants were grouped according to the number of PYD interventions they took part in which created 3 categories for analysis: 1 PYD (as participants in this category had only participated in one programme), 2 PYD and 3 PYD. The percentage average increase in resilience for participants who undertook one PYD programme was 9%. The percentage average increase in resilience for participants who undertook two PYD programmes was also 9%. The percentage average increase in resilience for participants who undertook three PYD programmes was 6%.

Table 2. Participation in Programmes and Resilience

3 PYDS	Helen	Tommy	Mark	Harry	Total			
Test 1	66	70	57	73	266			
Test 2	66	86	62	67	281			
Variance	0	16	5	-6	15			
2 PYDS	Jessica	Eugene	Sara	Joe	Darren	Charlie	Morgan	Total
Test 1	61	64	75	51	63	68	64	446
Test 2	64	69	74	67	68	80	66	488
Variance	3	5	-1	16	5	5	2	42
1 PYD	Clare	John	Evan	Polly	Total			
Test 1	69	49	64	71	253			
Test 2	77	75	53	72	277			
Variance	8	26	-11	1	24			

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1 Rounded to the nearest whole number

Participants were then grouped according to the PYD programme they took part in which created 3 categories for analysis: RAP, GAISCE and Canoeing Skills. The percentage average increase in resilience for participants who undertook the RAP programme was 9%. The percentage average increase in resilience for participants who undertook the GAISCE programme was 10%. The percentage average increase in resilience for participants who undertook the Canoeing Skills programme was 7%.

Table 3. Variance in Resilience Per PYD Programme

RAP

	Clare	Mark	Josephine	Timmy	Harry	Eugene	John	Sara	Helen	Joe	Charlie	Evan	Total
Test 1	69	57	61	70	73	64	49	75	66	51	63	64	762
Test 2	77	62	64	86	67	69	75	74	66	67	68	53	828
Variance	8	5	3	16	-6	5	26	-1	0	16	5	-11	66

GAISCE

	Charlie	Helen	Tommy	Mark	Sara	Josephine	Morgan	Joe	Total
Test 1	68	66	70	57	75	61	64	51	512
Test 2	80	66	86	62	74	64	66	67	565
Variance	12	0	16	5	-1	3	2	16	53

Canoeing Skills

	Charlie	Helen	Polly	Tommy	Mark	Harry	Darren	Morgan	Total
Test 1	68	66	71	70	57	73	63	64	532
Test 2	80	66	72	86	62	67	68	66	567
Variance	12	0	1	16	5	-6	5	2	53

Table 4. CYRM Scores for Each Positive Youth Development Programme

	All	RAP	GAISCE	CANOE SKILLS	3 PYDS	2 PYDS	1 PYD
Test 1	965	762	512	532	266	446	253
Test 2	1046	828	565	567	281	488	277
Difference	81	66	53	35	15	42	24
Percentage	8%	9%	10%	7%	6%	9%	9%
Participants	15	12	8	8	4	7	4

Participants in the GAISCE programme had cumulatively the largest percentage improvement in their CYRM scores outperforming the group as a whole by two percent. Participants in the RAP programme had the second largest cumulative improvement in CYRM scores and the largest individual improvement. Three participants showed a drop in their resilience scores and one showed

no change at all. Two of these participants were cohabiting and had unstable living arrangements. The remaining participant also had quite an unstable living arrangement. The participant who showed no change was related to the cohabiting participants and challenging family circumstances might account for the CYRM score. Participants who took part in three programmes experienced a smaller increase in their resilience scores than the participants who took part in two. This might suggest that that there is a diminishing return in resilience with PYD programmes as students become fatigued with the process and that living circumstances can have an impact on resilience.

The single greatest increase in resilience came from a student who participated in the RAP programme. The next three highest reported increases came from students who participated in one or more programmes. The highest normally distributed improvements in CYRM came jointly from two learners who participated in all three programmes and a learner who participated in RAP and GAISCE. The second highest normally distributed improvement came from a learner who participated in GAISCE and Canoe Skills. Participation in the GAISCE programme seems to have had the greatest impact on CYRM scores, followed by RAP and Canoe Skills. The GAISCE and RAP programmes were completed over a twenty-six-week period and the Canoe Skills programme was completed over an eight-week period. It might be possible that the Canoe Skills programme could be equally or more effective than the other two programmes given a greater period of time in which to run the programme. This would also suggest that to maximise the resilience building potential of PYD programmes they should be designed as long term programmes. The quality of the interventions may also have been a factor in the variance in CYRM scores between programmes, the Canoeing Skills programme did not formally contain any aspect of service learning though this could be integrated in future programmes.

Key Themes that Emerged from the Research
Three key issues that arose as a result of the interventions are: drug use, depression and discrimination. There is likely a cyclical relationship between these three themes which is shown in figure 1 below and dubbed the D Cycle. Action research was an appropriate research methodology to use as participants could then confront the problems they were experiencing and take action to improve their situations. Mini-research projects of participants in the RAP programme and their findings, actions and outcomes are examined. Each of the three PYD programmes are compared and discussed with relevance to their

ability to promote resilience in ESLs. All of the mini-research projects had a corresponding action. Presentations and information sheets were prepared and distributed by the learners and many learners made presentations for the first time. The more relevant an issue was to the Youth Researchers the more time they devoted to the project.

Figure 1. The D Cycle
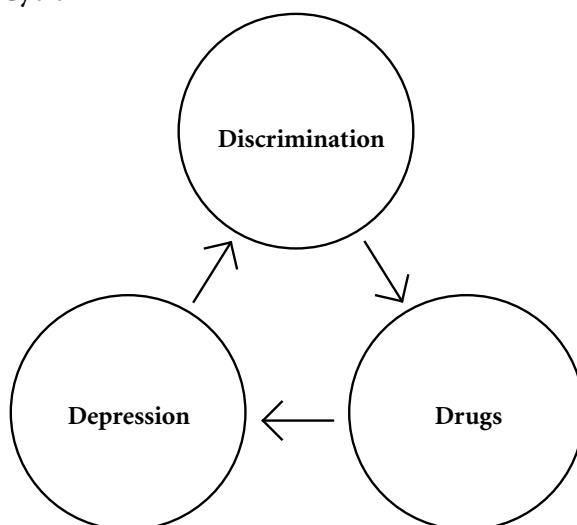
They responded well to doing research into problems affecting their own lives. Learners also seemed to become most engaged when they had real life experience of the problem they were researching. The learners in the centre worked towards the Leaving Certificate Applied qualification which involves continuous assessment of key assignments that must be completed, these assignments are often done in isolation and having a mini-research project to work on gave these assignments a unified purpose and provided scope for cross-circular integration. Students had a unified purpose behind their work when analysing data in spreadsheets, and writing their reports, rather than completing their key assignments by following a series of unrelated worksheets. Participants had an amalgamated objective relating to a real world problem that they were trying to solve which gave relevance in their learning to their own lives. The programmes were also designed to expose participants into new settings and activities in which they could establish relationships with new people. The programmes also required participants to engage in peer support in order to complete tasks. These aspects of the programme design were incorporated to overcome isolation and alienation and in doing so combat depression. The

programmes also had elements of outdoor education and thrill seeking in their design to offer an alternative to the 'buzz' of drug-taking.

Discussion

The D Cycle, discrimination, depression and drug use are challenging problems affecting the lives of ESLs. The RAP programme identified drugs, depression and discrimination as issues for ESLs. The personal reflections of participants and the RAP programme confirm this. There is likely a cyclical effect in this regard as discrimination and the narrative of the 'working class loser' when internalised can lead to depression and drug use is a likely response to this depression. There is a correlation between cannabis use and ESL though this does not imply causality. Truancy or continuous absence is a likely predictor of ESL. The research indicates that a high number of ESLs have been in care (17.9%) and that they may suffer from emotional hunger as a result. Gordon (2017) remarks that the principal focus for the ESL teacher is the creation of a connection with the young person. The research confirms that through the mentorship of an adult, ally boundaries can be crossed into contact zones where social capital can be developed through mutual process with ESLs and in these spaces their access to developmental assets can be expanded. The research indicates that taking action on an issue affecting one's own life can help a young person to take power over it.

ESLs respond well to PYD and PYD can be used in the design of educational programmes designed to overcome marginalisation in ESLs. The research suggests that the three Ds of the D cycle can be successfully challenged by Bowers *et al.*, (2010) five Cs of PYD. The five Cs of PYD are: competence, confidence, connection, caring and character. Competence is the ability to master the other domains. Confidence relates to self-worth and self-efficacy. Connection relates to positive proximal relationships so that family supports, peer groups and school and community groups provide a sense of belonging. Caring means compassion, empathy and concern for others. Character is a moral dimension in which the young person demonstrates a moral code that is suited to membership of their social ecology so that they can determine the difference between right and wrong subject to the accepted social norms. Bowers comments on the relevance of connectedness during adolescence, 'as youth transition to new learning environments, experience new social situations, and autonomy becomes an important developmental goal, many adolescents may begin to doubt their academic and social abilities and, as well, may feel less connected to both parents, peers, and the larger ecological context'

(Bowers *et al.*, 2010, p. 733). The five Cs model is used by PYD practitioners to integrate young people into their social ecologies while promoting traits in them that have a positive effect within the communities, schools, and groups to which these young people belong. The five Cs is a useful model in the design and implementation of PYD programmes and this research indicates that they can be used to disrupt the D Cycle and establish what (Merton, 2004, p. 5) refers to as a virtuous cycle of achievement.

Recommendations

Challenge the Dominant Narrative

ESL teachers should actively fight against the notion that ESLs are the Cinderellas of education. The personal anguish I experienced when I realised that most of the learners I was responsible for in Youthreach would describe themselves as 'scumbags' was distressing. Disputation is important to challenge the belief and the resulting behaviour or consequence. When the belief is disputed a new more positive understanding of the situation can emerge, e.g. there are a lot of people in this school that have problems reading and writing some of them have dyslexia or a similar learning difficulty. It doesn't make them stupid. Seligman (2002) refers to energization as a way of turning the negative belief into a positive, e.g. I am not stupid, I am just not good at reading and writing but I can be a good listener and contribute to class by saying things and making good points and I can work on my reading and writing. Service learning and the principles of YPAR used in the GAISCE and RAP programmes offer the opportunity to challenge this narrative as young people are given the opportunity to contribute positively to their communities. ESL teachers can also actively use disputation to challenge internalised beliefs of ESLs.

PYD as Proactive Health Promotion

A proactive approach to health promotion through outdoor education and PYD should benefit ESLs, as this research has shown. Third level graduates in Outdoor Education are often regarded like ESLs as the Cinderellas of education. The Leaving Cert points required to gain entry into these degree programmes are significantly lower than the points required for entry into a traditional education degree. The cost of outdoor activities can be quite prohibitive for Youthreach centres and might only last for a day. Graduates of Outdoor Education programmes might provide invaluable resources to Youthreach centres as they are qualified in a range of outdoor activities and are also the gatekeepers to a wide range of activities and opportunities not usually available to ESLs. They have the potential to be prosocial nodes for ESLs to connect to; Youthreach centres should actively recruit these types of graduates.

External Links

Greater links with national governing bodies for outdoor sports should be sought out by Youthreach centres. National governing bodies such as Canoeing Ireland, Climbing Ireland, Irish Sailing Association and Cycling Ireland to mention but a few have access to equipment and instructors that can deliver these programmes. In the case where ESL centres have hired Outdoor Education graduates they already have qualified instructors on staff with links to these organisations. Where possible equipment and instructors can be shared and costs of delivering such programmes can be greatly reduced so that while a centre may have an annual day trip to an outdoor activity centre, this might be changed into an eight-week course. This may present timetabling difficulties but during the programme students participation was dependent on their ability to stay up to date with their assignments and this seemed to work well. Regional equipment stores and licensing agreements for equipment should be entered into between Youthreach centre coordinators regionally. An important factor in the funding these organisations receive is outreach to disadvantaged groups which opens up an opportunity that centre coordinators can exploit.

Adventure sports provide opportunities to develop prosocial links as demonstrated in this research. Young people can experience a 'buzz' that they might otherwise seek from illicit substances. They provide an opportunity for young people to find a sense of belonging and connect to prosocial nodes as well as providing an escape that is more socially acceptable and certainly a healthier alternative to substance abuse. ESLs trapped in a cycle of negative psychology experiencing anhedonia might be reinvigorated by the thrill of adventure sports. Young people can experience adversity through adventure sports as part of a team, learn how to deal with setbacks through expedition and become more resilient. Young people can learn essential life skills like risk management, safety procedure and learn that through hard work and dedication anything is possible. Fear is intrinsic to adventure sports, managing and overcoming fear is important to the young people in crisis. Dealing with big emotions and being supported by adult allies and other team members while doing so creates a sense of belonging and fraternity in young people.

