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Editorial Comment

The notions of partnership and integration have been in the air now for a number of years. And partnership is a beautiful concept. After all, does it not make sense that all agencies operating in a related area should be working together, pooling resources, establishing common aims, devising collective strategies, developing common policies, delivering shared programmes – all with the one objective of serving the best interests of the client/participant. It has a ring of old fashioned socialism about it, except that it is now driven by a more benign capitalism and it does not posit any kind of class warfare and does not promote any kind of divisiveness. Best of all, it is aimed at helping those who are most in need and most excluded.

That this makes total sense is, of course, uncontestable. That is the ideal. The reality is not so rosy as we do seem to be experiencing some difficulties in establishing the correct flight path and in achieving the perfect landing. We know, at least in some vague way, what it is we are attempting to achieve but we are having problems with the process. In a strange manner, this does evoke memories of the 1970s which, as most of the audience will remember, were going to be socialist. We all knew then too what it was that we wanted to accomplish but we never did get there. Like now, there was a lot of heady talk – and at that time the medium was the message – and the talk was more enjoyable than the actions leading to positive outcomes.

Is it that the process has not been fully thought through? We must take a hard look at what has happened to date. We've had partnerships and, in some cases, pre-partnerships with all sorts of unlikely companions gathered around the table. We have had discussions, seminars, workshops; we have had reflection,

debate and old fashioned rows – and we have had consultations. And then it seemed that when all of this was done and even dusted, we were suddenly invited to perform again and communities which had been consulted and consulted again were invited to consult once more.

While there are undoubtedly fine examples of partnership in action, and some of them are chronicled here, there is no uniform pattern and some observers and participants are complaining bitterly about waste of energy, time and resources. Almost always, the success of partnership initiatives will depend on the efforts of individual activists within different agencies who are driven by conviction and who are prepared to make the commitment of long hours and valuable energy to bring about a worthwhile result. But unless these efforts are included in a meaningful cohesive framework, then partnership may well go the way of old fashioned socialism.

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Adult Education and Partnership

helen o'connell

Few would disagree that the political, social and economic landscape of Ireland has changed dramatically in recent years. As one observer remarked, a Martian leaving Ireland in 1989 would not recognise a society altered so fundamentally. Old alliances and allegiances have shifted at every level, economic, political and popular – old certainties and orthodoxies have been challenged as never before. A defining feature of Irish society over the past decade has been the notion of 'partnership'. What was originally developed as a problem solving process in response to the severe economic crises of the 1980s, quickly achieved the status of a political and fiscal imperative. For more than a decade 'Social Partnership' has been the dominant model of development for the Irish state and it has defined and shaped relations between the state and almost every sector within society. The proliferation of partnership type structures at both a national and local level, facilitating the participation of many previously excluded sectors, groups and individual, has become a *sine qua non* of economic stability and sustainable development. Increasingly and ironically for some, the only tenable model framing much of the activity within most sectors has been one of association with the state, with the adoption of a partnership approach a prerequisite for funding (Allen 2000)

Partnership: Culture and Practice

The challenges presented by such developments for those involved in the field of Adult Education have been considerable. At a time when the field of Adult Education itself has undergone quite dramatic changes, the need to reflect on how the sector engages with the wider environment, in pursuit of its objectives, is now crucial to its survival and ongoing relevance, in a society characterised by much change and uncertainty. The purpose of this article is to begin to

unpack and deconstruct some of the assumptions underlying the current culture and practice of 'partnership'. It explores the implications of and challenges faced by those in the field of Adult Education in the face of growing pressure to participate in and promote partnership as the primary model of development. It is argued that just as education itself is not neutral, it is either for emancipation or domestication, neither are the strategies, which are adopted in pursuit of broad educational goals. They are strongly influenced by the dominant ideologies and discourses of the day. 'When moral and political agendas of right left and centre appear to be merging, when all kinds of political parties can speak of their commitment to empowerment, freedom and self help, it is all the more necessary to observe that our global context is characterised by ideological confusion'. (Craig, 1998 p.3) One way of trying to make sense of such ideological confusion is to reassert the dynamic link between theory and practice. While a lot of innovative and creative work occurs within the field of Adult Education much of this work is not theorized. People do a lot intuitively but are weak conceptually. This in turn is affecting how people learn and how they conceptualise what it is they do and how it fits in to the bigger picture. The challenge is to move away from descriptions and 'how to' manuals and to engage with new theoretical and practical tools to help explain existing relationships and current tensions between internal and external environments.

Development of Partnership Model

A brief review of available literature reveals that far from being an organic or natural phenomenon, complex political forces rather than coincidence of shared objectives explain the current popularity of partnership (Meade 1999). Early attempts to establish corporatist type structures in the 30's and 40's, as a means of promoting industrial development, lacked political clout. The severe economic stagnation and deep despair of the 1980s was a primary catalyst in the development of The Programme for National Recovery, 1987–90, the first of four national agreements. It set down the parameters for agreement between employers, trade unions, farming interests and government on wage levels in both the private and public sectors for a three year period. The three subsequent agreements – The Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) 1990–93; The Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW) 1994–96; and Partnership 2000 have had a broadly similar form. In the third agreement, 'The Programme for Competitiveness and Work', the then Taoiseach Albert Reynolds gave an insight into the rationale behind the national partnership agreements:

> 'The government wishes to maintain and strengthen the consensus approach of recent years, to underpin our strong ecomomic performance, including continued improvement of the public finances, and, critically to deepen the competitiveness of the Irish economy'. (PCW; Introduction quoted in Meade 1999)

The national vision for partnership quickly filtered down to regional and local levels, mainly with the establishment of 12 Area Based Partnerships in 1991, under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress. They were charged with the task of tackling unemployment at local level. They were established as independent companies comprising representatives from the community sector, the social partners and state agencies. There are now 38 Area Based Partnerships in 'Designated areas of Disadvantage'. More recently, in the context of devolved local government, the creation of the County/city development boards (CDBs) were aimed at putting the concept of local partnership at the centre of social and economic development at a local/county level.

Much has been written about the merits or demerits of the various models of partnership. Defenders of social partnership highlight its capacity to align the social partners with a coherent and consistent policy framework. The emergence of a 'social pillar' with full social partnership status was proof of a systematic attempt to extend the process beyond functionally interdependent economic actors (O'Donnell & Thomas 1999). This more inclusive structure, an emergent 'corporate pluralism' in conjunction with partnership initiatives at the local and regional level, represented innovative attempts to reconfigure the relationships between representative and participative democracy which are fostering new forums of deliberative democracy (O'Donnell & Thomas 1999, p.138). Others point to the growing gap between rich and poor as concrete evidence of the failure of partnership to deliver on the core issues of poverty, equality etc. The 'fruit of the boom sceptics' decry the co-option of various sectors and other interests into strategies for dissipating and addressing social harmony, while the status quo remains unaffected. The blatant promotion of consensus politics fails to recognise competing interests and conflict and terms such as disadvantage are merely a euphemism for class and class inequality. Meade makes the point that the current idea of partnership militates against public discussion in relation to power. The image of a central state and civil society that can initiate mutually beneficial relationships along the way to negotiated socio-economic progress is created (Meade 1999).

Challenges

Many of the broader assumptions underlying partnership are also being challenged. Participation in partnership is generally considered to contribute to civil society. Civil society is frequently depicted as an unqualified source of all things benign – civil society is not apart from the class structure and other social divisions; it is therefore a site of inequality and conflict. (Adult Ed. Journal p.70). Others challenge the popular conception of 'community', as some utopian place characterised by solidaristic relations which can be represented and channeled in simple organisational forms (Cleaver 2001). The reality is very different. Allen highlights the ambiguity of terms such as 'social exclusion' and 'the marginalised'. Despite their prolific use in everyday parlance and politics – they do not say who is doing the excluding and marginalisation seems to be a process with no active subjects (Allen 2000 p.37). It can imply that the structures of society exclude the poor or that the poor themselves hold particular values which lead to their marginalisation. The growing popularity of such terms appears to be in their ability to satisfy a wide range of political agendas (Craig, 1998). At this juncture it is not unreasonable to ask whether concepts which appear to derive support from such a wide range of actors mean very different things. While previously the ambiguity of such terms allowed a certain freedom and innovation, their current usage puts them at risk of being reduced to de-politicised cliches, which legitimise the dominant ideology and provide little practical direction or inspiration to those working in the field.

Many of the above tensions are also reflected at a local level where partnership is generally quite mixed. While there will always be admirable exceptions, success often relies on the determination and commitment of individual players. Generally groups and organisations will vary in their capacity and willingness to profitably engage with the partnership arrangements. Evidence suggests that it is those groups that are more professionalised and focused on policy that are benefiting from their involvement in partnership (Meade and Nolan 1999). The recent *White Paper on Adult Education* proposes the setting up of a variety of partnership structures at a national and local level. The National Adult Learning Council will have a governing body, which will include representation from a broad range of interests including social partners, education and training providers, learners, community and voluntary pillar interests and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (White Paper p21). While such initiatives have been broadly welcomed, they should not automatically supercede or

result in the demise of existing partnerships. An ongoing challenge and at times source of frustration for those working in partnership at a local level is that new national policies or initiatives, e.g. RAPID, require setting up of 'new and improved' partnerships and structures.

While for many the *White Paper on Adult Education* went a long way towards bringing Adult and Community Education in from the cold, it should not detract from some of the very real challenges still facing the sector. The field of Adult Education is a diverse and eclectic mix of agendas, practices and experience and is not necessarily characterised by consensus. The decline in volunteerism, the emphasis on professional standards, the increasing professionalisation of the sector, the increasing reliance on state funding coupled with a wider ideological confusion, are very real sources of tension. Groups and organisations within the field now find themselves part of a complex and at times bewildering web of structures and funding arrangements. Increasingly it is paid professionals, of which there is a growing number, who are the main participants on the boards of partnership companies and bodies such as City Development Boards. Organisations and groups are trying to deal with the inevitable tension and conflict between the wider competitive environment and a co-operative approach. There are tensions between bureaucratic concerns with efficiency and effectiveness on the one hand and the other goals of empowerment on the other and tensions between transformative political aims and managerial ones (p239). The pace of policy initiatives has been relatively fast but the impact in the field is more contested. While the language and structures of partnership have been broadly adopted the practice of partnership is indeed much more difficult.