Service Learning

Service learning was a feature of YPAR and the RAP project, and the GAISCE programme that was undertaken as part of this research. Service learning improves young people's self-conception of their value and worth and allows them to contribute to their communities. Service learning is a way of integrating

learning with community work so that young people can see themselves as contributing to their communities. Scales (2011) comments on the importance of service learning, 'if a programme succeeds in raising youth assets, it is, by definition of the asset framework, having an impact beyond youth themselves: Asset scores for youth in a given programme are not likely to increase absent an impact on the broader ecology of young people's families, schools, peers, and communities'. Young people who feel that they can exercise a positive influence over their communities, raise the level of developmental assets in their community are becoming pro social nodes themselves.

Conclusion

It is well recognised in the literature, as discussed above, that ESLs need greater emotional support from their teachers than their counterparts in the mainstream, though there is no specific training for Youthreach staff in how to provide this. The internalisation of negative stereotypes has a demoralising effect on ESLs, challenging this dismal internalised narrative requires a catharsis, an experience from which a new truth emerges and the ESLs self-perception undergoes a paradigm shift to a more positive self-perception. Positive health promotion and positive self-perceptions for learners should be key values in Youthreach centres. External links provide scope for ESLs to engage in developmental activities and build positive purpose led relationships within their communities. Service learning provides an opportunity for young people to see themselves as contributors to society, this is important to alienated youth as it allows them to form connections and develop a sense of purpose and belonging. For some ESLs trapped in a dismal cycle of negative psychology, a clinical therapeutic approach might be necessary to break the cycle.

Young people who attend second chance education institutions like Youthreach are under the false perception on entry into Youthreach centres that they are 'scumbags and knackers'. They can present with challenging behaviour and a range of learning difficulties. The role of teacher in a Youthreach centre is a difficult one, however, if we can challenge this false perception so that by the time a young person completes the Youthreach programme they have changed this dismal self-concept, then their time in the centre will have been a success.

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SECTION TWO

Case Studies on Improving Practice

LINC Programme: Enabling Leadership for Inclusion through an Innovative Competency-Based Blended Adult Continuing Professional Learning Programme

FINTAN BREEN, SARAH KELLEHER, EMER RING, AND SEONA STAPELTON

Abstract

In 2015, an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) examining mechanisms to support access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme for children with disabilities recommended the creation of a role of Inclusion Coordinator in early years' settings. LINC, an innovative competency-based adult continuing professional learning programme, is a Level 6 Special Purpose Award[1] designed to enhance the inclusion of children with additional needs in early years' settings with graduates becoming Inclusion Coordinators. This paper provides a background and overview of the LINC Programme, examines the adult learning methodology employed and outlines the tools adopted for measuring its success.

Keywords: Inclusion, Early Years' Education, Childcare, Access, LINC, Continuing Professional Learning, Additional Needs, Special Needs, Disability, Higher Education, Further Education, Adult Education, Blended Learning, Online, Education Methodology, Impact, Evaluation

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1   The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels used to describe the Irish qualifications system including qualifications achieved in school, further education and higher education. The relationship between the Irish NFQ and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF – EHEA) has been formally established. See http://www.nfq-qqi.com/ for further information.

Introduction

The benefits of high quality inclusive education for children in the early years are well-documented (Ring *et al.,* 2016; Ring and O'Sullivan, 2018). However, providing for an effective inclusive education system is a complex political, economic and social struggle, involving reform at governmental, societal, pre-school and school levels. While the Irish Government has invested significantly in fostering inclusive school systems at primary and post-primary levels, investment at pre-school level has been neglected until very recently (Ring, 2016). This has had negative consequences for young children with additional needs and their families in terms of access to an appropriate educational experience right from the start (Ring, Daly and Wall 2018). It has also amplified the status-gap between early childhood and primary /post-primary teachers, with the latter enjoying significantly higher professional status and related pay and working conditions. In order to begin to address these emerging dissonances, the Irish Government launched the seven level *Access and Inclusion Model* (AIM) in November 2015, to provide for a new model of government-funded supports aimed at supporting the inclusion of children with additional needs at pre-school level (Inter-Departmental Group (IDG), 2015). This article reports on an innovative competency-based blended leadership adult continuing professional learning (CPL) programme developed to address level three of the AIM and discusses some of the initial programme evaluation findings.

Background – LINC Programme Overview

Embedded in international research, the seven-level AIM detailed in Figure 1. adopts a child-centred approach and acknowledges the centrality of developing a co-ordinated, responsive, effective and sufficiently resourced inclusive education system for children in early childhood care and education settings (ECCE). The model was developed following extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the parents of children with additional needs. In accordance with best practice, the model focuses on identifying and responding to each individual child's developmental level, abilities and needs rather than relying exclusively on formal diagnoses.

Figure 1. AIM Model (IDG, 2015, p. 6)
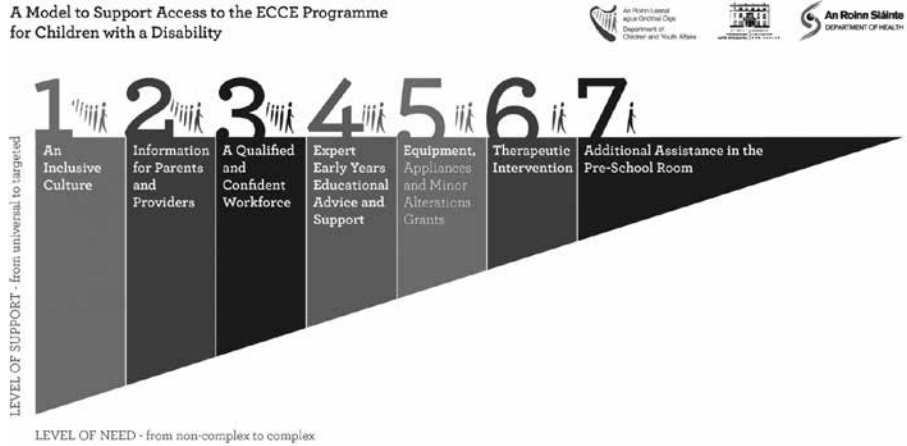
The Leadership for INClusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme, located at Level three of the AIM, acknowledges the critical role of continuing professional learning (CPL) in cultivating and leading inclusion. The *Competency Framework for Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education* (LINC Consortium 2016b) in Table 1 below, underpins the programme and was developed through identifying the knowledge, practices and values specific to leading inclusive culture, practice and pedagogy in the early years (LINC Consortium, 2016b; Urban, Robson and Scacchi, 2017; Pilgrim *et al.*, 2017; Ring, Daly and Wall, 2018).

Table 1. Competency Framework Underpinning the LINC Programme (LINC Consortium, 2016b)
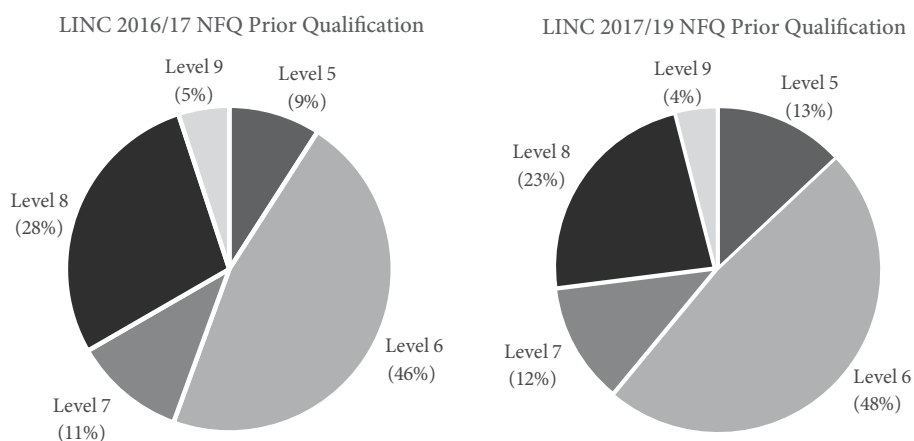
A.	An Inclusive Culture
1	All children are welcome.
2	All children are valued.
3	A focus is placed on promoting respectful interaction.
4	There are high expectations for all children.
5	Partnership with parents/carers is actively promoted.
6	Difference is acknowledged.
7	The environment accommodates the needs of all children.
8	All policies are inclusive policies.

B.	Inclusive Practice
1	Transitioning to and from the setting is a positive experience for children, families, and staff.
2	Support for children with additional needs is co-ordinated.
3	Staff members are encouraged to avail of continuing professional development opportunities.
4	All staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the promotion of inclusive practice.
5	The expertise of staff is acknowledged and utilised.

C.	An Inclusive Pedagogy
1	Children's experiences are planned with the needs of all children in mind.
2	Strategies are in place to promote the participation of all children in learning.
3	A range of appropriate pedagogical approaches is used to support the holistic development of all children.
4	Play and playful learning are key features of practice for all children.
5	All children's communication and interaction are promoted.
6	All children's views are values and responded to.
7	Early identification of children who require additional support is central to practice.
8	A variety of approaches to observation, recording and assessment is in place.
9	Early years educators plan, implement, and evaluate children's learning in partnership with children, parents/carers and relevant others.
10	Positive relationships are understood and nurtured.
11	Children's specific assessed needs are understood as 'signposts' that support children's learning and development.
12	External assistance is elicited where required to support the setting in meeting children's additional needs.

The first cohort of adult learners commenced the LINC programme in September 2016, following a competitive tender won by a consortium led by Mary Immaculate College (MIC), and including Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) and Maynooth University (MU) – Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education (MIC, 2016). To date, almost 1800 adult learners have participated in the programme.

A Diverse Cohort

As the learners on the LINC Programme are nominated by early years' setting (employers), all of the learners continue to work with their setting while undertaking the programme. The Irish regulatory requirement for early years' settings requires that early years' educators have a qualification that meets certain minimum requirements and a list of such recognised qualifications is published and maintained by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (DCYA, 2018). Recognised early years' qualifications range from Level 5 to Level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (NFQ, 2018). As a result, both the first and second LINC cohorts have included learners with a wide range of educational qualifications and backgrounds from Level 5 up Level 9 graduate diplomas and Masters degrees, which suggests substantial diversity in terms of learners' prior education experience and qualifications (see Figure 2 below).
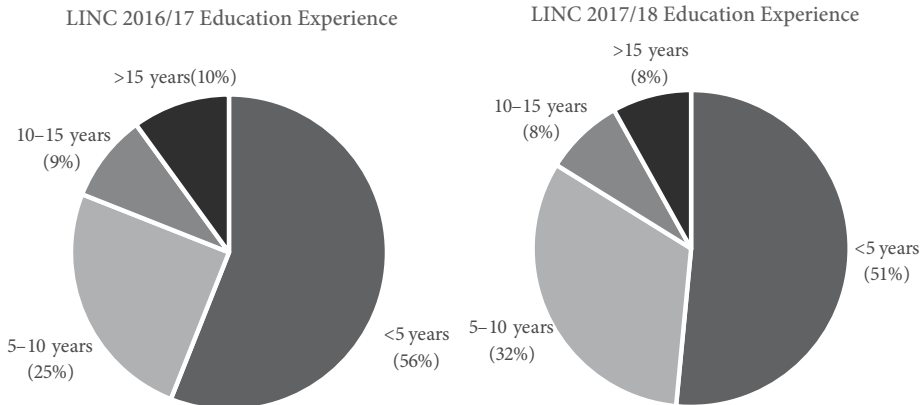
Figure 2. Prior Qualifications of LINC Learners (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 NFQ Prior Qualification

Level 9 (5%) Level 5 (9%) Level 8 (28%) Level 7 (11%) Level 6 (46%)

LINC 2017/19 NFQ Prior Qualification

Level 9 (4%) Level 5 (13%) Level 8 (23%) Level 7 (12%) Level 6 (48%)

While learners' qualifications are diverse, it is also significant that many learners had not engaged in formal education in some time with 10% (2016/17) and 8%
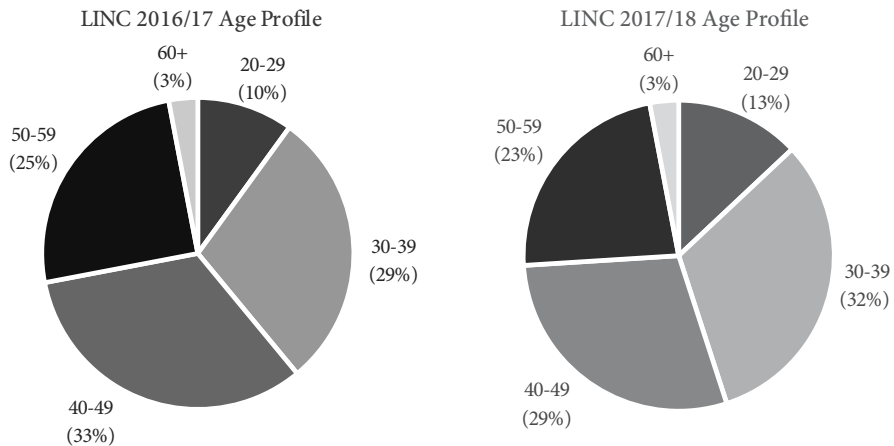
(2017/18) not having been engaged in formal education programmes in over 15 years prior to commencing the LINC Programme. Figure 3 below, details the educational experience of the first two cohorts, and demonstrates that more than 50% (56% - 2016/17 and 51% - 2017/18) had engaged in formal learning in the five years immediately prior to them commencing the LINC Programme.