> The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum – even encourage the more critical and dissident views. That gives people the sense that there is free thinking going on, while all the time the presuppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of the debate
>
> Naom Chomsky, American Linguist and US media foreign policy critic.

State and Civil Society

Much of the suspicion and criticism surrounding current models of partnership stems from the perceived motivation and involvement of the state. Positive and benevolent or domineering, manipulative and sectional, to use

Midegleys distinction. While the former explanations emphasise consensus and the subservience of the state to the will of the electorate, the latter stresses conflict, whereby the state manipulates, co-opts and compromises sectional interests, seeking to subordinate them to its own. The reality is rarely so straight forward. Take for example a membership organisation such as AONTAS. While it is likely that is receives a large proportion of its funding from the state through various funding arrangements, it is unlikely that it sees itself as being part of the state system but more as an active player within civil society. Equally there are many people who work for the state, in state agencies, yet who have aligned themselves closely with community, for example, Adult Education Organisers. The old chestnut of how to work within and against the state is still relevant. Many see the role of Adult Education as moving towards a greater involvement with civil society i.e. the sector of society that 'concerns itself with family, community, voluntary organisation and the locus for the potential of democracy'.(Cohen & Arato, 1992,p.vii) The fact remains however that current partnership arrangements particularly in relation to funding mean that Adult Education is still inexorably linked with the state. While not always inevitable, it is likely that there will be conflict between the state and civil society and increasingly, the task for leaders in the field of Adult Education is to make sense of such complex relations. This includes demystifying the state and its current role.

While acknowledging the increasingly central role played by the state in society, in recent times there has been a tendency to reify the concept of the state and to invest it with characteristics, which supercede the capacities of individuals to determine its actions (Midgely). This can have a debilitating affect on efforts to identify opportunities for change and influence. Power cannot be regarded simply as the operation of repression, law and coersion (Foucault). Modern power is excercised through getting people to want to do what the power wants them to do. Woodward argues that power is a matter of social production rather than social control and therefore refers to the general ability to achieve. The capacity to act and accomplish goals becomes central rather than who is dominant or subordinant. Political elites form policies through a process of reflecting on ideas emanating from many different sources tempered by their political ideology. Ideas are therefore created, not fixed and can therefore be enhanced through deliberation and reflection. As within any system or bureaucracy 'officials are subject to normalising forces in the same way as everyone else with dominant attitudes diffused and internalised as common sense' (Gramsci 1970, Foucault

1983, Ledwith 1997, Woodward 1999) The importance and potential of agency is an important consideration when looking at partnership. Long's Actor Oriented Approach tries to combine agency and structure. In doing so he 'emphasises the interplay and mutual determination of internal and external factors and relationships and which provides account of the life world strategies and rationalities of actors in different social arenas'. (Long p.4) This approach recognises the multiple realities and diverse social practices of various actors and in often different and incompatible social worlds.

O'Donovan's recent study participation of the NWCI in the Womans Health Initiative used emergent theories of the interactive state to help to explain the relationship between the state and pressure groups. I found some of the themes she identified in her literature review of current writings to be particularly enlightening in trying to demystify current state relations. They included the importance of agency i.e. people are characterised as being knowledgeable and capable – they are not blindly co-opted into the agendas of the state, but have the potential to recognise and resist regulation. Resistance and regulation are regarded as being closely related. The policy process is regarded as negotiated rather than predetermined. She suggests that participation of the NWCI in the Womans Health Initiative can be generally though not wholly characterised as a form of incorporated resistance. She draws distinctions between the state and state actors in that 'challenges to the dominant medical paradigm were as likely to come from women within the state as from NWCI'. This highlights the fact that some of the old stereotypes in relation to the state, specifically state actors, no longer apply. O'Donovan concluded that interactions with the state, therefore are multi layered and a vertical analysis that considers the interface at the ideological, cultural and cognitive level is crucial (2000:231)

Given the complexity of the socio-political context of today, an incomplete theoretical analysis not only reduces the critical potential of social change, but renders any professional located at the cutting edge of change, vulnerable to misappropriation and misuse. In moving away from the overly deterministic analyses which allow little for practical considerations, theories can be made more relevant to practicioners in the field and thereby contribute towards greater reflexivity.

Successful Partnership

While there is no blueprint for successful partnerships, it is possible to identify a number of interesting points in relation to emerging trends in successful

partnership working. A study of the workings of a sub-regional partnership in promoting lifelong learning opportunities in a region in England highlighted the key role of individuals in driving the formation and development of a partnership and revealed the level of shared commitment needed to sustain collaborative working. Discussions in relation to shared resourcing of administrative costs, values or principles underlying the group, rotating chair, representation on the group, reflected an emerging conceptualisation of a 'partnership'. The key actors in the partnership came together initially for bidding purposes but their commitment to the strategic vision of 'joined-up thinking' led the group to evolve a way of working collaboratively which reflected their own vision of working together for the benefit of the sub-region. The reasons cited for continuing to work in partnership ranged from the visionary and altruistic to the self-interested: from commitment to the benefits of collaboration; to having a more powerful voice in the region; to improving opportunities available to learners; to knowing about the intentions of other providers in the region.

Positive practice and experience of partnership needs to be reflected upon and shared. In the absence of good reflective practice, partnership risks becoming another form of social control glossed over with socially appealing jargon. This neutralising effect can be encouraged from inside and outside of the sector. The challenge for those involved rests not with being able to expound eloquently the merits of the principles of partnership but to create a nexus between these principles and the capacity to introduce change. 'The policy context in which community work occurs has always to be interpreted and translated into practice – the intended outcomes of policy and actual outcomes are two different things. Between the two is the space for the critical, creative and imaginative interpretation of ideas by workers who can still apply their own agency to the situation – what Allen and Martin refer to as the politics of practice' (Crowther and Shaw p.269). The development of horizontal as well as vertical networks has been a positive feature in recent years and should be developed further.

The Role of Adult Education

Adult Education has a crucial role to play in equipping people with the necessary skills to engage with contradiction as a resource rather than as a problem to be solved. Despite the monumental changes in society, the fact remains that a lot more positive change is needed to stem the growing tide of inequality. Once we look beyond the rhetoric, change in favour of those who benefit least will always be difficult.

> There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.
> For the reformer has enemies in all who profit from the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order.
> This lukewarmness arises ... partly from the incredulity of mankind who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it.
>
> Machiavelli (1531)

Since Adult Education is based on the belief that change is possible, it has a responsibility to create and promote opportunities which enable more and more people to experience new ways of bringing about positive change. Shaw argues that the growing number of social movements are a resource which should be tapped into. They are 'explicitly educational and contribute to the creation of a critically informed public through the dissemination of ideas, values and beliefs which are in opposition to the status quo' (Crother & Shaw, 1997 p.266). Social movements act as a critique of the existing social order, highlighting inadequacies and offering new ways of thinking.

In conclusion, as the economic clouds once again threaten, it is likely that the model and ideology of partnership will once again dominate economic and social discourse. This article has argued that partnership, be it as a strucutre or as an approach, is not a panacea for all ills and unless engaged with in a discerning, informed and skillful way, far from giving voice to marginalised groups, it can simply reinforce unequal social relations. All too often the race for inclusion, and the requirements and demands associated with being included, deflects from assessing adequately what exactly is going on. This article has called upon those involved in the field of Adult Education to go back to its roots of 'action and reflection' and to take a critical stance towards their work and its impact on people and society. Old theories and practices need to make way for new ideas and ways of relating, ones which are rooted in a realistic and more honest analysis of today's society and a clearer vision of the society we profess to want to create. Often, the limits are ones we impose on ourselves.

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Workplace Basic Education – A Partnership Approach

patrick stanton

Introduction to Workplace Learning

In the White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life White Paper on Adult Education*, workplace learning was cited as a means to improving the overall educational levels of the Irish workforce. The White Paper saw the emergence of workplace learning as an important factor in the support for the process to improve general skills levels, and also to further empower the workforce.

In order to achieve this goal, it proposed to encourage the development of partnership/consortia/training and industry interests to support issues such as:

- expanded industry and work placements in higher education institutions;
- agreements between education and industry in time-tabling and modularisation of course provision;
- recognition of workplace learning for accreditation purposes;
- delivery of courses in the workplace.

The White Paper also proposed that theses issues would be dealt with by the provision of 'flexible education and training options', with a particular emphasis on those with lower level of skills[1].

This requires that any partnership should play a key role in developing workplace learning. Proposed education and training consortia along the lines of the European models should also be examined. Consortia such as these allow for the exploration of workplace learning in that they allow not only for locally relevant customised responses with the voluntary participation of all the stakeholders but also they allow for flexible delivery systems and for new route ways between work and education. As well as leading to new synergies between education,

training and the workplace, they tend to normalise the co-existence of education and training with work. They allow, too, for local developments within the context of a national framework.[2]

In addition, the Government's taskforce on lifelong learning, in collaboration with the education sector, was seen to have an important role in bringing about the necessary conditions under which initiatives in workplace learning could be progressed. This applies in particular to the provision of support such as information, advice, access to education and linkages between the education and training institutions and industry.

The Task Force on lifelong learning was established in the year 2000 by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science. The Task Force stressed the importance of prioritising state investment in those most at risk through second chance education. This would include early school leavers and those with literacy difficulties.

The recognition by the Task Force of the need to prioritise basic skills is clearly supported by the emergence of data on high levels of education disadvantage in Ireland compared to other European countries. For example, approximately 81% of second level students complete post-primary level, 3.5% leave without any qualification and 15.5.% have only lower level secondary qualifications. In addition 25% of adults in Ireland were deemed to be at the bottom level in the OECD International Literacy survey. These levels of educational disadvantage tend to be a barrier to implementing or upgrading ICT skills, and providing opportunities for individuals to progress in their careers.[3]

Thus, there exists a situation where it is necessary to implement appropriate interventions, particularly in the workplace, where employment levels are considerably higher than they were ten years ago. Intervention in regard to the upgrading of basic skills is considered to be fundamental to the improvement of this situation.

Evidence from studies in Britain such as the British Cohort Study BC570 and the National Child Development Study (1958) indicates that individuals who improve their basic skills improve their chances in the labour market and move up the occupational status scale. They also have better physical and mental

health and are less likely to have children experiencing difficulties at school. They are more likely to be active citizens and to be more liberal in their attitudes.[4]

Development of Basic Workplace Learning in Ireland

Workplace learning in Ireland is, to a large extent, in the early stages, with a number of individual initiatives in various V.E.C.s throughout the country, and other specific work being supported by NALA.

In October, 2001, a National Literacy steering group was established by NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, to advance the development of workplace literacy programmes. The group's membership comprised representatives from the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, employers (Employers Associations – CIF, IBEC, ISME, SAF), Trade Unions (IUTU, SIPTU, UNISON), Practitioners (Adult Education Organisers Association, Adult Literacy Organisers Association, and the Irish Vocational Education Association) and learners.

The group's main task was to develop a strategy for workplace basic learning and to pilot a Return to Learning Initiative in five local authority areas. The local authorities involved were Mayo, Meath, Offaly, Tipperary S.R. and South Dublin.

The initiative was developed by LANPAG, the Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group, and NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency. The implementation was carried out in collaboration with the Vocational Education Committees in the five local authority areas. The funding of the Initiative was provided on a joint basis by the Department of Education and Science and LANPAG.

How Partnership Worked

In the evaluation report on the project, Conboy, the researcher, examined the efficacy of the linkages which were established among the stakeholders during the process of the implementation. These involved the linkages at national level between NALA and LANPAG, NALA and the V.E.C.s, and LANPAG with the local authorities. It also involved the network of linkages within the organisations, such as those between the partnership facilitators, project co-ordinators, Adult Literacy Organisers and key groupings of staff, such as engineers and local authority supervisory staff.

The linkages at national level between LANPAG and NALA, and the resources provided jointly by the Department of Education and Science and LANPAG, allow the project to be effectively delivered. However, in the linkages at other levels a number of issues arose, such as the following:

- difficulties in communicating the objectives of the project due to a lack of awareness from some of the partners;
- lack of appreciation of the culture, structure and system of local authorities;
- gaps in induction and literacy awareness training for partnership facilitators;
- the need for more consultations between NALA and the local authorities and V.E.C.s;
- concerns over the level of prior consultation regarding budgets;
- the importance of how the whole concept of workplace learning is introduced;
- the importance of briefing supervisors and engineers of the local authorities;
- dealing with the tensions between the needs of the workplace and the need to be able to release workers;
- flexible approach to the timing of classes and the need to programme these classes during the winter months.[5]

The Benefits of the Project

The evaluation was based on feedback from the participants and listed benefits such as an increase in self-confidence leading to an improvement in specific literacy tasks such as form filling, letter writing and newspaper reading. Participants also gained greater familiarity with computers and experienced a re-awakening of interest in learning and a desire to continue to learn now that this interest had been triggered.[6]

The Project in Mayo

The Return to Learning or Workplace Literacy Programme was piloted in Co. Mayo, beginning in October 2000 and continuing throughout 2001. A report was compiled by Phyllis Carney, Workplace Literacy Co-ordinator with Co. Mayo V.E.C.

The initial meetings took place in Dublin and were attended and chaired by members of LANPAG (Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group). This is a joint union management group, with members of NALA, the V.E.C.s and local authorities, and representatives from the Department of Education and Science. Mayo County Council was represented by the Partnership Facilitator and Mayo V.E.C. by the Project Co-Ordinator.

The Partnership Facilitator and the Project Co-Ordinator discussed the project and it was decided that the Partnership Co-Ordinator and the Adult Education Organiser would address the Local Partnership Committee. This was a literacy awareness meeting which gave the committee some information about literacy to report back to their various departments. Following this meeting the Project Co-Ordinator and the Partnership Facilitator visited each of the nine engineering areas in Mayo and spoke to a cross-section of the County Council workers. The Adult Literacy Organiser in the area also came along to support the project. These meetings were attended by the area engineers, overseers, supervisors, office staff, foremen, gangers and general operatives. Information on the proposed programme was given to those in attendance and leaflets distributed, giving details of telephone contact numbers. Those attending the meeting were also requested to convey the information to their co-workers.

While the meetings were fairly well attended, it was decided that a more appropriate time to hold them would be early in the morning, during the first break, giving all staff an opportunity to attend. This change proved more successful in attracting additional participants.

Following a series of these meetings, which were mainly to create an awareness of the programme, the course commenced with 9 groups, involving some 42 participants, spread fairly evenly across the County. The duration of the programme was 80 hours, spread over 20 weeks and participants attended two 2-hour classes each week.

As with the setting up of any new initiative, a number of difficulties were encountered, none of which were really insurmountable. A particular difficulty in the initial stages was that of time available to meet with participants and discuss the details of the course. In addition, it was necessary to arrive at a basic assessment of each participant, in order that the programme would be relevant.

Distance is another difficulty in Co. Mayo, given its large geographic spread and some time was lost in travelling to and from venues. Time was also needed to find premises and allocate suitable tutors.

The introduction of the course required a high level of support and commitment on the part of those involved in the implementation process and this led to some minor difficulties on some occasions, as it was felt that the 20-week programme,

continuing for 80 hours, was too drawn out. The fact that the programme did not commence until February created problems for some area engineers, as the programme ran into the summer – the busiest time for the Co. Council. On the other side, however, the participants were of the view that the course was not long enough and many felt at the conclusion that they were now ready for progression. A number did register with the V.E.C.'s literacy programme and in this way were able to maintain some continuity.

The feedback on the course was extremely positive and many of the original participants are keen to return to the programme proposed for this year. However, given the limitations on resources, priority will be given to new participants, many of whom have shown interest in the course due to the positive feedback from their colleagues.

The whole area of progression is one of some concern as there is a need to ensure that progression is available, as expectations have been raised for learners and these need to be met.

The benefits of workplace learning have been clearly outlined in the evaluation report and the participants in Mayo would concur with the feedback from the rest of the country. In Mayo, it was emphasised that an important factor in the success of the course was that it took place in working hours, which gave the programme a special status and made employees feel very important.

The pilot project was successful in Mayo in that it provided a very useful learning experience, both for those implementing the programme and for the participants and future programmes can be of an improved quality given the knowledge that has been gained from the pilot project.

Conclusions and Future Developments

In general, it could be said that the national pilot projects were successful and fulfilled their purpose in identifying the issues and gaps in the implementation programme. The partnership process also indicated the strength of the joint approach by the agencies. Even though some weaknesses were revealed, they were in areas which could be dealt with in future initiatives.

While the reaction, initially, from some local authorities and participants might have been somewhat apprehensive, the end results, as indicated by the evaluation, were generally positive.

The project is currently being offered in the remaining 29 local authorities and again with the same stakeholders. The funding is a joint venture between LANPAG – 70%, and the Department of Education – 30%.

The National Steering Committee has almost completed its draft policy document on workplace basic education programmes in Ireland. Approaches and modules set out in the document and the proposed implementation strategy will be presented to Government as the model for workplace basic education in both the public and nonpublic sectors.

The indications, therefore, so far, are that the partnership approach, involving national and local stakeholders, appears an efficient and effective method of delivering workplace basic education.

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Area programmes: an effective strategy for tackling poverty?

jim walsh

Area-based programmes remain central to the government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion. Along with employment and welfare improvements, area programmes represent one of three pillars of the government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy. In the last year, the government has introduced two sister programmes for tackling disadvantaged areas: Rapid in urban areas and Clár, its rural equivalent. With these latest additions to the government's armoury for tackling poverty, it is appropriate to reflect on achievements of the plethora of area-based programmes in the last 15 years and to consider future policy directions.

Area programmes: a new policy approach

The origins of area programmes lie in the First and Second EU Poverty Programme in the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to this period, local initiatives received little support from the state. Community initiatives such as Muintir na Tire, credit unions and the Gaeltacht cooperatives largely existed outside of the domain of government policy. Some such as the credit unions survived, but most declined without outside support. The EU poverty programmes heralded a new policy approach to local initiatives in two main ways: first, there was official recognition that area programmes had a role to play in public policy; and second, they were explicitly associated with anti-poverty issues as distinct from generic local needs.

In the 1990s, the role of animator of area programmes passed from the EU to the Irish government. While the EU remained a player, the government adopted the more central role, moving quickly from the favoured EU pilot approach to

ensuring such programmes were at the core of national policy. As a result, a succession of area programmes was rolled out during the 1990s under the direction of various government departments. The EU was a willing supporter of this trend, providing both financial resources and policy advice. As importantly, government bodies (and associated interests such as the employers and trade unions) were introduced as official actors in these programmes under the rubric of social partnership.

Current initiatives

There are now eight area programmes being implemented (Table 1). These include the Community Development Programme, the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, the Local Drug Task Forces, the EU Urban Initiative, the EU Peace II Programme, Breaking the Cycle and the recent arrivals, Rapid and Clár. To-date, a wide range of government departments have been sporsors of these programmes. However, following the formation of the new government in June 2002, there has been a significant rationalisation of administrative responsibility, with the new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht emerging as the lead government department in fostering these diverse area programmes. In most programmes, a distinct local structure is established to administer the programme. In a few cases, the programmes use existing local structures such as schools or local authorities.