Figure 3. Time Since Last Education Experience for LINC Learners (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 Education Experience

>15 years(10%)

10–15 years
(9%)

5–10 years
(25%)

<5 years
(56%)

LINC 2017/18 Education Experience

>15 years
(8%)

10–15 years
(8%)

5–10 years
(32%)

<5 years
(51%)

The age profile of the cohorts is also varied and, as detailed in Figure 4 below, includes learners from their early 20s to their mid-to late 60s.

Figure 4. Age Profile of LINC Learners (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 Age Profile

60+
(3%)

20-29
(10%)

50-59
(25%)

30-39
(29%)

40-49
(33%)

LINC 2017/18 Age Profile

60+
(3%)

20-29
(13%)

50-59
(23%)

30-39
(32%)

40-49
(29%)

Prior to commencing the programme, learners were asked to identify how much interaction they had previously with online learning. Figure 5 below, highlights that 62% of learners had never engaged previously with online learning, while 38% had, with 19% having completed some (defined as being 'a module or more') and 19% having completed 'a lot' (defined as being 'a full programme').

Figure 5. LINC Learners' Experience of Online Learning (LINC Consortium, 2018)

LINC 2016/17 Experience with Online Learning
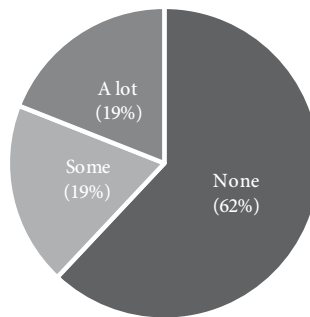
The diverse profile of the learners therefore necessitated an approach to CPL that optimises learners' engagement while simultaneously acknowledging, celebrating and accommodating this diversity.

Adult Education Methodology

The traditional face of education has seen a transformation of sorts in recent years and now encompasses an increasingly electronic world (Williams, 2002). There is now a requirement to embed technology-based practices in education and to reach a more diverse cross-section of the population (Hicks, Reid and George, 2001). This integration of online learning along with face-to-face learning experiences can be referred to as blended learning (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004).

Some have suggested that this blended learning approach may in fact be even more efficient and effective than the traditional classroom model. Benefits of this approach include its flexible nature for learners (Cheung and Hew, 2011) and the potential to accommodate large numbers of learners (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). Learners also have the opportunity to learn from home and have some control over 'time, place, path and/or pace' (Horn and Staker, 2011,

p. 3). Studies further indicate that faculty members, who employ a blended-learning approach to course design, report improved outcomes from their learners related to, *interalia*, the quality of written assignments, depth of engagement with course content and overall success rates (Garnham and Kaleta 2002; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2015).

Although technology plays a vital role in facilitating the LINC programme, technology was considered a means to a pedagogical end with instructional designers and content developers utilising pedagogical expertise to enhance learning through the *meaningful* use of technology (McGee and Reis, 2012, p.15). Key principles of instructional and universal design were combined with established learning theories to promote an active online learning environment (Gagné, Briggs and Wager, 1992; National Disability Authority (NDA), 2014).

A variety of methods was developed to ensure that the LINC programme was accessible to learners with a range of learning styles and experiences. Each of the six modules comprises one face-to-face day (approx. six hours) along with six weekly online 'units' of both synchronous and asynchronous learning materials. In order to ensure as much flexibility as possible for the 900+ adult learners annually, the majority of the programme employs asynchronous online learning, ensuring lessons and learning activities can be completed at a time that is convenient for the learner. Each week, the asynchronous material includes three pre-recorded lessons and between one and three learning activities. The online lessons are a mix of voice-recorded over content interleaved with specific activities, for instance, viewing of video-clips, reading articles or webpages and reflections. In addition to these, there are requirements to contribute to specific learning activities including online discussion fora with other learners, mini-quizzes, uploading reflections and practice-related assignments. The synchronous element of the programme requires learners to engage in a weekly online tutorial, in groups of 20-25, and complete a text-based tutorial with their tutor over a 30-minute timeframe. Taking into account the Irish broadband situation, whereby one in ten internet users highlighted speed as being an issue when completing online purchases (Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2017), video and voice-based tutorials would not have been possible for all learners, given the bandwidth requirements, and may have caused issues for this synchronous learning activity. Therefore, a text-based tutorial system was used, and has functioned well in ensuring effective communication amongst learners themselves and with their tutors. These tutorials were designed to promote communities of practice (Anderson, 2008), to ensure that key learning

points were understood and to provide learners with an opportunity to engage in discussion, question and seek clarification.

Finally, a key element of the LINC Programme is the mentoring session which creates a forum for learners to meet with their tutor on a one-to-one basis and reflect on their practice. The session is conducted with reference to *The Competency Framework for Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education* (LINC Consortium 2016b referred to in Table 1 previously), which is used by the learner and tutor to develop an action plan for the learner in order to assist with the implementation of the theory into practice. This process comprises a core part of the final module, the Portfolio module, where the learner has the opportunity to demonstrate inclusive culture, practice and pedagogy.

A Supportive Team

The LINC Programme is supported by a large team, responsible for the delivery of the programme. The Steering Group, comprising representatives from each of the Consortium Members (MIC, ECI and MU-Froebel) is responsible for the overall governance, strategy and direction of the programme. A Consortium Academic Advisory Team (CAT), with combined expertise in ECCE, inclusive and special education, as well as leadership and management is involved in programme development. Operationally, a team of academic and professional services staff, managed by the National Programme Coordinator (NPC) has responsibility for the programme roll out. Figure 6 below, provides an overview of the 50 people involved in in the rollout of this programme.

Figure 6. LINC Programme Governance, Management and Operational Team (LINC Consortium, 2018)
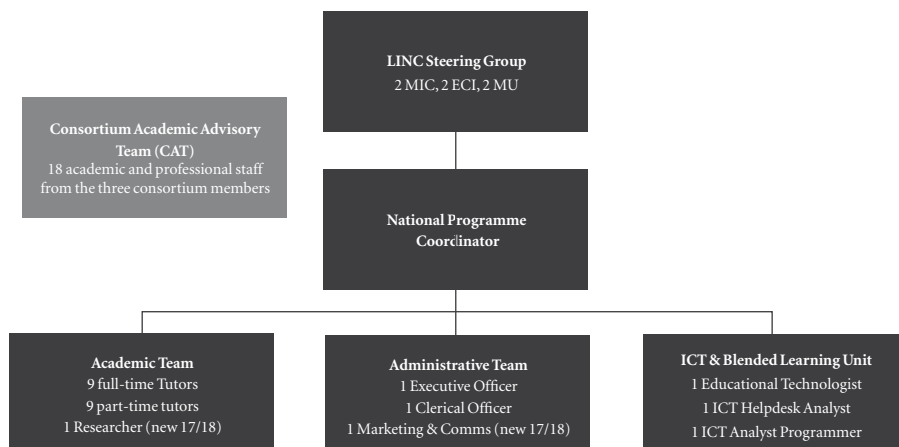
Specific attention has been directed to supporting the diverse learning cohort through Learner Support Services; Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Support; Educational Technology Support and Academic Support.

Learner Support Services

A dedicated support team has been recruited to manage queries from members of the public, prospective learners, employers and learners. This team assists and guides prospective and current learners through processes such as application, enrolment, examinations, bursary payments and graduation. This 'one-stop-shop' is a dedicated support for LINC learners, and enhances access by learners to other support areas where necessary. This also precludes the needs for these learners, who are not based on the MIC campus, to access all services in one place.

ICT Support

Given the blended-learning element, and the profile of the learners, their prior ICT and educational experience, as well as the fact that they are working, the provision of ICT Support was deemed to be critical. As a result, the LINC Programme has funded a dedicated ICT Support Technician, as well as an ICT Administrator. These posts allow for the existing ICT Helpdesk hours to be extended (from 5pm up to 7pm nightly and on Saturday) to facilitate LINC Learners as well as provision of timely server and network administration and support.

Educational Technology Support

A dedicated Educational Technologist role, located within MIC's Blended Learning Unit (BLU), has facilitated the design of the relevant module pages on Moodle, the design of the module templates, and the implementation of a thorough content review process prior to modules being made available for learners. This quality assurance mechanism ensures that the material presented is accurate, relevant and presented in a suitable format for an online learning approach.

Academic Support

A team of tutors, each leading one of the centres, is responsible for working with approximately 100 learners. The tutor delivers the face-to-face content (twice in order to facilitate smaller group sizes); facilitates the weekly tutorial session; moderates the online discussion; assists learners with queries and completes the

mentoring session with the learners. It should be noted that strict criteria are used to recruit this team of tutors, including an academic qualification (degree-level) in ECCE, experience working in the early years' sector, an adult education qualification and experience in the adult and further education sector. Assistant tutors support the delivery of the face-to-face classroom sessions, reducing the ratio (approx. 1:25) further to facilitate effective group work.

Measuring Success

A multi-method methodological programme evaluation framework has been designed and is summarised in Table 2 below. This contemporaneous evaluation is designed to ensure that the views of all stakeholders are harnessed and the voices of children, parents, families and practitioners are captured, as advocated in *Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2009; Ring, 2018).

Table 2. Summary of the Multi-Method Methodological LINC Programme Evaluation (LINC Consortium 2016a)

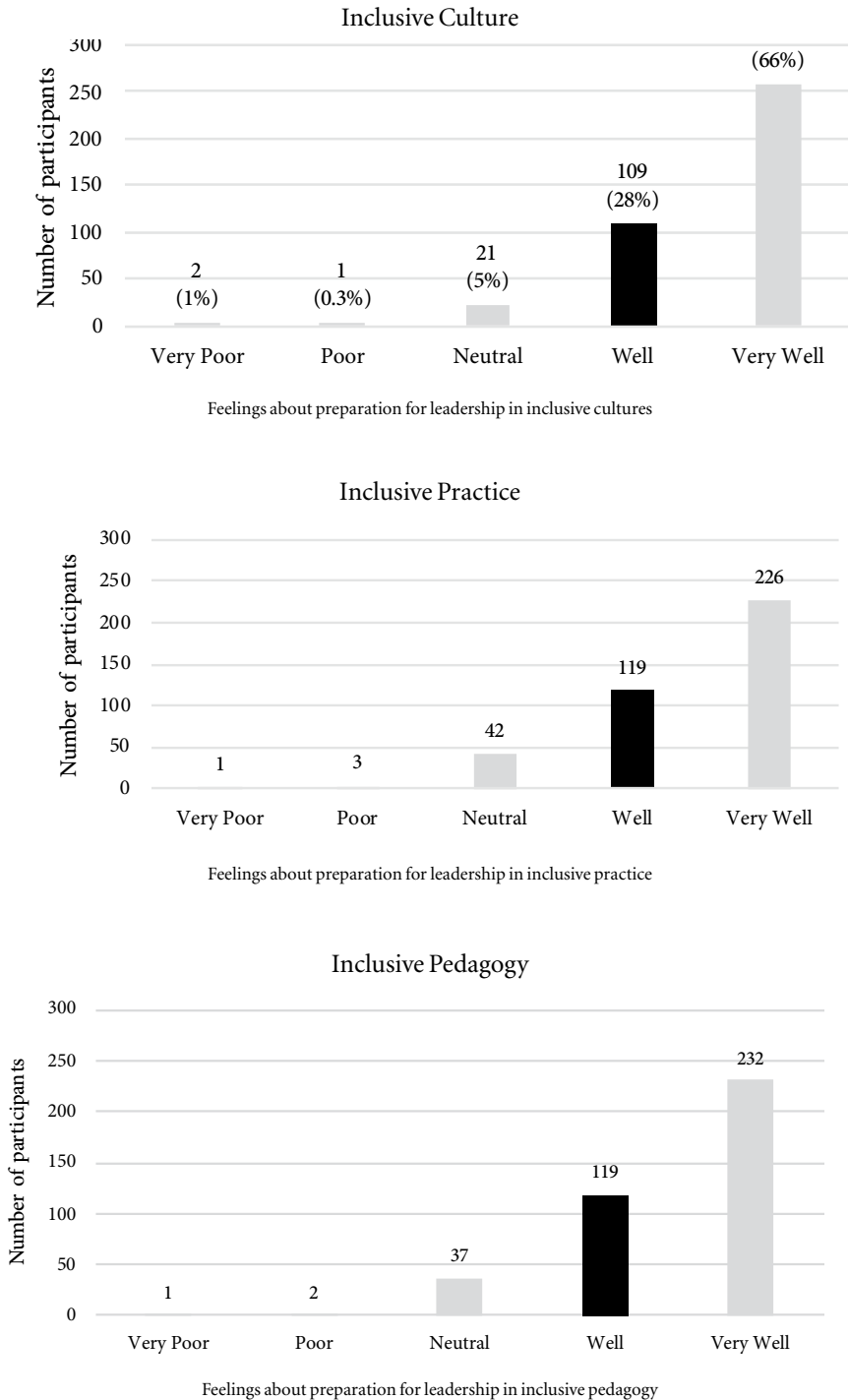| Strand	Research Technique	Summary	Time–Frame
Strand 1	Literature Review	Focuses on the development of inclusion; key elements of inclusive practice; teacher competency for inclusion and utilising innovative technologies for teacher education.	2016-2020
Strand 2	Survey of participant evaluation of each individual module	On-line survey	2016-2020
Strand 3	Annual participant and employer evaluation of the programme linked to the competency focus of the programme	On-line survey	2017-2020
Strand 4	Stakeholder Consultations	Semi-Structured interviews	2019-2020
Strand 5	Individual interviews with Tutors	Semi-Structured interviews	2019-2020
Strand 6	An analysis of programme materials, documentation and assessment data	Documentary Analysis	2017-2020
Strand 7	An analysis of quality control visits to face-to-face deliver sessions	Documentary Analysis	2016-2020
Strand 8	Compilation of final report		2020