What are the principal features of these area programmes? Four main elements can be identified: area-targeting; partnership; integration and community involvement. The remainder of this article discusses each of these features in turn.

Area-targeting

Area-targeting refers to the prior designation of specific localities for delivery of area programmes on the basis of objective criteria of disadvantage. The main criterion is a multiple deprivation index (popularly known as the Haase index). This index is derived from combining various indicators derived from the Census of Population, which is then used to rank all district electoral divisions in the country (*c.* 3,000 units). This approach has attracted considerable methodological criticism. However, in the absence of any alternative mechanism, it remains widely used. A related issue is the extent to which any method can effectively target poverty when all the evidence suggests that the phenomenon is spatially pervasive and not amenable to easy designation, no matter the criteria

table 1 ***Area programmes***

initiative	date	govt department/agency	no. of projects
Community Development Programme	1989	Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs +Regional Support Agencies	150
Local Development Programme	1991	Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs + ADM	71
Local Drug Task Forces	1996	Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs + ADM	13
Urban Community Initiative	2000	Department of the Environment and Dublin City Council	1
Breaking the Cycle		Department of Education + local schools	100
Peace II Programme	2000	Department of Finance + ADM/CPA	NA
Rapid (1+2)	2001	Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs + ADM + local government	50
Clár	2001	Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and local government	17

used to measure poverty. While there are clearly poverty 'blackspots', these only account for a minority of the poor. Even the most intense spatial pattern – local authority rent housing – where up to 70 percent of households are poor, still only represents less than half of all those in poverty.

A second and more substantial concern is that area-targeting neglects the structural dimensions of poverty. Research has failed to identify a specific location

factor to poverty, with the primary causation being social class-related. The search for a local solution for what is essentially a structural problem is therefore doomed to failure. Poverty blackspots do not represent a social underclass in society. Rather, they are simply the outcome of a segmented housing system which segregates winners and losers. This is not necessarily an argument against area programmes per se, merely a reminder that what we expect from such interventions is kept in perspective.

Partnership

Partnership is at the heart of the organisational form for area programmes. It is now widely accepted that all social actors have to be mobilised in the fight against poverty. This means not just government agencies and the target population, but also employers, trade unions and other interests who can bring additional expertise. The partnership model is often characterised as a shift from government to governance, enabling a more effective identification of local needs and more efficient service delivery. There is clear evidence that this approach does work in practice. Witness the many new initiatives developed by the new partnership structures to address issues ranging from unemployment (eg the local employment service) to education (eg breakfast clubs, third level access programmes) to local development (eg smallholders' initiative, local enterprise). What is less apparent, however, is the capacity of the partners to change the organisational practice of their own organisations. Many initiatives remain at arms' length from service providers, as they many not have the resources or technical know-how or even decision-making capacity to mainstream.

Integration

Integration is the third leg of area programmes. The case for better co-ordination was first made by the NESC in the early 1990s:

> Currently, social policies and services operate on a 'functional or 'departmental' basis (health, social welfare, and others) without any coherent attempt to integrate services at local levels. Clearly, many low income communities are affected by the services, and receive resources from a range of state agencies – local government, health boards, the Department of Social Welfare, FAS, for example. The scope for area 'renewal' and community based co-ordination must therefore be considerable. Evidence suggests that concerted, intensive programmes in small areas, containing elements of housing and environmental improvement,

> as well as retraining and employment schemes and 'outreach' health and educational projects, can have an impact over and above the separate effects of individual programmes. Furthermore, the more closely involved are local communities in the planning and delivery of area-based projects, the more they will reflect local needs and priorities. (NESC, 1990, 74)

It is therefore surprising that after 10 years of local co-ordination the government saw the need to launch a new initiative last year, Rapid/Clár, to once again address this deficit. As the Taoiseach said at the launch, Rapid will involve service providers working together and with the community in a co-ordinated and planned way. But this objective of co-ordination has been the driving force in the first emergence of area programmes. So why is it that another programme is now needed?

What is it then that has prevented better local co-ordination: Is the geographic scale at which these programmes take place? Are all the right actors involved, with the appropriate personnel? Is it a question of more resources? Is the functional remit of the various actors too diverse? Or is there a lack of local autonomy in achieving integration? The last question is probably the most pertinent. Despite all the enthusiasm for local initiatives, central government has been decidedly slow to delegate decision-making. The best example of this is the education system, where control remains very firmly in the Department of Education and Science. With the exception of the VECs (who only have a limited remit anyway), there is no local forum whereby the full range of education issues can be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

Recently the government introduced a new structure, the county and city development boards, to promote integrated local development and service delivery. These are meant to bring the key actors together, along with the local political apparatus represented by local government. It is too early yet to say whether these county structures will achieve what other bodies have failed to deliver, especially the absence of a commitment to decentralise decision-making powers to local actors.

Community involvement

The final ingredient in area programmes is community involvement. Traditionally, community involvement was something public policy resisted

rather than fostered. With the area programmes, the 'community' has been embraced as a key mover in shaping the policy agenda of these new initiatives. An extensive infrastructure has been developed to support this involvement, including community development projects, community workers and community networks. Under the auspices of the Combat Poverty Agency, a further national tier has been provided through its support for the operation of ten national anti-poverty networks representing various sectors (eg lone parents, the unemployed, Travellers, children, rural dwellers).

There are at least two threats to this recognition of community involvement. The first is economic and relates to the decline in voluntary activity due to higher employment and changing family structures. The increased professionalisation of community involvement has helped to minimise the impact of this trend. However, this changes the nature of the engagement between service providers and beneficiaries. The second concerns the dangers of institutionalising community involvement. The newly-established county community and voluntary fora illustrate this dilemma. These were set up to manage the involvement of local people in a reformed local government. However, given their organisational scale, they require a high level of bureaucracy which can be seen as running counter to the spirit of community involvement.

Conclusions

Area programmes are at the cutting edge of policy to tackle poverty. They represent a dynamic and creative response to poverty at the local level, harnessing new energies and developing innovative responses in a creative policy environment. However, after ten years of experimentation, perhaps we should now be entering a new phase. The establishment of a new government department (Community, Rural and Gaeltacht) may herald a time of reflection as to the future direction of area programmes. We have gained much from these programmes in terms of new insights, better services, new actors and additional resources. But there still exists a sense that area programmes remain outside of the mainstream of government policy-making. They are add-ons to the system, to be kept at arm's length, rather than acting as catalysts for structural reform. The most obvious example of this is policy decision-making, which is still monopolised by government departments and agencies. Arguably, national social partnership has only exacerbated this, by reinforcing the predominance

of the national over the local in policy-making. Perhaps this issue should be the focus of future policy in regard to area programmes, rather than seeking to re-work existing deficiencies into a more effective system of policymaking.

The opinions expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the Combat Poverty Agency.

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The Ruhama Women's Project

kay bailey

The Ruhama Women's Project offers a range of services to women who are or have been engaged in prostitution. The name Ruhama is rooted in the Hebrew, it means 'renewed life' and the phrase captures the philosophy of the Project. We see possibilities for change, development, growth and the ability to reach one's potential given a nurturing, non-judgemental environment. We seek the empowerment of women by taking a holistic approach, encouraging them to know their needs, rights and boundaries. We encourage participation in education for better opportunities in an alternative lifestyle.

This article sets out to describe how partnership has worked in development of the services at the Ruhama Women's Project. It will tell of a unique response to a group of women who live on the margins in many senses of the word. To set the context, a brief history of Ruhama, the services, how the work is funded and the ethos of the Project will be outlined.

In particular it will look at the ways that women involved in prostitution are linked into education and training programmes. In conclusion it will look to future possibilities from work being undertaken with funding under the Equality for Women Measure.

History of outreach work on the streets of Dublin

In the late 1980s the Good Shepherd Sisters were asked to become involved in making contacts and creating links with women involved in street prostitution. They in turn sought support from another religious order, Our Lady of Charity Sisters, and together they researched the needs of the women they met on the street. 'Someone to listen' was the most frequently articulated request

and in listening it was decided that a mobile unit was the best response. A van was converted to provide a space to sit in and have a hot drink. This van still drives through the red light districts of Dublin most nights of the week. Over the years the van has provided a place for hundreds of women to meet a friendly face, a listening non-judgemental ear and the hand of friendship in the person of the Ruhama Outreach worker.

The development of services

The range of services that the Ruhama delivers to-day has developed in direct response to the expressed needs of women engaged in prostitution. The Project operates under three strands, Outreach, Development and Awareness Raising. Outreach work at night provides the primary means of contacting women, which leads in turn to their requesting individual follow up contacts. Follow up daytime work includes court accompaniment, advocacy with other state services, hospital and prison visits and linking the women with the Development strand of the Project. Awareness Raising includes training, information and strategic media work.

The funding of the services

Partnership is core to how the work is funded. Current funding comes from Probation and Welfare within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), the Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA) and the Charitable Infirmary Charitable Trust. The Department of Education and Science channels support through the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) in part-time teaching hours for some of our educational inputs.

This year the Project was granted funding under the Equality for Women Measure from DJELR for a particular piece of work over the next three years. This successful application came out of the history and success of work done in the Development strand of Ruhama under New Opportunities for Women (NOW) which in turn was funded under the EU Social Fund, in the years between 1996 and 1999. This statutory funding is supplemented by donations and voluntary contributions.

The Ruhama Ethos

Before moving to look in detail at how education is delivered, it is important to state how the Ruhama Women's Project views prostitution. While in our day

to day work with women our approach is non judgmental and there is no requirement to have exited prostitution to avail of our services, we see prostitution as a violence and an exploitation of women.

In 1991, the Coalition against Trafficking in Women worked with the United Nations to develop a new Convention against Sexual Exploitation. (Barry, chapter 5) They worked out a definition of sexual exploitation as:

> a practice by which person(s) achieve sexual gratification or financial gain or advancement through the abuse of a person's sexuality by abrogating that person's right to dignity, equality, autonomy, and physical and mental well being.

The work undertaken in the three strands of Ruhama is influenced by the wish to restore the loss of dignity, equality, personal autonomy and the loss of physical and mental wellbeing that prostitution steals from the woman.

Education and Training at Ruhama

The majority of women hear of the Development Strand of Ruhama through the Outreach services either in the van, at the courts or at the Women's Health Project, which is a clinic run by the EHRA especially for women in prostitution. Others are referred from the Probation and Welfare Services and occasionally by solicitors, doctors or therapists. The women range in ages from late teens to their fifties. Almost all have addiction problems, either to prescribed drugs, illegal drugs or alcohol. While women in prostitution may share common experiences, they are not a homogenous group. They differ from each other in their families of origin, educational attainments, employment skills and social class. They present with a range of different personal difficulties so there are no fixed or predetermined solutions.

In Development we provide in house programmes for some women and support others that are pursuing education or training in their own local area. We differ from the mainstream adult education providers in a number of ways and these will be discussed under four headings;

- A confidential, safe and secure space
- Recognition of the slow pace of the personal development journey
- An open door and year round programmes/classes
- Varied and flexible programmes

The confidential, safe and secure space

The first contact from a woman can come after weeks or months of setting up and breaking appointments. This frequent pattern is indicative of the courage required to take the first step. A safe environment is created for the woman with the emphasis on confidentiality. The knowledge that when she comes to Development, if she does not wish to meet another woman that she may know from the world of prostitution, she need not do so also helps the sense of security. Once the woman makes the connection to Development she is given guidance and information as to what education, training and employment supports we can offer.

Sensitivity to the vulnerability of the woman, how she is in a sense 'coming out' when she takes the step from the hidden world of prostitution into an education programme, is key to making the connection work. Understanding of this comes from listening and learning from the women. It also comes from knowledge and awareness of the psychological processes of distancing, disengagement, dissociation and disembodiment that women engage in to be in prostitution, as described by Barry in 'The Prostitution of Sexuality: The Global Exploitation of Women'. (Chapter 1) The confidential aspect can pose logistical difficulties in planning classes; however most women after a period of time build enough trust in us and confidence in themselves not to be undermined by meeting another woman in the building.

The slow pace of personal development

Our experience of working in Development has taught us to recognise and respect the slow pace of a woman's journey towards change. Many women adopt a pseudonym for the purposes of prostitution and it can take months or years before they build enough trust in us to reveal their true identity. This poses challenges and difficulties in supporting them to know their rights, accessing training and education opportunities and the development of a C.V. We note progress in the small steps, in the way for example that a woman who, when first introduced to Development was unable to make eye contact, grows in confidence enough to initiate the conversation over a coffee and can look her teacher directly in the eye.

One woman now in full time employment spent approximately four years linked to Development at times taking steps two forward and at others, three steps back. The elements that led to her successful progress included being

brought to the Project by an Outreach worker for the first few months; time spent with her over a meal that allowed the development of social skills in terms of conversations about everyday life; the incremental building of computer skills that led to an accredited outcome. It is worth noting that she does not use these computer skills in her current employment but the confidence gained in the process allowed her move from low paid occasional cleaning work to a secure paid position in the food sector.

The open door

Recognising that the motivation to make the link with Development will not match with traditional academic terms or semesters, we offer the possibility to begin a programme in any month of the year. The ability to have the open door and to offer the flexible programmes brings us back to the theme of partnership.

Many of our programmes are delivered by volunteer teachers and their contribution in partnership with the other teachers who receive paid hours from the CDVEC are essential to the success of our programmes. This is especially true of the summer months when most teachers take holidays.

Our teachers are required to have particular skills for this work. They need an understanding of the slow pace of progress, the chaos of the lives of many of the women and to be sensitive to and celebrate the small steps that mark progress.

The varied programmes

As the service revolves around the needs of the individual woman, each follows a programme designed to match her ability, availability and short and long term aspirations for herself. What we set out to do is provide the building blocks of self esteem in the shape of achievable goals and outcomes. The approaches we use are similar to the models of intervention developed in 'Solution Focused Brief Therapy'[2]. In this way of working with people in need of support, the focus is on listening for the person's strengths, skills and resources and looking for ways of building on their successes rather than on the failures of the past.

In our holistic approach the interpretation of education and personal development are broad and flexible. This means that one to one counselling may be the most appropriate starting point at the woman's particular stage. Counselling has become an integral component of the programmes in Development where women can avail of single session in response to a crisis situation or commit to

engage in sessions over a longer period of time. This approach fits with best practice in the models of women's community based education described in chapter five of *Learning for Life*, the Department of Education and Science's White Paper on Adult Education.

The following paragraphs give a sense of how varied and individual the programmes are:

A short programme delivered in the past was for a woman on holiday from a VTOS course who could not cope with the lack of structure in her day and feared a relapse into drugs and prostitution. Here we arranged for some training in Computers and English with an Outreach worker spending some 'social' time with the woman over coffee or lunch.

Another woman had a goal of beginning a course in her local area in business studies in the autumn of last year. We were able to organise a class in accountancy and maths to build her confidence in the months beforehand. She continues to be in receipt of support from the Project staff and also gets assistance with her childcare costs which are beyond her means.

More recently we provided support for a woman in keeping a personal record for the Family Court as she went through the process of having her children returned from Social Services. While engaging in the process she was developing her key board skills, developing a sense of self and had begun the process of taking back ownership of her life.

Computer training is the most frequently requested training with improved reading writing and language comprehension coming second. A number of women have successfully completed NCVA (now FETAC) modules in Computer Literacy and Personal Effectiveness. The FETAC system has proved a very valuable means for the women to acquire accreditation at a pace that suits them, in manageable blocks with an appropriate assessment methodology.

The Next Step Initiative

The Next Step Initiative (NSI) is the name given to our current action research project which is being funded under the Equality for Women Measure. After more than eight years of supporting women into education, training programmes and employment opportunities, we strive to build on our successes

and to learn from our failures. We are aware of the many barriers to progress and participation experienced by women who wish to return to education and training in the general community. For women in prostitution stigmatised by society, the barriers which can be experienced through our social, economic and political structures are even more complex.

The aim of the Next Step Initiative is 'to develop a new model of intervention that will provide a link/bridge between the first steps currently offered to very marginalised women by Ruhama and the process of being mainstreamed into the social economy, community education or local employment.' A participant centred approach will be adopted when building the model(s)

We will achieve this aim through a series of actions. Key to the NSI will be action research over the first two year period. We have chosen action research as a methodology as it will allow for an interactive process between the researcher and the women whose experience is the subject of the research. Our aim is that the experience of being involved in the process will be an emancipatory one for the women as they research their particular barriers. Our approach is influenced by the theories of feminist education where it

> aims at empowering women and validating their experiences and their abilities to understand and influence the world that has marginalised them. (Mc Cann *1999*)[4]

To support us in this work we will draw on 'outside' and 'inside' expertise, the outside group being the Advisory Board that is set up for the Initiative. This is made up of representatives of third level institutions, CDVEC, FAS, The National Women's Council of Ireland, the Community Platform and the Workers Research Co-operative which also provides technical support. Their role is to challenge and support us as we develop the research and new ways of working. The representation of the varied organisations on this Board also opens avenues as we work to influence areas of policy within the statutory training agencies.

The inside expertise will come from a small group of women who have come together under the Ruhama umbrella for peer support. These are women who have left prostitution and seek to deal with the issues that remain with them by having a small supportive group structure. This group is in turn supported by a facilitator who is a trained therapist. We anticipate that this group will bring

their deep insights in prostitution and the barriers that it creates to participation in social and economic life.

In this sense of partnership, the women hold the knowledge of their own oppression and they can lead us in developing the appropriate models of intervention that will make a difference in their lives and the lives of the many other women who link with the Project. Listening to the women whose lives are shaped by prostitution is how the Ruhama Project began its work. In the Next Step Initiative we will continue to listen and learn to create better opportunities for a special group of women, whose strength, spirit and ability to survive and succeed, give inspiration to all who work with the Ruhama Women's Project.

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The Ad Ed Cup – A Preview

ad hock

Cup fever is in the air again as the first round draw for the Ad Ed Cup has been announced. This coveted trophy is presented almost every year, depending on the state of the petty cash. Here Ad Hock, who was once the bar manager at Shanwally Ramblers and is now a part-time football panellist on TV, casts a bloodshot eye over some of the more attractive fixtures.

FAS v VEC

This is the big one, the clash of the old firm and this is a mouth-watering prospect indeed. The fixture will be preceded by the usual pre-match hype with both sides making outrageous claims. Word has it that the FAS team has been going well in Training while the VEC side is Learning all the time. There are some exciting new signings on both sides, featuring some notable asylum seekers - not to mention the foreign players. They say that rivalry is not as keen as in former times but those intending to travel should note that, at the time of going to press, the venue has not been agreed with both sides claiming home advantage. Rumours of a possible merger between these great old clubs have been greatly exaggerated.

In an interview, the FAS manager said, 'Well, it's a case of courses for horses and as long as we win, the outcome is irrelevant'. The VEC manager was not available for comment but is quoted as saying that this is just another battle in the same old war of education versus training. Expect a draw with both sides claiming victory.

ADM v RAPID

This is the meeting to end all meetings and it is an intriguing tie with the more established ADM taking on the new kids on the block. ADM are now known as significant players and recently won their first major trophy when they captured the Childcare Plate despite some hot competition.

RAPID was formerly based in Vienna and is something of an unknown quantity. I am informed by community activists that they have been holding meetings with a view to recruiting new players. It is reported also that they have some serious financial backing although no one seems able to identify the sources of their funding. When questioned about this, the RAPID coach replied rather evasively, 'We

are not a wealthy club and we are relying on accessing funding wherever we can find it'. Both sides place great emphasis on team play and there is much talk of level playing pitches. Despite this, it is something of a grudge match with RAPID looking to replace Partnership as the team of the future.