Strands two and three have now been completed for the first cohort (2016/17). Participants had the opportunity to anonymously answer evaluative surveys based on each individual module, as well as the overall programme, while employers were also offered the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback through the employer's evaluation. In particular, strand three generated a large number of responses (n=391, or 46% of learners). The key outcome of this evaluation is an 86% satisfaction rating for the programme overall (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7. LINC Evaluation: Overall Satisfaction (LINC Consortium, 2018)

How do you feel about the programme overall?
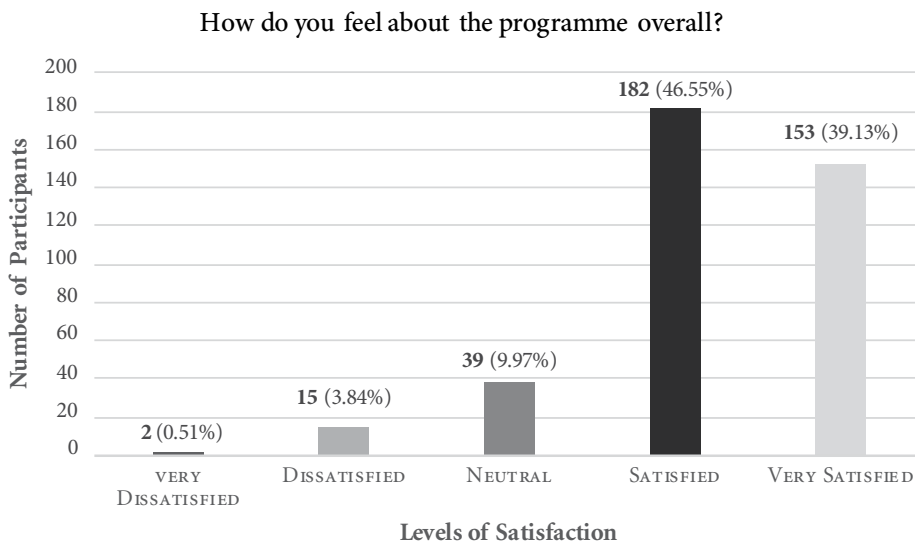
In relation to the *Competency Framework for Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education* (LINC Consortium 2016b, 94% of learners believed the programme prepared them to lead an inclusive culture effectively, while 88% and 89% responded positively on how well they were prepared to lead inclusive practice and inclusive pedagogy (see Figure 8, below).

Figure 8. LINC Evaluation: Preparing to Lead (LINC Consortium, 2018)

Inclusive Culture

Feelings about preparation for leadership in inclusive cultures

Inclusive Practice

Feelings about preparation for leadership in inclusive practice

Inclusive Pedagogy

Feelings about preparation for leadership in inclusive pedagogy

Learners were asked to rate how useful to them each of the programme activities were in terms of their learning and in terms of the transfer of learning into practice. Figure 9 below, demonstrates participants' satisfaction with each of the learning activities. As can be seen, the online recorded lessons (92%) and face-to-face classroom sessions (91%) rated highest, with the mentoring visit (88%) also rated highly useful in terms of the learning process. The weekly chats (later renamed online tutorials) were rated at 66% useful, and orientation day at 69% useful – both of these elements were re-designed ahead of the rollout for 2017/18.

Figure 9. Usefulness of Programme Aspects (LINC Consortium, 2018)
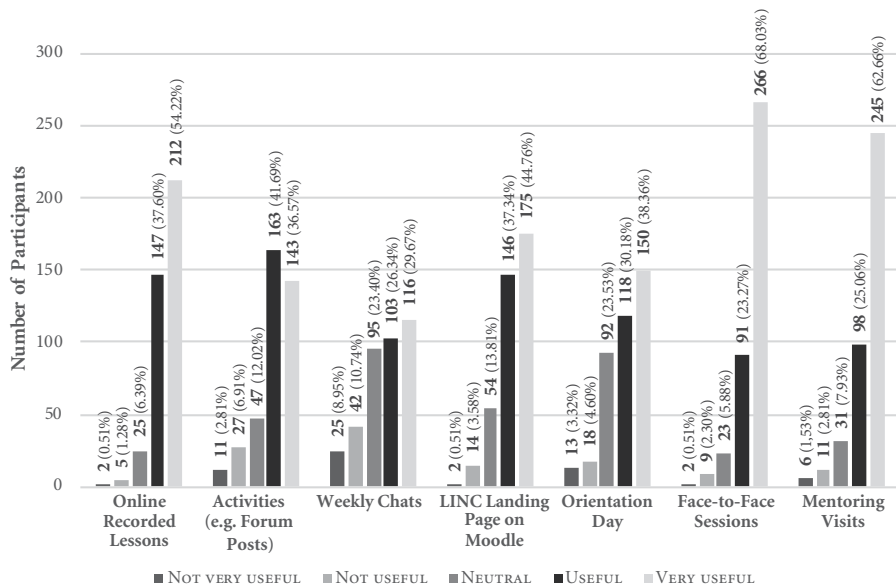
Finally, as outlined above, more than 60% of the learners had not had any experience of online learning prior to taking part in the LINC Programme. Learners were asked to rate their own competence in relation to using Technology for Educational Purposes both before and after the programme. Prior to undertaking the programme, 70% of learners rated themselves as being competent or very competent, with this raising to over 92% after the programme. 17% of learners rated themselves as not being competent prior to undertaking LINC, and this reduced to 1% following their completion of the programme. Learners were not asked if they intended to pursue any further education after completing the LINC programme, however, this question has now been added to the overall programme evaluation survey for 2017/2018.

Figure 10. Competence in Using Technology for Educational Purposes (LINC Consortium, 2018)
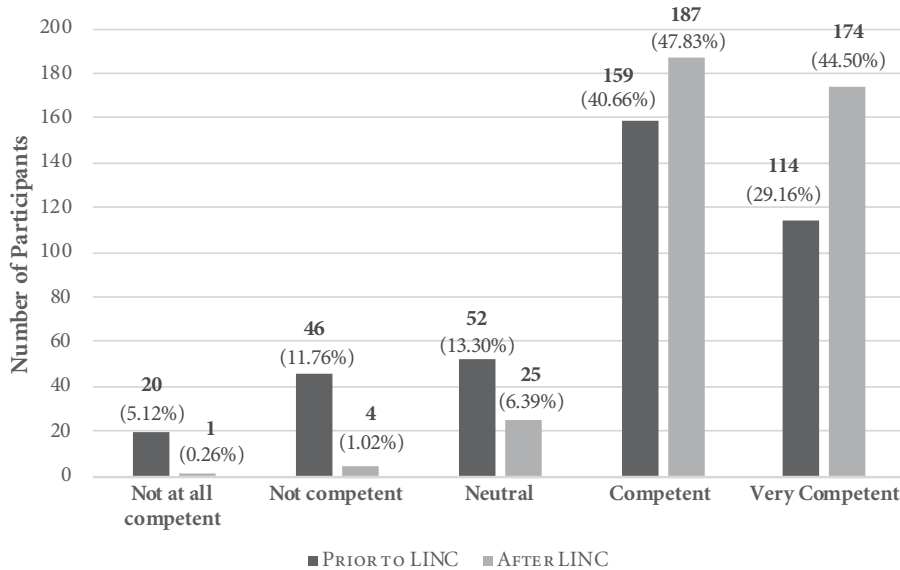
The LINC Programme was shortlisted and won the 'Best Online Learning Experience' Award at the Education Awards 2017, was shortlisted for an AONTAS STAR Award in 2018 and has also been shortlisted for an Education Award 2018.

Conclusion

Emerging findings from the evaluation of the LINC programme suggest that the development of a competency-based blended adult learning programme, which considers participants' prior learning, accommodates a variety of learning styles, provides a range of targeted supports and is based on best practice in instructional design, has the potential to transform the experience of CPL for adult learners. The academic excellence underpinning the programme, the differentiated pedagogical strategies and the experiential practice-based focus have clearly contributed to optimising engagement for a wide variety of adult learners in a multi-media environment. Critically the evaluation findings suggest that the programme has impacted considerably on enabling leadership for inclusion and has the potential to transform both the lives of adult learners and those of children, families and society in Ireland.

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Breaking the Cultural Silence Imposed upon Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants: A Snapshot of the Current Faith-based Project in Tigers Bay (North Belfast)

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Abstract

This case study tracks an established collaborative partnership between faith-based organisations and the local community of North Belfast. The initial stages of the project of implementing a welcome day, a cultural food and activities fest day and an Ulster University led Unblocking Potential programme. This set the scene for social cohesion and community integration through emancipatory praxis. The next stage of the project is to engage the group in theatre dramatising their experiences and disseminating the shared learning throughout the local community.

Through the delivery of our programmes we identified issues around fear, low self-esteem and the lack of mechanisms within the wider community to empower participants to confidently engage more meaningfully within their own community and the wider community bringing a new dynamic to transformational cultural diversity work.

Context

The context of creating cohesive partnerships at local level is heavily influenced by the existing social constructs of a people in a process of conflict transformation. The cultural paradigm shift that has been created by the influx of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, who have been allocated housing in already contested and polarised communities, can paradoxically further the cause of conflict rather than build bridges of hope and provide opportunities for reconciliation.

Collaborative Partnership in Action

The partnership between the faith-based group St Paul and St Barnabas (STP&B) and All Nations Ministry (ANM) came about from an invitation from

ANM's leader, David Maganda. He came along to an evening church service, and asked if the church could send a representative to a meeting the following week to discuss how they could begin building relationships in the area. The rationale for the church becoming involved in such a partnership was firmly embedded in the vision strategy of outreach to the local community which included: embracing diversity, provide a safe warm and friendly environment where indigenous people and newly housed refugees, asylum seekers and migrants could learn how to live together in community, to learn about cultural traditions and difference, whilst not losing indigenous identity, and gain skills of integration.

David Maganda (ANM, 2018) gave an update stating that recent statistics revealed there had been 150 families from Syria accommodated in North Belfast since December 2015, and that new groups arrive every eight weeks. The ongoing work with such groups is widely recognised as being extremely important. This was highlighted by the Church of Ireland Refugee Working Group Report on supporting asylum seekers and refugees (2018):

> Clergy and parishioners whose neighbours include asylum seekers and refugees are encouraged to take up unexpected opportunities to serve as and when they arise e.g. by offering lifts to hospital appointments in rural areas, food banks, helping people to improve their English language skills through classes and everyday conversations, or giving goods for mothers and toddlers.

During the first information sharing meeting with community representatives, a request was made for use of the STP&B church premises to host a weekly 'drop in' session as the premises they currently were using was not suitable for group activities. Further discussions resulted in the suggestion of a welcome service to mark the initial launch of a suggested 'drop in' at the church. This was the first test of collaborative partnerships as the organising committee consisted of representatives from local churches/residents, ANM and local faith-based groups. The plans were detailed and action points taken on board. The STP&B group took a coordinating role and set in motion some action plans for each representative.

This first collaborative working group meeting was highly encouraging and a statement of commitment from each representative was made. The critical thinking behind the role required by the leaders is based on the definition given by one of the group leaders (Hawthorne).

The construct of transformational leadership in a contemporary framework is about re-visioning praxis, bringing forward initiatives for change and taking responsibility for developing people and projects. It is our understanding from a community development perspective that transformational leadership is not about taking a key role of managing people or projects in any authoritative way but working in a collaborative, inclusive and participatory context that drives positive change.

The support for this and the notion of collective action formed part of the initial discourse and was agreed by the leadership group. However, as the weeks passed, there was a heightened sense of panic and frustration as the action plans were not being executed as previously designed. This lack of communication increased the frustration and anxiety among group members. There was a palpable sense of racial discrimination where some voiced 'typical African time, they work to the beat, dead slow and stop', and other discriminatory comments such as: 'I spent 2 years in Nigeria, so from my experience, once you realise 'they' are on a different time-zone, you will have to make a decision either to go with 'their' time-clock, or forget working with them'. After some critical reflection we realised this was a clear indication of deep rooted differentiation and that we needed to confront our preconceived ideas and prejudices we each held, and deal with these accordingly. This reinforced for the group, the seismic problem facing us in trying to encourage people from the local community to cognitively reframe *their* prejudices, as we realised we needed to deal with our own that had lain dormant until awakened during this process. We agreed that we needed to skilfully work through this towards building an inclusive environment that would permeate into each group and situation we might encounter. This also brought home to us the importance of developing a partnership that would be based upon integrity and strive to be committed to being collaborative and supportive to each other.

The paramount aim of this partnership was to build social capital which according to Field (2003, pp. 1–2), is based upon the central idea that 'social networks are a valuable asset … and are the basis for social cohesion'. Putman (2000, p. 19), further postulates the trustworthiness that arises from these networks that is closely related to 'civic virtue' and this is most powerful when embedded in social relationships within such partnerships.

Embracing Cultural Diversity

The task then has been to work collectively to frame the scaffolding needed to introduce the community at large to change. This means nurturing and helping

people to identify the building blocks that will help increase confidence and give assurances. The purpose of this was to encourage congeniality rather than dissension that historically has manifested when territorial claims are threatened. An entrenched introspective worldview of sectarianism and racial discrimination is common with people in this area, and the idea of embracing integration across ethnicities is fraught with tensions.

Already the indigenous community live in a contested space, and this new cultural shift presents a complex and multifarious task to all involved in collaborative transformatory praxis working toward social justice, social cohesion and inclusion. Already in this community there have been incidents of hate crime and heinous acts of violence against ethnic minority families who have tried to settle in the area. In more recent weeks one family from Somalia was intimidated and had to have Police protection to relocate to another part of the country.

The task was clearly a mammoth undertaking to avoid further community conflict as indigenous people are suspicious when they believe their identity is threatened, at which point, attack becomes their first line of defence. It is within this context that the outreach initiative to welcome refugees, asylum seekers and migrants is located. The project is firmly grounded in a faith-based community partnership that has an inherent desire to reach out to those who are in need as strangers, and to help indigenous people embrace cultural diversity. This mirrors the thoughts of Nic Craith (2003, p. 16) who advocates for the pluralism and ethnic diversity with the penultimate aim to integrate into the host society.

The need for this project has been established through previous work and consultation with the refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities through the delivery of a celebration of Diversity Welcome Day. Thirteen different nations were represented and a total of eighty-three people attended. The programme provided opportunities for story-telling, music, dance, and multicultural food tasting. Each of the dishes served had been prepared by the participants. This was followed up by a 'food fest event', and sixty-five attendees joined in fun activities that included arts and crafts, games, drumming circles and a variety of food tasting. Since then, there has been a programme of activities during an on-going weekly 'drop-in'. The primary aims of these sessions were to provide advice, help with language, ensuring the basic needs of food, clothes and shelter are met. A significant consideration was how to create an environment where participants have a sense of belonging and gain confidence to explore possible shared future goals.

Breaking the Cultural Silence by Creating Space for Transformative Intellectuals to Grow

One of the key issues voiced by participants in the drop in sessions was the lack of educational opportunities open to the refugees, asylum seekers and migrants' community. This evidently reinforces Freire's (1984, p. 50) concept of 'cultural silence'. As a group we were aware of and concerned with addressing the social injustice of discrimination and inequalities. We recognised the need to provide a forum where participants identified as most silenced in our community could engage in consciousness-raising activities that are liberating. By using generative themes in a problem-posing way through critical praxis approach, we reasoned they could perhaps begin to question their lived experiences of oppression. Freire (1993, p. 109) postulates that in order to reach critical conscientization, the seeker must be fully immersed in curiosity, critical reflection, rigour and humility. Ledwith (2016, p. 54) suggests this can only be realised if it is 'coded in the language and culture of the people'.

We began thinking about how we could address these important issues. Research on the effect of formal educational opportunities by Hawthorne-Steele and Moreland (2014, p. 91) concluded that

> Transformational learning can occur within a formal learning environment and that, given the right conditions of providing a positive mutually accepting learning environment, one that freely allows the learner to participate in life-scripting, critical reflection and dialogue, students can begin the process of engaging in transformational learning.

Transformative Educational Opportunities

The opportunity to advance the group came in the shape of the Unblocking Potential (UP) programme designed and delivered by the community development team from Ulster University.

The UP programme aims to bring individual participants and their educational histories to the fore and to increase self-worth, self esteem, and confidence building, allowing them to explore setting goals and work towards achieving these. The course is regarded as a stepping-stone towards further education. It further aims to create opportunities for people from disadvantaged communities, who are often disillusioned by the barriers they face that prevent them from accessing third level education. It is underpinned by the value-base of creating social mobility often achieved through educational advantage. Whilst

we recognise the significant civic value of promoting positive social change by encouraging indigenous people to become what Gramsci (1971) describes as 'radical organic intellectuals', who work to a political agenda to raise awareness in the working class producing leaders to engage people in collective struggle, we believe it is in fact, more closely aligned to Giroux's (1988, p. 151) assertion that advocates 'transformative intellectuals who provide moral, political and pedagogical leadership'. We determined that providing access to higher education is a critical element of social mobility. It is our ambition then, to encourage people to avail of educational opportunities so they may then serve as positive relatable role models within their communities. Through the course they would be equipped with the skills to articulate the needs and issues of the oppressed. The UP programme is designed to introduce students to learning theories and discovering their specific learning needs. Often the apparently immovable obstacle in the journey of an adult learner lies in ignorance about tailoring learning needs to the individual. Once this is processed and unblocked, the learner can begin to enjoy learning. The UP programme with the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community group, is currently in an early stage with twenty active participants, and an essential aspect is ensuring participants gain knowledge and understanding about their particular learning style. The tutors of the programme noticed the attendance at the beginning was sporadic and discussed this with the students and discovered that a number presented as Muslim and needed to set aside time to pray. The start time was changed to accommodate this and the attendance problem was averted. The intention is to continue to monitor progress and critically evaluate the impact of the programme upon completion. It is hoped this will help identify what areas of the partnership that may need to be strengthened or perhaps eliminated.

The next stage for this group is currently in the early ground-breaking stage. We are working to develop and deliver over a period of 12 months across North Belfast a three-phase project. This was borne out of listening to some of the harrowing stories of people who have been active participants in STP&B outreach programmes.

This project is grounded in the model of transformatory praxis. To this aim we intend to provide a pedagogic pathway by ensuring these programmes are accredited so that participants can readily access higher education, thus exercising the right for an inclusive education. The aim of the practical aspect of the project is to capture stories of integration or those attempts to integrate, into the local community, through using the expression of arts, primarily Augusto

Boal's (1995) theatre of the oppressed workshops. The project recognises the importance of tracking transformational change through measuring outcomes of social capital, educational attainments, healthier lifestyles through use of professional video and roadshows, performing with other communities, and producing 'integration guidelines' for future incoming migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Putman asserts,

> Social capital can help to mitigate the insidious effects of socioeconomic disadvantage … children are powerfully shaped by social capital … opportunities, educational achievement behaviour and development … public spaces are cleaner, people friendlier and safer, lower crime rate … better health and happier lifestyle. (Putman, 2000, pp. 319–320)

Story-telling

The aims of this project is to record the stories of the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community from North Belfast. Their stories will identify the issues they face as 'newcomers' coming to live in Northern Ireland and report on the difficulties they suffer including racism. The overall project objective is to highlight their issues and dispel misconceptions from the indigenous community around the 'taking our jobs and houses' statements as so often referenced in media reporting. The second phase of the programme will involve working with the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community to bring to life some of those stories using Boal's theatre of the oppressed techniques. This will give the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community the opportunity to proactively do something to address the issues that have been explored and address the key problems and issues facing themselves and their families trying to make a new life in North Belfast. Such voices are seldom heard. Besides being considerably isolated by regulatory requirements, limited resources and language difficulties, they live in a society whose renowned expertise in sectarianism, the first cousin of racism, makes interaction with mainstream society a risky business for strangers. Many persons seeking sanctuary live with a constant sense of anxiety – about their situations, their family and friends and, particularly, the outcome of their claim, which can lead to random arrest. Many have a well-founded fear of 'authority' figures based on previous experience, making it hard to trust those who are often in positions to help them. In consequence, people who live among us with much to teach us all about values and priorities, are voiceless, and live in a vacuum that forces a culture of silence within a hegemonic environment, hence the importance of this project. The third and final phase of the programme will allow us to showcase and use our

theatre pieces to tour around local schools and community centres to highlight the issues of the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community. It is hoped this process will allow interaction from the audiences and create a safe space for dialogue. This programme will inform the wider community and help to dispel inaccurate myths about the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community. It will hopefully give them confidence to voice their opinions, influence their community and the wider society for the better of all. In terms of personal development, it will hopefully enable them to their build their self-confidence and self-esteem levels and lead to their increased participation within their community and beyond.

The biggest destabilising factor within working class communities is disinformation or 'fake news'. Historically we as a community have built walls to keep each other out, resulting in division and allowing 'others' to feed our own sectarianism. This programme will address the spread of racism delivering the facts around immigration and immigrants and their entitlements and in a way through theatre that humanises them as people through the telling of their own stories. This will inform the wider community of those facts and contribute to more cohesive neighbourhoods. In this partnership programme we seek to work towards addressing racism and the wide spread damage it causes to people and communities.

Envisioning the Future

We envision the social impact in the short-term to provide a safe space for the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community to have their voices heard. Through the storytelling they can begin to dispel the myths that have grown and inform the wider community with the facts. This will undoubtedly empower and develop the capacity of the refugees, asylum seekers and migrant community through programme delivery. We envision the long-term impact to work towards eradicating racism in the wider community, and bring about opportunities for all to celebrate the diversity of cultures within North Belfast, forging neighbourly relationships and creating a safer community.

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Herbal Medicine: An Adult Education Response to Mental Health

TOM O'BRIEN

Abstract

Adult education is concerned with the redistribution of resources and the recognition of rights held by citizens and to have these rights respected (Honneth, 1995). Mental health is an important domain of rights that are disrespected and unprotected by the state. This article reflects on herbal medicine as a practice in adult education in response to the mental health needs of citizens. It argues that adult educators need to pay more attention to the limitation of biomedicine in the defining and treatment of mental health. Herbal medicine has potential to offer adult educators a critically reflexive space, to critique issues of power, medicine and wellbeing.

Keywords: Herbal Medicine, Adult Education, Biomedicine, Mental Health, Addiction

Introduction

I grew up on a small land commission 52-acre farm in Wicklow, surrounded by nature, plants and animals. My father produced milk for the co-op and we survived on his small farm income. He borrowed money from the bank to develop the farm and paid it off through the cycles of nature and its produce. In 1997 he died of a heart attack aged 62. His struggles were the same as many of small farmers all around the world, who face the same or worse, in trying to provide a sustainable living for their families (Patel, 2008). When he died, I remember the conversations after the funeral about health, heart attacks and sausages. However, it took me a few more years to realise that sausages while not the healthiest of foods, were not the singular cause of heart disease in Ireland. At the time of my father's sudden death, he was being treated by his doctor for heart disease. It was the failure of his medical treatment that sparked my inquiry into the limitations of medicine and led me to become an adult educator and herbalist.

A year before my father died I was involved with a group of local people and organisations from the north inner city of Dublin in setting up the Crinan Youth Project, in Sean McDermott Street. This was a biopsychosocial model of addiction treatment for teenagers using heroin and other substances that combined youth work with medicine, psychotherapy with art and personal development with community development. However, as time passed, I noticed that these discourses of treatment did not operate on a level playing pitch. It seemed to me that medicine was the dominant discourse of treatment that influenced how the service evolved. The rest of the discourses passively accepted their position in the hierarchy and did not challenge the status quo that maintained medicine. This became the focus of my PhD research and later as an adult educator, managing two drug treatment services, 'The Young Persons Programme' in Trinity Court and 'Sankalpa' in Finglas until 2016.

Developing these ideas in *Is there a way out of this clinic?* (O'Brien, 2007), I tried to show how a medical hegemony or medical domination without force (Gramsci *et al.*, 1971) existed in addiction treatment and this hegemony was supported by a reductionist model of scientific materialism that undermines and distorts the complex and profound way in which herbal medicine can facilitate the healing process (Flower, 2012). These models of medicine and research are underpinned and supported by the pharmaceutical industry and neoliberal models of political and economic governance (Brown, 2015). This set of political and economic relationships gave rise to a medicalised model of addiction treatment maintained and controlled by psychiatrists who continue to justify higher doses methadone, with additional prescriptions of anti-anxiety drugs, sleeping pills, anti-psychotic drugs, while many of the subjects of these treatments, were still self-medicating on cannabis, heroin, cocaine and sometimes alcohol (O'Brien, 2007). As Richard Ashcroft from the Verve says, 'The drugs don't work, they just make you worse' (Ashcroft, 1997). Prescription drugs can make things worse for many as seen in the new epidemic of prescription addiction that has been linked to the medical model of treatment and to a much bigger problem in health known as the 'overuse of medicine' (Gibson and Singh, 2010).