Youthreach v LDTF

Both of these sides have graduated from the Youth Leagues and have undergone intensive training. These are possibly the only players to hold the Football Education Training And Cornerkicking (FETAC) level two certificates. Both teams have also benefitted from the recent Department decision to increase the age for participation in this competition and the winners here will be granted automatic entry into the VTOS Champions League. LDTF stands for Local Drug Task Forces but prefer to remain anonymous.

LEADER v CLAR

This is the battle for the hearts and souls of the rural communities. LEADER have been around for some time now although their home venue still remains something of a mystery – 'ah, it's up there in the hills somewhere' was the nearest we could come to a satisfactory response. Their territory covers vast acres of ground but their young team is only just recovering from the ravages of emigration. The Stay at Home campaign which they promoted in recent years is paying dividends and they have also benefitted from a major fundraising tour of the EU where they spent some time with the CAP in one hand and the GATT in the other.

CLAR is an amalgam of a number of clubs – Community, Rural, Gaeltacht, Affairs, Local, Government and are looking at reviving some of the defunct clubs like Marine and Transport. They have a very shrewd manager in Young Dev who, when asked to comment on the fact that his players are more accustomed to playing hurling, responded briefly, 'Ni mar a siltear a bitear'.And when a reporter commented on the lack of physique in his side, Dev replied, 'Ni hiad na fir mhora a bhaineas an fomhar'.

AONTAS v NALA

And what a clash this is! Featuring two high profile woman managers, both sides will benefit from shrewd signings in recent years. NALA are said to be in top shape following some very intensive sessions in workplace training. It will be interesting too to see which of these teams will suffer most from the recent departure of sponsor Willie Oday, who is now in a different league. Berni B though is confident as always and is said to have acquired the services of a specialist coach from ASTI, a club which could boast of having the leading strikers in the country last year.

Local Partnership – Reality or Myth

eileen curtis

There is no doubt that this country is in the grip of a 'partnership' craze. A cursory glance at any city or county throughout the country will reveal a veritable explosion of local interventions – County / City Development Boards, County Enterprise Boards, County Childcare Committees, Leader Groups and, of course, the ubiquitous A.D.M. Partnership Company or Community Groups. These groups take a variety of forms but have at their core the motif of partnership. This partnership concept has become a byword for how we do things in this country at present. It is a local manifestation of a national framework which has been considered a resounding success and on the back of which recent economic prosperity has been built.

As adult educational professionals we have been involved in these groups and, in this process, we have become 'partners'. For some it has been a voluntary process while for others it has been a form of conscription. It is a landscape which has thrown up both possibilities and paradoxes and this article will look at some of these and, in so doing, create a framework for identifying and analysing what is happening to us in this process and where we are going.

Picture the Scene

It's the last Tuesday or the first Thursday – the diary says it's time for yet another partnership meeting. We find ourselves back in the same rooms with the same people. In here we accrete labels as 'agency' or 'statutory' reps. In here we meet colleagues (the same colleagues) from other agencies and other community and voluntary sector 'reps'. In here we talk the language of partnership. We speak of plans – strategic, integrated and operational; of funds-core and matching; of responses-multi-sectoral and interagency; of phases and programmes pre-development and pilot.

We set up sub-committees and working groups, we talk of networking. We find ourselves cast in the role of directors of limited companies with responsibilities for the staff, premises and finances of this 'partnership entity'. We do all this in the name of social inclusion.

As we move through our agenda and our procedures, a look around the room at the group of actors present reveals a collection of individuals, some committed, others not so committed, people tired of endless meetings and discussions, people weighed down by the process. In here you find all the contradictions of partnership being played out on a local stage. When you look around you have to wonder what we're all doing, does it make any difference and is there an easier way?

The Backdrop – The Policy Framework

This local drama is set against a policy framework which developed throughout the last decade – the emergence of local partnership as a policy construct of National Government. This period saw an essentially E.U. defined concept of partnership transposed to a national arena and subsequently applied at a local level. As such, social partnership became an agreed mechanism for policy making and implementation at both national and local level. Though infused with a language of solidarity and an inclusionary perception it is primarily 'a creature of the central government' (Walsh, Craig & McCafferty,1998: 4). While situated at the level of the local, as a manifestation of the central it is in essence contradictory of its own language and vocabulary.

Herein lies one of the fundamental paradoxes or contradictions which is apparent at partnership group meetings up and down the country. There is a critical tension between partnership as an entity, a loose series of alliances charged with implementing localised initiatives, and partnership as process, a synergy which demands independence and nourishment as it sets out to define new ideological frameworks with new ways of being and doing.

In many respects we have invested in this concept without exploring its potential and its hazards and 'elevated it to a shared political ideology' which brooks no dissent (Walsh, Craig & McCafferty, 1998:16). Many would argue that we have over-invested in the concept of partnership, in the process separating it from its essential value and potential. Its conceptual and linguistic incorporation into 'official jargon' has defined it in a particular way and altered our perception of

it. In many ways it has created a false dawn where the rhetoric of partnership has surpassed the capacity of all sectors to deliver on it. Given such a context it is more likely that what many of us are currently engaging in is what Conroy describes as 'partnerism' which she suggests may 'replace localism as the new barrier to local development' (in Conroy, Crawley, et al,1996 : 36). Thus, when we sit at this endless series of local meetings, partnership for some is just about being in the same room together while for others this only represents a start. In such a context is it any wonder that people become frustrated and this concept of partnership becomes infused with such negative tensions ?

The Cast – Statutory and Community 'Reps'

Against this backdrop are cast a repertoire of local actors, the statutory and community 'reps' designated to take part in this partnership drama. While all 'agency reps' come into this process as designated representatives of their organisations of origin, the role which they should fulfil has rarely received any consideration. For many, these partnership groups have come to represent a merry-go-round of time consuming meetings in what Walsh, Craig and McCafferty refer to as 'large and unwieldy local entities without a natural cohesion' (1998:3). While there has been committed representation from individuals within organisations there is a paradox in the whole process, the concept of being an individual representative rather than a partner. On its journey from the national to the local this construct has failed to consider the realities of the local – the differing range of players with varying degrees of autonomy and power whose institutions require radical reform if they are to fulfil the lofty partnership ideals set out at the centre. This situation has resulted in an over-reliance on individual representation with little overall impact on local resources or services. This disjuncture and inconsistency in public policy has also surfaced in the agency – partnership interface with many local statutory reps with minimal discretionary budgets and powers finding themselves sitting on partnership boards which have available to them multiples of their funding. This has been particularly evident for us as education reps whose community education budgets have remained stubbornly low over the years. Such inconsistencies often propel 'partnerships' into models of service delivery which can have the effect of diluting the focus locally and introducing a competitive relationship between itself and other service agencies.

Similarly, the co-option of the community sector into this process has been made without any great consideration of its capacity to engage. This 'partnership'

format has placed a heavy burden on the community sector, presuming a level of cohesion and organisation which rarely exists. The ongoing nature of the process has exposed community reps to 'burn-out' as they seek to provide representation for more and more groups at neighbourhood and county level. In addition, questions about the linkages between community sector nominees and the wider communities which they represent have emerged. These have centred on how they assume their mandate and the procedures by which they are accountable to their groups of origin. Again, this represents a fracture at the nexus between the community sector and the partnership company, demanding of the former a degree of developmental sophistication which it has not yet attained in most areas. In similar vein, they, too, find themselves in the same representational role as their statutory colleagues, which has its attendant difficulties. In such circumstances they often revert to the role of local area representative viewing this as a means of attracting resources and funding to their own specific area with a subsequent casting of the 'partnership' in the role of funder or service deliverer. Such over-reliance on individual representation often serves to create a power differential within the partnership between those who control funds and those who need to access funds.

A fundamental difficulty of this overall approach has been the tendency to view both the statutory and community elements as constituents of a sector and, as Varley and Ruddy rightly point out, 'the world of statutory actors and community groups is not a single world' (in Conroy, Crowley et al, 1996: 81). In many respects it has created a policy framework for partnerships which in a sense operates in a vacuum from mainstream local service delivery, having little or no impact on resource allocation or the way things are done. Thus, good partnership at local level is very often dependant on individual participation rather than any great organisational commitment to the notion of partnership or its agenda.

The Plot – The Delivery Vehicle

It is in this centralist, pre-set context with designated partners that local groups set out to rewrite the narrative of local intervention and participation and engage in a dialogue for reform. The plot has unfolded through the mechanism of the local partnership company which, with its socio-legal form, has conferred on its partners roles and responsibilities for staff, premises and finance in a reporting framework which has created what Walsh, Craig & McCafferty describe as 'increasingly bureaucratic and inward focused organisations'

(1998:84). The haste and regularity with which this model has been adopted has served to create what some regard as a culture of exclusivity within partnerships, with a replication of the traditional hierarchical roles, responsibilities and forms of other organisations. Conroy advances the notion that 'this may reflect a need ... to form and mould structures which are capable of relating in a proximate way to the public authorities and can function as vehicles for dialogue' (in Conroy, Crowley et al 1996:34) However, it creates the perception that 'the partnership looks likely to amount to the same people using the same tools and concepts to have another go at the problem' (Rafferty, 1996: 61).

This type of structure has required of local partnership groups a high degree of sophistication in terms of its management and operating processes. Many statutory and community representatives have come to see the partnership entity itself as absorbing a great deal of local energy, energy which they feel should be focused on community activity rather than organisational maintenance. For many groups this task has led to a preoccupation with the techniques as opposed to the desired local outcomes. The vision of the partnership approach as a means to an end has often times become a casualty of this focus on technique. This concept and the form that it has taken has led to what can only be described as the professionalisation of local partnership and created a consultancy approach to local intervention. The mandatory preparation of a local plan to secure funding involves the hiring of highly paid consultants to deliver, in many instances, poorly defined plans over which there is little ownership. Paradoxically, programme and project costings are such that they create inconsistencies at local level with partnership companies paying far more favourable payment rates for similar work than local statutory agencies. Indeed, many from the statutory sector look on with envy at the staffing and payment ratios which pertain in the partnership sector. A major difficulty with an approach which has such high cost ratios is its ultimate sustainability and this may well be at least one of the reasons why the mainstreaming of lessons has been so difficult.

The Denouement

So where are we now ? Well, who knows – this is a process in process, so to speak. Partnership has become the motif which defines the current local operational narrative in cities and towns throughout the country. The myriad range of local partnership forms; the limited range of local personnel to service them; the time consuming nature of the process and the additional responsibilities

which it brings may cause it to implode as people become more and more disenchanted with the process set as it is in an existing institutional framework which sees it as peripheral rather than integral to its local service provision.

As educators and partners we need to revisit the concept of partnership, examine its language and its processes and in so doing attempt to build a local consensus which is real. There is much to be gained from working in partnership with others. However, the means by which we do this has to be slow, deliberate and respectful. Partnership needs to be viewed as a long-term process of relationship building rather than an 'in vogue' concept to be used and discarded as the agenda dictates. Also, we need to re-examine the local form which partnership has taken and to tease out whether this model and its endless replication is serving our local areas well. As educators we need to act as critical voices of structures and processes which may well serve to cause greater alienation and disempowerment at local level in the long run.

Partnership is a process which requires energy and commitment and at the moment its form at local level is sapping that energy and commitment from all sides. This article has sought to reflect on the nature of that process, situate the players within it and look at its critical determining factors. In the end it seems that there is a need to engage in a dialogue which ultimately seeks to rebalance the partnership axis at local level in favour of partnership as an emerging process rather than on partnership as an emerging structure; otherwise we run the risk of replicating inefficient and ineffective structures which are unsustainable in the long term. In the meantime what can we say except ... roll on RAPID.

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Public Private Partnership

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Private Public Partnership in the Renewal Process

Mansfield District in the heart of the Nottinghamshire coalfield, in the UK, has a population of over 120,000. In 1994, the District Council asked me to lead its bid to create a public/private/voluntary partnership aimed at stimulating urban economic and social renewal. Our efforts culminated in the creation of 'The Diamond Initiative' containing 70 different projects valued at £50m. The partnership comprised 270 private and public organisations working together to implement an integrated programme of housing, education, economic development, leisure, business infrastructure, marketing and other renewal projects [1].

It won the National Award from the Secretary of State for Environment for being one of the best examples of regeneration through partnership in the UK.[2] Such was the strength of partnership that about 150 local business people would turn up every six weeks to the Town Hall for an early morning breakfast meeting with the local elected members and officials. The private sector acted as an ambassador for new investment coming into the town, providing vocal backing for competitive bids for resources, investing in buildings and accommodation and using its expertise to market the town. The partnership provided a level of business confidence that created loyalty and a 'can do' approach to the affairs of Mansfield.

What is Partnership?

It is outside of the scope of this article to define partnerships and so I will use one example of a definition at local authority level. Newchurch & Company studied the partnership process in eleven UK Local Authorities.[3] Authorities largely supported the definition that a 'partnership is a process in which a local

authority works together with partners to achieve better outcomes for the local community, as measured by the needs of local stakeholders, and involves bringing together or making better use of resources' Mansfield was one of many urban area which became transformed through partnerships where the public and private sectors negotiate their respective roles on a basis of mutual trust and shared commitment to the area.

Since its formation in the early eighties, *Business in the Community*, a private sector led organisation in the UK, has made an enormous contribution to public private partnership by piloting different models at local level, encouraging businesses to take more corporate responsibility and building bridges between public, private and community sectors. Its work is a statement of the scope and depth encompassed by partnership in the UK .[4]

Public Private Partnerships in the UK, like those facilitated by organisations such as *Business in the Community,* have a strong positive profile built on transparency and trust. The same cannot be said of privatisation in the public service which is often confused with partnership in the broader sense.

Privatisation of Public Administration and Private Finance Initiative in the UK

Privatisation of the utilities and other public services involved a more proscribed process, not left to local negotiation but established along terms set by central government. In the eighties and nineties, privatisation in the UK was largely driven by new legislative imperatives to curb public spending, to increase efficiency, reform the public service and to advance the role of free market capitalism in the public service provision.

Public utilities were privatised, many local authority services were put out to tender and private consortia were contracted to build hospitals, schools and prisons and manage services. Designated public services in local authorities were audited, client/service distinctions were drawn up, services were tendered and successful bidders given contracts. Officials became 'client managers' and either the private sector or a defined department in the Local Authority became the service provider. In 1992, the British Government established the Private Finance Initiative, which invited the private sector to design, build, finance and operate huge public sector capital projects.

The effect of privatisation on quality, cost and transparency in the public service in the UK is debatable. Few would argue that rail services have become more cost effective under privatisation; equally, few would not agree that waste collection was vastly improved when it was released from the fetters of public service monopoly.

Partnership or Privatisation in Ireland

The Department of Environment and Local Government in Ireland sets out the definition of Public Private Partnership in *A Policy Framework for Public Private Partnerships*:

> A Public Private Partnership is a partnership between the public and private sector for the purpose of delivering a project or a service traditionally provided by the public sector.[5]

Effectively the private sector is given the task of providing a combination of the following options for completing a project or service: Design, Design and Build, Design, Build and Operate or Design, Build, Operate and Finance.

Clearly, the Irish PPP is mirrored on the British 'Private Finance Initiative' (PFI), which started in 1992. The British PFI model defines a flexible form of financing of projects, which involve design, build, operate and finance activities. The term 'public private partnership' therefore, is a little misleading. It is more clearly a fiscal mechanism, which borrows heavily from the PFI rather than from any significant organic development of the partnership process in Ireland.

The Impetus for PPPs in Ireland

The impetus for PPPs in Ireland came from the need to find innovative ways of effectively implementing public infrastructure provision in the NDP, in the light of likely reductions in EU funding and higher performance levels set by EU legislation. A whole spectrum of interests called for increased public infrastructure expenditure; IBEC, Chambers of Commerce, CIF, regional interest groups. Ireland's infrastructure was hopelessly out of step with the requirements of a modern economy. At the same time the Government had to be seen to control public capital expenditure.

In May 2001 the Department of Finance (DoF) published *A Framework for Public Private Partnerships,* a statement of the high-level principles for the

conduct of such partnerships.[6] The document outlined the key characteristics, which constitute a PPP: these included shared responsibility, significant levels of risk by the private sector, better value for money and longterm commitment by the public sector to the provision of quality public services to consumers through contractual arrangements with private sector operators.

In my own conversations with those directly involved in the PPP process the following benefits were mentioned:

- Efficiency and cost effectiveness
- Value for money for the taxpayer
- Added value from the integration of private sector skills, knowledge and expertise with the public service ethos
- Competition and greater construction capacity through, for example, the participation of overseas companies
- Accountability for the provision and delivery of quality public services
- Effective use of state assets to the benefit of all users of public services

Implementation of the PPP Process in Ireland

PPPs are implemented by the appropriate public authority usually government departments, local authorities, the Office of Public Works and the NRA. A Central PPP Unit in the Department of Finance provides overall co-ordination. A Public-Private Advisory Group on PPPs comprising IBEC, ICTU, CIF, Forfas and the various government units and the OPW and NRA helps develop partnership arrangements with the private sector. At present there are around 60 PPPs being actively considered of which a small number are in operation. The sixty projects include 29 Waste/Water/Water Waste projects, 28 local services projects, 18 roads projects, 3 public transport projects, 3 education projects and four in an 'other' category. The three education projects, which are approved, are the Cork School of Music, Five Grouped Schools and the National Maritime College.

Speed

It is clear that PPPs provide a short-term fix to the challenge of accelerating large public capital projects. This has enormous short-term political appeal. A neighbour of mine in Sligo said that her son was told that by the time he finished school in 1985 he would be attending a new school in Tobercurry. The usual delays ensued. However, under the PPP process there is now a scheduled

start for the operation of the new school in Autumn 2002. Many of those connected with the new school and who campaigned for its establishment justifiably see the school as a major achievement against the background of major infrastructure deficits in the region.

Value for Money

PPPs are presented as good value fore money for the taxpayer (DoF). The British experience of PFI is interesting. The costs of PPP projects are usually presented in terms of capital. The longer-term operational revenue payments excessively exceed the capital payments. A London Borough of Haringey secondary schools project was announced as an £87m capital project but the total PFI payment is £233m over 25 years. This future stream of payments could commit the British Government to imposing charges for services which are currently free, raising taxes and borrowing to finance public services because it cannot cut payments to the PFI services.[7] Undoubtedly, the private sector will say that the level of risk it is taking and the cost of borrowing justify these charges. However, in the UK, it has now emerged that private firms refinance their projects after the construction phase, when the greatest risks have passed but that the considerable gains from these subsequent deals are not passed back to the taxpayer.[8] Secondly, it is clear that the public sector could have borrowed the same capital at a much more competitive rate.

In Ireland, 'the capital value' of the Five Grouped Schools was announced in 27th March 2001 as costing £56m (€71.11 m). However the contract winner, Jarvis Plc, is not only building a capital project. It will be providing 'a range of facilities and management services which include, building maintenance, cleaning, security, ground maintenance and IT support'.[9] More recent figures show the capital costs of the five grouped schools in Ireland is €79.54m but the payments from the taxpayer over 25 years will be at least €244m, more than three times the capital figure.

Clearly there are long-term consequences in terms of the private ownership of Ireland's infrastructure and public services. Clearly there is long-term gain for the private sector. A network of leading UK companies in the PFI business now fund the key policy making bodies on PFI in the UK including the Institute for Public Policy Research. The companies include Serco, Jarvis, BT, KPMG, Carrillion, North Anglia Education Plc, Amey, Sodexho, Capita and Arthur Andersen.