In my practice as an herbalist and adult educator I work to uncover the diseasing model of addiction and mental health that tries to lay the blame for people's pain in flawed genes or personal circumstances (Heather *et al.*, 2018; Metzl and Kirkland, 2010; Courtwright, 2010). Adult educators need to challenge oppressive and reductionist forms of treatment that risk doing more harm than

good under the guise of evidence-based treatment. They also need to resist blind acceptance of medical assumptions about addiction treatment that exclude and ignore the socio-economic roots that influence drug choices, addiction patterns and wellbeing. Data from the US indicates that medical harm is now one of the leading causes of death (Myhill, 2015). It was against this backdrop that I decided to become an herbalist, believing that it would provide me with a different way of seeing health and illness and allow me to work with people in their suffering and challenge the dominance of biomedicine in people's lives.

My herbal medicine journey began in the Irish School of Herbal Medicine and after a four-year period and 450 hours of clinical practice I qualified as an herbalist in 2012. Herbal medicine is a form of traditional medicine using plants that have medicinal benefits. As a student herbalist in Sankalpa, I was able to introduce herbal teas to clients, in a morning ritual that involved an informal check-in and a meditation. I also introduced a nutrition programme to support recovery through food. However, by the time I had qualified as an herbalist, the economy had collapsed and austerity politics had started to impose funding cuts and stricter governance rules that shifted the power in favour of the funder (Health Service Executive) who now controlled what an addiction service could offer its service users (Cullen and Murphy, 2017). Herbal medicine was not on the menu, at least officially. Meanwhile prescribed drugs went unchallenged even though they continue to be linked with increased numbers of drug related deaths among drug users (O'Brien, 2013). Herbal medicine has a history of being misrepresented and undermined by powerful vested interests seeking to maintain the capitalist social and political order. The most successful marginalisation of herbal medicine came when the American Medical Association was formed in 1847 and it became illegal for doctors to practice herbal medicine (Baer, 2001). While herbal medicine did go into decline it was kept alive through social movements around the world for people who didn't have access to biomedicine.

The Word Health Organisation estimate that 80% of the world's population still relies on traditional medicine as their primary source of health care, with the market in herbal medicine estimated to be worth $60 billion annually (Tilburt and Kaptchuk, 2008). In Ireland, herbal medicines are controlled by the Health Products Regulatory Authority and the European Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. Herbalists are self-regulated like many other professions in Ireland. Herbal medicine has been critiqued for a lack of scientific evidence to support claims about various medical plants (Ernst, 2000). Despite this critique

there is a growing body of scientific evidence (Hung and Ernst, 2010) including systematic reviews demonstrating the efficacy of herbal medicine.

Becoming and being an herbalist is central to my practice as an adult educator and way of resisting neoliberal biomedical and pharmaceutical interventions that I believe risk harm to body, mind and spirit. Today I practice under the name of 'The Mental Health Herbalist' and work mainly with people who suffer from depression and anxiety. As part of my practice I have a YouTube channel that supports my goal of educating people around the world on the benefits of herbal medicine for better mental health. In my practice I meet people on a regular basis who suffer from depression. Some of them don't want to go on to antidepressants and others want to come off them. There are a wide range of evidence based herbal medicines that I use to treat depression and anxiety; Passion Flower, Lemon Balm, Valerian, Skull cap, Brahmi, Ashwaghanda, St John's Wort, Linden Blossom, Hawthorn Berries, Hops, Wild Lettuce and Wood Betony (Mowrey, 1986; Mischoulon and Rosenbaum 2008; Tang *et al.*, 2017). These herbs offer a powerful way to support a person's nervous system while they take additional steps to improve their overall wellbeing. I also help people look at their diet as certain foods have been found to have a positive impact on people suffering from depression (Johannessen *et al.*, 2011). Food choices are also linked to socio economic inequalities, a theme within the wider goal of my work as an adult educator (van Lenthe *et al.*, 2015).

At the heart of my relationship with each suffering adult who comes to see me is a synergy between adult education and herbal medicine. Becoming an herbalist for me was a natural response as an adult educator to the oppressive practices I saw from biomedicine in the form of psychiatry. So, when I practice as an herbalist, adult education underpins my approach to understanding and critiquing concepts such as: 'disease', 'treatment', 'healing', 'medicine', 'patient' and 'power'. My practice as an herbalist is built on many of the concepts which underpin adult education today. The relationship between the herbalist and the person suffering is not a passive one of compliance like in biomedicine, where the good patient is treated as a passive object rather than empowered subject (Greenhalgh, 2001; Rowe, 1999). In herbal medicine the person suffering is understood as an embodied subject who exercises agency in the healing process (Tang and Anderson, 1999). Herbal medicine offers a person-centred and self-directed experience of wellness and recovery from illness. Herbal medicines are used as a catalyst in promoting homeostasis and natural recovery (Chopra, 1990). Herbal medicine offers a transformative learning experience of illness

and recovery as the person reflects on their life and learns to challenge some of the assumptions they held about disease and its treatment. This is an idea supported by Mezirow's transformational theory of adult education, where the central task is 'the critique of assumptions through critically reflective learning' (Wilson and Kiely, 2002, pp. 1). Adult education has a strong focus on emancipatory adult learning theory as a means to social transformation and the attainment of human freedom (Welton, 1995). For some people coming off medications like antidepressants after many years with the support of an herbalist can be emancipatory. A major review of anti-depressants found that 82% of the response to anti-depressant medication is as a result of the placebo effect (Kirsch, 2009). While some people find comfort from antidepressants, many find that they don't address the root causes of depression and in the end leave people dependent and with little choice but to stay on them. On a macro level herbal medicine provides a critique of neoliberalism in the form of industrial farming that is undermining local environments and economies around the world (Patel, 2008). Herbal medicine provides a micro model of health and medicine that is sustainable, that connects local food markets, with local economies and models of community that support stronger social cohesion and community wellness (Myhill, 2015). Herbal medicine can also be understood in the context of critical health literacy, as it has a strong commitment to ensuring that the person receiving the treatment understands the language used and their role in the healing process. The biomedical model on the other hand has been critiqued for its disempowering effect on the patient understanding of their condition and its treatment due to the over technical use of language and the clinical relationship between doctor and patient (Vilhelmsson, 2014).

Health systems based on biomedicine are failing on a massive scale around the world and yet the illusion that these systems are completely based on evidence remains virtually unchallenged within the field of adult education. Health is political and adult educators interested in the redistribution of health resources, need to pay more attention to the health needs of adults in their practice and challenge the assumptions of biomedicine. In Ireland we spend €20 billion or 10% of our GDP on health each year and despite this redistribution of our taxes, many citizens who can't afford private health insurance, must wait for prolonged periods of time to be treated. Currently there are over 600,000 people waiting for a medical procedure in our health system. Each night around 700 people are unable to secure a hospital bed for treatment and instead must lie on a trolley in a hospital corridor, without privacy (*Irish Medical Times*,

2017). This is what Illich (1975) called 'iatrogenic disease' which occurs when a medical intervention leads to making the problem worse. Despite the failure of our health system hospital consultants are one of highest paid professions in the state.

Conclusion

Adult educators are at risk of becoming irrelevant if they don't find new ways to challenge dominant and oppressive discourses and controlling influences in the lives of ordinary people that have lasting consequences. Adult educators must avoid being sucked into a world where one is unable, unwilling or afraid to challenge the status quo or articulate an alternative way forward because of the risks associated with such a challenge. We all benefit and lose from the neoliberal blanket that we critique, that both keeps us warm and threatens us at the same time. We must enrich our practice as adult educators with new and innovative ways to address the challenges that face us today. I believe that mental health is an area that must concern adult educators more and that herbal medicine provides a space to reflect and think about mental health in a different way to that offered by biomedicine. I believe herbal medicine can form part of an adult education approach in the tradition of critical theory of adult health and contribute to new emancipatory and participatory health practices in the area of addiction and mental health (English, 2012).

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Assessing Lifelong Learners through Enquiry Based Learning: A Master's Level Perspective

ANGELA WRIGHT

Abstract

'Enquiry Based Learning' (EBL), as an engagement strategy to encourage lifelong learning, is the focus of this paper. Participants in this study are adult learners in full time employment who are returning to education, in many cases, after a substantial break. The empirical data was gathered from these students who are studying a master's in business. As educators, there is a need to move beyond traditional assessment models to more creative and innovative ways to ensure learning. The empirical data gathered in this research is relevant and important and will inform practice when considering the inclusion of EBL for assessment and its role in lifelong learning.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Enquiry Based Learning (EBL), Assessment, Masters, Engagement, Adult Learners

Introduction

Student engagement is an 'umbrella term' that covers a very wide range of strategies and activities (Wynne, 2014), but, in the context of this discussion on Enquiry Based Learning (EBL), it leads to the encouraged use of working with 'real life' issues and problems, outside of the educational institution, for pedagogical enhancement and, ultimately, as a valuable assessment tool. Attempts at engagement present challenges on two fronts: in the day-to-day order of how a university conducts its work, and in higher order considerations around values, identity and purpose (Wynne, 2014). Emphasis is placed on public scholarship, on sharing the expertise of the university more broadly, and on learning from communities, to contribute to public problem solving, where civically engaged universities are mindful of the contribution they make to the economy (Hunt, 2011; Wynne, 2014). Hutchings (2007) attempts to set out the

philosophical bases of EBL, and argues that the true sources of EBL are to be found in enlightenment thought, its epistemology and in its aesthetics.

Research Context

It is vital that we move beyond a conceptualisation of education as the simple acquisition of knowledge to one which equally emphasises, nurtures and assesses innovation and expertise in the utilisation and application of knowledge (Boland, 2010). This research focuses on the use of EBL as an appropriate assessment tool for the adult learner at a master's level 9. In Ireland, qualifications are assigned to one of 10 levels on the National Framework of Qualifications as defined by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. Levels 6–10 cover higher education qualifications with level 9 equating to Master's level. Adult learners are defined either based on their age, cognitive maturity, or, as a non-traditional learner (Chao, 2009). The adult learner returning to education brings a different perspective to the classroom and varying standpoints to education, in terms of emotion, motivation, and financial resources, when compared to students entering higher education through normal channels after second level education. Students learn differently in varying situations (Ramsden, 1992), and this is to the fore with adult learners and lifelong learners. Connotation varies greatly with each student but especially with the adult learner (Ramsden, 1992). Considered reflection is therefore important when developing and applying appropriate assessment strategies for these learners. EBL has enjoyed increasing inclusion in assessment processes and, now, some informed student feedback is timely; correspondingly, this study was conducted in conjunction with adult learners studying a master's in business degree.

Literature

Problem solving (as it was initially called - and later referred to as Problem Based Learning (PBL)) in higher education (HE) was developed initially for medical schools (Ertmer and Simons, 2006). The use of problems and EBL in HE prepares students to be more effective in the real-world situations in which they work, and to return to their places of work with the skills and knowledge that they need to develop policy and implement change (Miles, 2006). Advocates, specifically of EBL, outline numerous benefits of EBL such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, deep learning etc., but are reluctant to acknowledge any disadvantages, such as the ability of students to gain and develop large knowledge about the particular topic, the difficulties for instructors and, in general, the need to change the ethos of the educational institution. Gaining large quantities of knowledge in a fast manner is typically suited to a traditional

classroom situation and not problem solving. Problem solving is still not yet widely used (Ertmer and Simons, 2006). Implementation and operational issues around EBL and PBL are challenging and much more taxing for the instructor. Instructors need to have a much boarder skill set, and be able to adapt and be flexible (Ertmer and Simons, 2006) to this changing learning environment when compared to traditional classrooms—the instructor is now facilitating and not instructing, and also a provider of scaffolds[1] (Resier, 2004) for the student. Transitioning to this type of guidance is exigent. Barrett (2005) considers problem solving not merely as a teaching and learning technique, but a total approach to education, and outlines several philosophical principles underpinning Problem-based Learning.

What is Enquiry Based Learning (EBL)?

EBL describes approaches to learning that are driven by a process of enquiry (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). The tutor establishes the task and supports/facilitates the process, but the students pursue their own lines of enquiry, draw on their existing knowledge (often found in the workplace) and identify the consequent learning needs. They seek evidence to support their ideas and take responsibility for analysing and presenting this appropriately, either as part of a group, or, as an individual supported by others. They are thus engaged as partners in the learning process (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005), and students can take control of their learning (Whowell, 2006). EBL, however, while incorporating elements of PBL, also covers a broader spectrum of approaches (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). Problem and Enquiry-based Learning are multifaceted in nature and are not mere teaching techniques but rather total educational strategies (Barrett, 2005).

EBL V PBL

An examination of the literature reveals that the terms EBL and PBL are used interchangeably – although some theorists suggest differences. Kahn and O'Rourke (2005) outline for example, that EBL has a definite overlap with PBL, where the handling of a problem defines and drives the whole learning experience of the students. EBL, however, is more far reaching in nature (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). Problem Based Learning originated from innovative health sciences and progressed into mainframe schools and Universities. PBL is a learner-centred approach – students engage with the problem (Savery, 2006).

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1   A teacher assists a learner, altering the learning task, so that the learner can solve problems or accomplish tasks that would otherwise be out of reach, (Resier, 2004, p. 274).

Problem-based Learning is seen as a set of approaches under the broader category of Enquiry-based Learning and is a total approach to education (Barrett, 2005). Within PBL, significant time is involved in the search for relevant resources. If a sufficient set of relevant resources has already been collated, then the time for searching will be reduced (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005). In PBL, the students define their own learning issues (Barrett, 2005). Interestingly, one of the main defining characteristics of Problem-based Learning, which distinguishes it from some other forms of Enquiry-based Learning, is that the problem is presented to the students first at the start of the learning process, before other curriculum inputs (Barrett, 2005). This is an important point to note.

By contrast, EBL advocates a wider use of project work or research activity, emphasising the use of project-work to master a given body of knowledge itself, and not simply to make connections within an existing body of knowledge. This approach is a key factor that distinguishes an enquiry-based approach from a more traditional use of projects. During the EBL process, students are facilitated to construct their knowledge (Kahn and O'Rourke). Certainly, EBL facilitates deep, and especially, memorable learning (Whowell, 2006), and is now implemented in higher education institutions across the U.K. and world-wide in a broad and diverse list of subject areas (Whowell, 2006).

Methodology

The motivation for this study was to inform practice, and to examine the value of EBL as an assessment tool at master's level. It was considered appropriate to apply a positivistic research methodology in this context. A quantitative research survey instrument using Likert questions was devised based on surveys and suggestions on educational research on Survey Monkey. Quantitative measurements and hard facts may be of more use in demonstrating concrete achievement to the researcher (Harvey, 1998). The survey was completely confidential, facilitating confidential and anonymous contributions to access negative feedback (Harvey, 1998), thus allowing graduates the freedom and confidence to make a relevant and genuine contribution to the research. Sixty-two graduates (male and female 23-55 years of age), consisting of the total population of the last three years of the taught master's programme, were invited to give feedback on this method of assessment. This was considered an appropriate sample size; more students could have been invited to participate, but it was believed that a more recent pool was more beneficial. Prior to sending out the survey, the questionnaire was tested to eliminate any errors and cleansed prior to surveying the sample proper. When the survey was ready, an email was

sent to the sixty-two graduates with the survey link attached with a request to complete same in the interest of improving practice. Four of the emails bounced (the emails on file were work emails), implying that the graduates had moved from their place of work and relevant email to another position. Therefore, the working sample was reduced to 58. Forty graduates of the relevant 58 taking the survey responded – a response rate of 68.96 – 70%.

Discussion

In the context of lifelong learning at master's level 9, the use of EBL is encouraged and considered a worthy approach for assessment at group level within HE. It is also considered to be attractive to prospective students returning to education when compared to traditional examinations. The key reason for using EBL and not PBL is due to the fact that the 'Enquiry' assignment is not presented to the students until week 4 of the term, (in line with Barrett), as it is necessary to present relevant theory to the groups in advance of their 'Enquiry' process so that they are fully informed. For the initial lecture, the format and process of what will happen throughout the module is provided to the students (Hadgraft, 2000). Findings from this research, however, reveal that graduates would actually like to get the problem earlier in the term due to its short nature (12 weeks) prior to week four.

For the EBL, a business organisation (local or international) is chosen by the lecturer (who will facilitate the learning), and the research problem is developed in conjunction with this organisation. Overall, and in line with the literature, respondents were satisfied with the quality of the organisations, and derived particular satisfaction when it involved a 'not for profit' organisation (86%) especially. Problems that are current, local, relevant, and authentic were welcomed by respondents as they are viewed as beneficial to both parties to the exercise. 'The best elements of the course were the live case studies and the guest speakers'. 'The speakers from industry worked very well and gave excellent insights into their companies and problems'. 'As an adult returning to education, this was attractive to me'.

This research found that EBL as a method of assessment was both engaging and challenging for students. 89% stated that EBL was challenging, but in a 'positive way', with only 7% stating that it was 'stressful'. When asked about working together in groups to 'problem solve', 38% stated that problem solving in groups 'helped me to work better in a team setting and ultimately, in my work setting'. 38% stated that it improved their professional development skills, and 25% stated that it improved their communication skills at their place of work.

In line with the literature, when setting the EBL problem, it is important that a clear language and unambiguous terminology is used to define concrete concepts and goals, and acknowledge and reward successful outcomes (Wynne, 2014). Sophisticated problem solving requires strategies for planning and guidance with good quality scaffolds (Resier, 2004). The EBL 'forced us to structure our learning and to plan well'.

By contrast, some respondents were concerned with 'free loading', where weaker students gained an advantage by using EBL. 'By nature, group work tends to allow weaker team members to coast on the coat tails of others, so, perhaps, a certain structure within the group work scenario could be established to address this'. 'It could be easy for some students to be 'carried along' particularly in larger project groups'. On balance, however, students engaged well with the EBL. 'I loved working with actual companies and believe that these types of projects benefitted me most'. Overall, the participants were satisfied with the assessment strategy applied for the EBL (presentation to the relevant company and feedback from same), with 86% affirmation. However, concern was still expressed in terms of 'free loading' of students. This will have to be considered and reviewed.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand. (Benjamin Franklin - politician, writer, scientist. In Spronken-Smith, 2012)

The findings of this research support Biggs (1999a) who believes that setting a problem and encouraging enquiry is a perfect way to assess students. Some graduates expressed a concern around the 'free loading' of others while working on the EBL; however, a solution to this can be found by offering a range of assessment methods, matching the complex open-ended nature of an enquiry (Biggs, 1999b). Macdonald (2005) notes that the real challenge is to make assessment rewarding, stimulating, and a fun learning experience! Assessments must be attractive to lifelong learners to encourage participation. This is mirrored in the research findings.

This research recommends the application of a Tripartite Assessment (Macdonald and Savin-Baden, 2004), while using EBL at master's level. Firstly, the group submits a report for which they receive a mark. Secondly, the individual submits the piece of work they researched. Finally, the individual

writes an account of the group process that is linked to the theory of group work. These three components are added together to form the overall individual mark (Macdonald and Savin-Baden, 2004). The advantage of this is that it does not privilege some students who do less work, and an individual student will be responsible for gaining two-thirds of the marks. Most students, therefore, perceive this grading as fair (Macdonald, 2005). This solution will address the 'free loading' concerns expressed in this research.

Participants also expressed the view that they are anxious to start the EBL as soon as possible in the term, before week four, for example. Given the short-term time of 12 weeks, if this is a future consideration for the masters, then the EBL, as defined by Barrett (2005), may well have to become a PBL where the problem can be presented prior to academic delivery. Theorists provide much debate around the ideas and philosophies for the use of EBL and PBL, with advocates for each providing compelling benefits in the literature. The benefits are especially evident for adults returning to education and for the future encouragement of lifelong learning. The use of any type of problem solving certainly provides new challenges for instructor and student alike, but, on balance, the case for its use in a blended format is compelling. EBL certainly presents benefits along with disadvantages but, holistically, the advantages have a clear recompense, as the students will reap the rewards of being able to undertake EBL interacting with a 'real life' team in an organisational setting. According to one student, 'projects where you work with real companies are supremely productive and invigorating!'. 'Lifelong learning can be rewarding and fun'.

As an adult, returning to education can be a daunting prospect for those who want to engage in lifelong learning. For lifelong learners, including EBL assessments can encourage participation and make the prospect less intimidating for such learners, especially as many of the EBL involves organisational work. This may be perceived as a comfortable environment for many adult learners when compared to traditional examination-based assessments. It is incumbent on HE Institutions to promote the benefits of lifelong learning by inserting even more EBL assessments into adult learning programmes for the future.

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SECTION THREE

Book and Policy Reviews

Policy Review: UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All

MOIRA LEYDON

Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. 2018. *The Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018–2020.* Dublin: Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. 2018. *Ireland: Voluntary National Review 2018 Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.* Dublin: Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

In his foreword to the Irish Government's *Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan, 2018–2020*, An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, described the United Nations' *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Transforming our World -* as 'the international community's roadmap for collective progress towards the kind of world we want to see'. The *Agenda* was adopted by all 193 Members States of the United Nations (UN) and sets out a framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which cover the social, economic and environmental requirements for a sustainable future. The SDGs represent the most ambitious agreement the UN has ever reached and focus on the '5 Ps': People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. Building on the experience of the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000, the hallmark of the 2030 SDGs is that they (i) apply to all countries equally; (ii) address all the social, economic and environmental requirements for sustainable development; (iii) include a stronger role for the public, particularly in monitoring progress in implementing the SDGs.

This agenda is different! The 17 SDGs do not differentiate between rich and poor countries. Every single country is challenged to achieve the SDGs. The old

dichotomy of North and South no longer prevails as humanity faces what are increasingly acknowledged as existential challenges. While the agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals is not legally binding, each UN member state has committed to achieving them. The *Agenda* includes a review and follow-up process to measure progress towards achieving the Goals over the next 15 Years. Countries are encouraged to develop national responses to the *Sustainable Development Agenda*. Another key difference in this new global agenda is the focus on targets and indicators to measure progress in meeting those targets.

Concomitant with its lead role in co-facilitating with Kenya the final inter-governmental talks on the *2030 Agenda*, the Irish Government continued to demonstrate leadership by early publication of its *National Implementation Plan* and submitted its first national progress report to the United Nations in June 2018. While both were broadly welcomed by Coalition 2030, an alliance of over 100 civil society groups and networks, concerns were also expressed in relation to the lack of detail, particularly in relation to costings, targets and outcomes. The need to systematically involve stakeholders in the planning and delivery process was underlined as was the need for sustained political leadership of the overall *2030 Agenda* process.

Unfortunately, those involved in adult and community education must give a much more qualified response to both documents. Not only is there little or no reference to adult learning in the context of adult and community education in the *National Implementation Plan*, the focus of actions aimed at adults under Goal 4 are exclusively framed in terms of national priorities for skills development, participation in the labour market, further education and training, and higher education. There is one anodyne reference to lifelong learning: 'people across Ireland will engage more with lifelong learning' (*National Implementation Plan*, 2018, p. 75). Adult and community education is equally absent in the *Progress Report* which briefly states that higher and further education are 'responding strongly to the challenge of meeting Ireland's human capital needs' (p. 38).

On the face of it, this low prioritisation of adult and community education as a distinct modality of lifelong learning is at odds with the overall approach of the *2030 Agenda* which identifies Goal 4 as central to the achievement of other development goals. In particular, education is viewed as having a catalytic role in relation to progress on Goal 3 Health and Wellbeing; Goal 5 Gender Equality; Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth: Goal 12 Responsible

Consumption and Production; and Goal 13 Climate Change Mitigation. As noted by Milana *et al.*, (2017), the conception of education in these different goals draws on underlying values of much adult and lifelong education and learning practice. For example, the UNESCO 2016 guidelines on Goal 4 identify its three underlying principles of (i) education as a fundamental human right and enabling right (ii) education as a social good; (iii) education as inextricably linked to gender equality.

Within Goal 4 itself, adult and community education has strong linkages with four out of the seven targets: Goal 4.3, equal access to technical / vocational and higher education; Goal 4.4, relevant skills for access to decent work; Goal 4.5, gender equality and inclusion; and Goal 4.7, education for sustainable development and global citizenship. This lack of articulation between adult and community education and the transformative role of education in the 2030 Agenda in general and in Goal 4 has been attributed to a number of factors, in particular, the overriding emphasis on empirical targets and indicators in the *2030 Agenda* and the dominance of human capital models in global education discourse. The OECD subtly noted that 'significant challenges remain for many countries with respect to achieving targets that measure learning outcomes and equity' (OECD, 2017, p. 27). The challenge therefore for AONTAS and the wider adult learning community is to articulate targets and indicators for adult learning that capture the humanistic conceptions and practices of non-formal adult learning. The articulation of such a metric would ensure that this domain of adult learning can no longer be considered as 'invisible' by the state which has responsibility promoting and monitoring progress in Goal 4. Parallel with this, there are enormous opportunities for the adult learning community to articulate visions and to develop practices to promote Goal 4.7: 'all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development'. Sustained political engagement around Goal 4.7 represents an opportunity to open up the value of transformative education that is about critical thinking, social action, engagement, community development and empowerment, gender equality and about living together.

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Policy Review: New Skills Agenda for Europe

MAJA MAKSIMOVIĆ, KATARINA POPOVIĆ

European Commission. 2016. *A New Skills Agenda for Europe: Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness.* Brussels: European Commission.

It is already commonplace for policy analysis to state that policy documents contain concepts and approaches that are socially constructed and value loaded. However, it is still necessary to look at the narratives behind wording and concepts and to shed more light on the political and economic backgrounds of the discussed problems and proposed solutions.

The subtitle of the *Agenda* reveals clearly the motivation and thinking behind the document, as well as the values on which it is based: 'Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness'. Although the *Agenda* doesn't indicate any ambition to enter the sphere of education and to intervene in the main social problems, we consider this detachment to be the main weakness of the *Agenda*. Dealing with skills out of the education realm gives them a strictly instrumental and fractional character, and narrows down the potential they might have in innovation and development. Coming from the human capital theory, the *Agenda* focus mostly on hyper-individualism and maximised competitiveness as the main values. Furthermore, disconnecting economic growth and employment from political-democratic goals and the social dimension of the European Union (EU), is seriously harming the balance between three main dimensions of development – economic, social and environmental.

The first paragraph in the *New Skills Agenda* proposes skills as a crucial and universal solution for employment and active participation in society:

Skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth. They are key to social cohesion.

The process of framing a problem is essential in any political process. Without doubt, many European countries are facing high rates of unemployment, but the point is how unemployment is described? Therefore, we are interested in the explanations of complex realities across Europe and how they justify investments in vocational education and training (VET) and skills for jobs:

Skills mismatches hinder productivity and growth and affect Member States' resilience to economic shocks.

Productivity and growth are placed at the top of the European Commission's list of priorities. Widely accepted, hardly ever critically reflected, skills have a fascinating attractiveness for all those who are seeking for a closer relation between education and work, for more effectiveness and standardisation, for establishing procedures, quality criteria and measuring. This kind of popularity made 'skills' a kind of *deus ex machina* for any problem, be it in the field of policy, research or practice. One of the reason of the charm of the concept might be the perceived neutrality.

On the contrary, it could be argued that skills supported (or followed) a move towards a neoliberal approach in adult education. Skills are context-related in such a 'loose' way that they cannot be easily linked with the situation of an individual, with his/her life context and the meaning that is attached. An additional aspect is that the reductionist characteristic of skill put responsibility for education and learning process on an individual. We tend to forget the millions of those who are in precarious jobs or jobless, very often not because of the lack of skills. Even more important – research show that current high unemployment rates cannot be attributed to skills mismatch, but have more structural and systemic causes. The need to 'equip' people with skills tend to dangerously blur these causes and look for a solution in the 'narrow street' of skills mismatch. The experiences of successful companies are pointing out a completely different approach – the innovations are not coming from good and well trained set of skills, they are boosted by creativity, thinking out-of-the-box, personal development etc.

Soft skills and transferable skills appear as a kind of a new answer that should balance economic and social dimension, employability and participation, growth and inclusion. But they appear more as decoration and a poor attempt to keep the earlier balance of these two main pillars of European education policy. The *Agenda* states that 'job creation and growth ... are key to social cohesion' but it is not elaborated, not explained how or what else should be done for skills to overcome its narrow character and help Europe to meet the new social and political challenges it is facing nowadays. 'Civic education does not create new jobs!' used to be the mantra in EU education policy, but probably one of the myths – civic education, general education, culture and art can create a working environment where skills might innovate and not reproduce, help motivate and not compete, boost development of people and environment and not only economic growth.

The *New Skills Agenda* is one more example of the influence of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) perspective on EU policy making, especially after the triumph of the concept of measuring learning outcomes, incorporated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) study. After the results were published, PIAAC was an important wakeup call for Europe, but perhaps it was not read and interpreted in a right way. It was an indicator, but not policy guidance; it indicated the problem, but the solution needed deeper analysis of causes and complex solution based on long-term strategy. The *Agenda* is a symptom of incorporating OECD logic within EU educational policy, without moving further on through visionary, interdisciplinary thinking, rooted in positive European traditions and its comparative advantages.

Finally, what will be the future of education if we make VET a first choice (*New Skills Agenda*, p. 6)? Should 'education' in the future be replaced by the term 'upskilling' and 'reskilling'? What will happen to personal development, creativity, critical thinking, relatedness, openness, tolerance, empathy, and trust? Will adult education be reduced to a recruiting centre and a space for boosting skills? Will these other 'skills' disappear from the education agenda just because they do not fit the term and are falsely not considered important to economic growth?

Book Review: Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning: A History of Irish Education 1800–2016

'In order to go forward, sometimes one has to go back.'

I first benefited from the work of Professor John Coolahan in the early 1980's. While working within the Irish Education Sector and studying for my H.Dip., Coolahan's first edition of *Irish Education: History and Structures* (1981) proved invaluable for a succinct depiction of the multi-faceted Irish education system. The 1981 publication was divided into two sections, 1800-1960 and 1960-1980. Among the chapters covered were:

- Primary Education

- Secondary (Intermediate) Education

- Technical / Vocational Education

- University Education

- Adult Education

Thirty-six years later and with a significant number of re-prints and updates, John Coolahan published his last book, *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning: A history of Irish Education 1800-2016.* This publication comprised of three sections, 1800-1960, 1960-1980 and 1980-2016 and as per the title changes from 1981 (History and Structure) to 2017 (Era of Lifelong Learning), the chapters' headings similarly reflect the change in descriptive language illustrating the new sectors that have emerged over 36 years, encompassing the goal of enabling lifelong learning:

- Early childhood education

- Primary education

- Post-primary education

- Higher education

- Further education and training (FET) and adult education

Having worked for over 20 years in the adult education sector within a number of Vocational Education Committees (VECs), I can recognise within chapter 17 how Coolahan has sought to pull together the numerous threads of policies, programmes and practices between 1980 and 2016 that would culminate with the establishment of a fourth pillar within the Irish educational system. In 2013, according to Coolahan, Further Education and Training (FET) became a nationally recognised sector in its own right alongside primary, post-primary and tertiary education.

Historically, under the heading of FET and adult education, Coolahan highlights the separate spheres and twin track approach to education and training that was the Irish education system from the 1800's and continued until recent years with the formulation of two separate Educational Acts, the *Vocational Education Act* (1930) and the *Apprenticeship Act* (1931). Since almost the beginning of the Irish Free State, separate government departments have held responsibility for initial and continuing vocational training, the Department of Education (VECs) and the Department of Labour / subsequently the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (AnCo and subsequently FÁS). In Ireland schools did not adopt the dual mode of academic and technical / vocational modes similar to other countries such as Germany and some of the Scandinavian countries. Coolahan refers on many occasions to the lack of a coherent policy along with a unified national approach that was required for the provision of full unity of purpose.

During the 1990's adult education and second chance education was brought distinctly into focus following numerous Commissions, Conferences and Conventions in Ireland and the European Union (EU) resulting in the publication of Green Papers and White Papers. One Convention in 1993 concluded that for the future well-being of FET and adult education, a coherent policy framework, a structured accreditation policy and a comprehensive

national budget were prerequisites. Green Papers and White Papers set out a range of recommendations to remedy deficiencies. Despite detailing many of the recommendations Coolahan seldom comments on them. Many recommendations were, in my opinion, ambitious and while some selected aspects were implemented, the overall proposals were never implemented for both financial reasons as well as the necessary structural changes that would only reach fulfilment from an integrated vision from FET and adult education. Similarly, Coolahan did not articulate in much detail in Chapter 17 the impact that the contribution from European Commission, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) had on the educational debate with publications such as a *White Paper: Teaching and Learning Towards the Learning Society (1995)* and *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All (1996).* Perhaps this may have been because Coolahan had served as Ireland's vice-president of the OECD committee as well as facilitator and contributor to many educational discussion documents.

John Coolahan wrote in Chapter 17 that 'the onset of the recession in 2008 may have helped to concentrate minds and have led to the overhaul of existing provision'. As an educational practitioner, this one short sentence, buried in the heart of a paragraph does not, in my opinion, convey the important turning point of this occurrence, resulting in significant structural changes within the FET and adult education sector. In a time of economic crisis FET was challenged to re-build a stable economy and society. In 2013 under the leadership of Ruairi Quinn, T.D., Minister for Education and Skills, 33 VEC's were replaced by 16 Education and Training Boards, thus bringing together areas of education and training formerly under the remit of a number of government departments, particularly apprenticeships previously under the remit of the national training agency, FÁS. Also established in 2013 was An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS), the National Further Education and Training Authority with responsibility for overseeing and facilitating the delivery of integrated FET. These FET changes Coolahan describes as broadly analogous to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in higher education. A final aspect of change referred to is the introduction of a Programme Learner Support System (PLSS), an integrated approach to collecting data on FET programme outputs, outcomes and performance. The challenge in gathering data within the FET and adult education sector lies in what is measured and what is measurable in the context of lifelong learning.

Despite his retirement in 2004 John Coolahan continued with his contributions to Irish education and was a significant, influential and pivotal figure in enabling many of the changes in both thinking and policy within the Irish educational system. While substantial and some would say monumental educational changes have taken place between the publication of Coolahan's first book in 1981 and his last book in 2017, particularly in the FET and adult education sector, one phenomenon remained the same, the dedication written within both books

For my wife, Mary. Ní fheicimid a leithéidí le linn arís

Book Review: No Artificial Limits: Ireland's Regional Technical Colleges

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH RYAN

In the exceptionally high warm summer days of mid July 2018 Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD and three other members of his Cabinet signalled publicly that the first technological university comprising the Dublin Institute of Technology, the Institute of Technology Tallaght, and the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, was to be designated following an evaluation and recommendation of an international peer evaluation panel. The announcement marked a signal day in the life of the technological sector and gave effect to one of the principal landscape recommendations in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* which had been published in 2011. It is fitting that such a significant enhancement of the Irish higher education landscape has coincided with the publication by the Institute of Public Administration of Richard Thorn's insightful account of the history of the country's regional technical colleges. Dr Thorn's eminently readable volume speaks of a passion for the sector and attests considerable research which undoubtedly benefited from his direct experience as policy maker and institutional leader.

This is a very readable book and can be approached equally by the education insider or by any person interested in the evolution of education in Ireland. It is related with characteristic wittiness and an easy style that makes of this more of an informed and engaging story than a forbidding study. Thorn traces through in detail the evolution of the sector from the age of massification in higher education in the 1960s until the cusp of the creation of the technological universities mentioned above. He records the almost eightfold increase in enrolments to higher education in a period of four decades covered within this account. The book revels in the personalities and the political intrigues and we are close enough to the period to have afforded the author direct contact with many of the principal actors. The account, for example, of the delay in opening

the Galway Regional Technical College recorded by its inaugural principal, Gay Corr, that had been occasioned by the untimely death of the horse that was to pull the cart intended to supply this promising new high-tech institution is told with relish. It is characteristic of the humour that informs the book and it pithily captures the prevailing self-effacing character of the sector as a whole.

Thorn's account brings us to the foothills of the current situation. He leads us to the gestation of the technological universities but stops short of engaging with the current landscape. It is reasonable to argue that historical analysis requires some little perspective. But he does deal with the as yet unresolved funding debate up to the time of writing in mid-2017. This allows him to record some personal comments on the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* and its implementation. The reader will find it telling when the author chooses to assume the mantle of the critical commentator. His opening remarks are succinct and perceptive while the corresponding closing remarks betray something of the passionate campaigner in their call for longer-term and more strategic planning. Thorn also employs the opportunity to register his reservations over the merger criterion attaching to the creation of technological universities. One fear he voices is that of distraction; that institutions with a proven record in educating people with a focus on the workplace, with a close-to-market emphasis in their focused research endeavours, and not least with close ties to their own communities, might be in danger of loosening these core commitments and drifting from the shared mission that has characterised the technological sector for half a century.

The emergence of a defined technological sector that finds its roots in the 1967 report of the Steering Committee on Technical Education provided essentially, in Thorn's phrase, a missing rung in Irish education. This shift to upskilling and inclusion echoed a broader international movement centred on expanding vocationally oriented institutions to become higher education providers outside of the traditional university space. The consequences have been dramatic and various; from humble beginnings the sector has grown to 14 regional institutions, and the cumulative impact on individual lives, on the sustainability of regions, and on the economy, has been profound. Another result has been a distinctive Irish response to the predictable debate around the optimum construct for a system of higher education; over recent decades we have examined international exemplars and considered binary and comprehensive systems but policy has eventually realised a diversified model that is singularly Irish and one that attracts significant intentional attention

for our espousal of a complementary but diverse mission construction. For anyone interested in that evolution, a curious mixture of careful planning and happenstance, Thorn's book is an invaluable contribution to charting the progress and colouring in the context.

In switching voice, albeit momentarily, from narrator to advocate, Thorn highlights again the value to the Irish society and economy of the maintenance of a diversified system, one that provides channels for all and at differing times through their lives. He highlights that this has been the sector for access and for support of the adult learner. That our system of higher education must be dynamic and ever changing is attested repeatedly and not least through the considerable development chronicled in this concise record. That it holds faithful to the fundamental tenets of flexibility, inclusiveness, and relevance to the requirements of society and economy is Thorn's fundamental parting message and one that is echoed by generations of alumni and the many who labour currently to enhance and promote the opportunities provided through this vibrant technological sector.

The Adult Learner Journal 2019

About the Journal

The Adult Learner, the Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education was founded in the mid-1980s. This valuable resource documents the growth and development of adult learning policy and practice.

2019 Edition

In 2019 AONTAS will celebrate 50 years as the voice of adult learning, established in 1969. To mark this very important milestone we will be publishing a very special edition of *The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education: The Adult Learner* which will be launched at the AONTAS Annual General Meeting in May 2019.

The purpose of the journal is to highlight developments in the sector and to comment on and debate important issues arising.

The 2019 edition of *The Adult Learner* will reflect upon changes in the field of adult, further and community education in Ireland, across Europe, and globally over the past 50 years. To do this the 2019 edition of *The Adult Learner* will reflect upon the work of AONTAS in this time as well as the impact of *The Adult Learner* itself since its first publication in 1985.

Notes

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. Visit www.aontas.com for more information.

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