Under current PPP arrangements, payments by the government under PPP are classified as revenue, not capital, and thus do not count as public borrowing and do not normally commence until the buildings are completed.

In the short-term, the gain for the Government is a reduction in the capital budget commitments; long-term implications for public revenue may not be so positive.

The Need for Public Debate

The beliefs underpinning the PPP and PFI is that public services can be better managed by the private sector, private management is more efficient, that it makes sense to separate purchasers from providers of public services and finally that there is fair and open competition between rival private bidders. In the UK, there has been widespread public debate and a variety of other options for public private partnership within a strong overall tradition of private partnerships. This is not the case in Ireland. The PPP solution has been parachuted into the public services without sufficient examination to show the merits of other options. Projects are chosen, advertised and awarded and local communities have very low levels of awareness of what is really happening. The enthusiasm and commitment of the government is laudable but one would surely prefer to see more debate and publicity regarding the complex finances and other arrangements agreed with one company. I spoke to several members of a local management committee for one of the schools. I was struck by the paucity of information they had been given on the process and the real costs involved.

Core Service or Ancillary Services

The benefits quoted for PPP projects like the Five Grouped Schools is that the private sector concentrates on buildings and support services while teachers can concentrate on the core service – teaching. However, numbers of students, school reputation and educational performance all impact directly on the commercial use of the school facilities. This will have implications for the distribution of any future government cuts to funding between partnership and non-partnership schools and may well influence how resources are allocated to non-partnership schools in the future. In the health sector in the UK, a House of Commons Select Committee stated that the 'often spurious division of staff into clinical or non-clinical groups can create an institutional apartheid which might be detrimental to staff morale and to patients. We believe the Government should limit PFI to a number of pilot schemes until a proper evaluation of the impact on staff and patient care is produced'.[10]

Partnerships Waiting to Happen

When I returned to Ireland in 1997 to take up a position as Chief Executive of the Western Development Commission I found huge levels of willingness on the part of businesses in the region to become partners in the social and economic development process.

Within the WDC, I had attempted to stimulate private/public partnership and collaboration with the private sector. For instance, we facilitated the establishment of industry-led steering groups for seafood and organic agrifood production. The Irish Government launched the National Strategy for Organic Agrifood Production on 15th April 2002. It drew heavily on the expertise, experience, research and momentum of the industry-led steering group established two years previously in the Western Region.[11] My experience of working with these groups convinced me that they were not only capable of defining public service strategy but also of securing and leading implementation on the ground.

Invariably, however, the authority shifts back to the public sector which refuses to let go of the controlling powers. In 2001, the Western Development Commission presented government ministers with proposals to establish town-based partnerships with the private sector. Effectively this would have been a mechanism for inviting business organisations into the development and renewal process in the country's towns and regions. The proposal was largely ignored.

While we have a national social partnership, real partnership on the ground is still under-developed. At any rate national social partnership, born out of the Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness, is crumbling and seems to have been largely concerned with wage price control. The wider issue of how the private sector could work with the public sector in the post Celtic Tiger economy is largely ignored in public debate. Many private bodies are relegated to the role of lobbyists. In my opinion there is a real willingness by the private sector to enter fully into partnership but there are very few fiscal mechanisms or public policies to facilitate true partnership.

The current PPP process is a fiscal mechanism for the creation of service delivery partnerships in the public service in Ireland. To some extent, a possibly controversial and debatable policy has basked under the very acceptable term of 'partnership'. It has been subject to very little scrutiny in public debate as to its acceptability in the public service, value for money, accountability and the long-term impact on public policies and finances.

Fiscal deals without real partnership

When Jarvis Plc, based in the UK, won the contract to construct and provide management services to the Five Grouped Schools, under the Irish PPP process, few businesses in Tobercurry (one of the chosen locations) or in the other regions, had heard of the company and nobody was aware of the financial implications for public finances. The project may well be the best thing that ever happened in the Irish education system. Equally, it may constitute a very worrying development, which would have negative implications for future quality and transparency of education, health and other vital public services.

There has been a lamentable poverty of debate on the issue of Public Private Partnerships. Real partnership remains relatively unexplored and without major fiscal measures to support it while a powerful fiscal mechanism is provided for a process that hardly merits the term public partnership and is more aptly defined as private financing.

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Integrated Strategies to Address Educational Disadvantage

Roscommon Partnership Company and Co. Roscommon Vocation Education Committee

eileen fahey

Vocational Education Committees (VECs) are educational institutions with responsibility for the planning, management and delivery of education services at a local level. They have a long history of addressing educational disadvantage and developing new responses within mainstream education and at community level (Area Development Management Ltd 2001)

Area-based Partnership Companies have been involved in education and training since their inception on a pilot basis since 1991. There are currently 38 Partnership Companies and 34 Area Development Management (ADM) Community groups in Ireland delivering the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP). While recent social and economic development has been encouraging, this does not apply equally to different regions and localities throughout Ireland. Contrary to the belief of some, the rising tide has not lifted all the boats. There are still substantial proportions of the population that remain in poverty and the dominant structural processes at work in society seem to endlessly reproduce the incidence of poverty amongst the same social groups and geographical localities (Nolan and Callan, 1994, Roscommon Partnership Company, 2001).

The purpose of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme.

The overall objective of the LDSIP is to counter disadvantage and promote equality and social inclusion. This is done through the provision of funding and support to Partnership Companies and ADM Community Groups that adopt a partnership approach to tackling local issues on the basis of comprehensive integrated local developmental plans.

Partnership Companies are organisationally unique in their hybrid structure mobilising a range of partners, who differ very much in origin, around a common agenda. They are based on the principle of social corporatism which is the belief that combining diverse and often conflicting interests can generate synergy or add value for those involved in the local area (Craig, 1996; Walsh et al., 1998). Partnership Companies have direct control over fairly limited resources, far less than those of any individual statutory partner. Therefore promoting significant change in their localities requires that more attention be paid to using networks and memberships to harness mainstream resources and get greater flexibility into wider programmes.

The Partnership Companies have performed a significant and catalytic role in bringing together key organisations and agencies to address issues of common interest concerns. While it has to be acknowledged that some agencies have been operating in this role to varying degrees for a number of years, there is a strong consensus that the emergence of Partnerships has given a significant boost to the co-ordination and integration of services and programmes.

The purpose of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme is to maximise the effectiveness of existing activity and not to duplicate it. This can be done by adding value to mainstream programmes (ADM, 2001). Partnerships have been most successful where they have abstained from becoming primarily direct delivery agents. Although they may have been obliged to take on responsibility for the delivery of particular projects due to the absence of any other suitable delivery conduit, the priority task for Partnerships is to influence the policy of existing service providers and thus influence the overall resource base within their area (ADM 1995).

The Role of the Education Co-ordinator in Partnership Companies

In relation to education initiatives and measures in Partnership Companies, the responsibilities of the Education Co-ordinator include facilitating linkage and co-operation between the formal education system and the voluntary sector, facilitating the development of new innovative responses to address educational disadvantage, management and administration, supporting evaluation and review processes, monitoring actions and formulating policy outcomes.

In the context of the aim of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, it is important that adequate attention be given to co-operative and

collaborative strategies in planning and delivering education in local communities by Education Co-ordinators and the Adult Education Organisers (ADM and DES, 2001).

It is also vitally important that this evidence is documented to provide incontrovertible evidence of partnership processes and impacts. There are still however very few mechanisms in place to report systematically on and generalise the lessons of this experience at local and national levels (Area Development Management Limited 2001 a). The experience of co-operation and collaboration between Co. Roscommon VEC and Roscommon Partnership Company was documented for a joint presentation by the AEO and the Education Co-ordinator at a recent conference.

The following is a summary of co-operation and initiatives involving both agencies:

- the VEC provides free office space for Education Co-ordinator in VEC
- the AEO is a Director of the Partnership Company and member of the Partnership Education Sub-Committee
- the Education Co-ordinator is a member of the VEC ad hoc Adult Learning Board
- the CEO and AEO of VEC, Manager and Education Co-ordinator of Partnership are representatives on the Co. Development Education Sub-Group
- the CEO and AEO also co-operate with other Partnership staff and Partnership initiatives

Traveller Education and Training

Roscommon Partnership Company identified the education and training needs of female Travellers in the county in 1998. The Partnership subsequently worked with Co. Roscommon VEC, Roscommon Co. Council, FAS and the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs in designing and implementing these courses. These training courses were evaluated by the Partnership Company in 1999.

In 2000, the Education Co-ordinator carried out further research on appropriate education and training opportunities for male Travellers in Roscommon town. The VEC played a lead role in responding to the identified needs with the

support of the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, Roscommon Co. Council, and the Partnership Company.

In 2001, the Education Co-ordinator in consultation with the VEC prepared the application to the Department of Education and Science for the provision of a Senior Traveller Training Centre for Roscommon. This application was successful and has led to the mainstreaming of this project under the VEC. The Education Co-ordinator was subsequently invited to be a member of the Management Committee of the Training Centre.

Adult Educational Guidance Initiative.

In 2001,the Education Co-ordinator with the support of the VEC carried out initial research on 'Identifying issues in developing a proposal for a pilot adult educational guidance initiative'. Following this research the Education co-ordinator and the AEO established a consortium and jointly prepared an application to the National Centre for Guidance in Education. This application was also successful and the service was established under the VEC in September 2001. The Education Co-ordinator is now a member of the Management Committee of the Co. Roscommon Adult Educational Guidance Service.

Mobile Computer Suite Project

In 1998 the Partnership purchased ten laptop computers and five printers. The purpose of this project was in order to bring IT training to small rural communities in an attempt to bridge the digital divide. This investment is being more than matched by the VEC in subsidising the cost of tuition, providing tutors and covering the cost of insurance and maintenance on the equipment. Certification is provided by the VEC but certificates are presented jointly.

National Reading Initiative

A joint application titled *Granny Power* was successful in securing funding from ADM to support the training of VEC Adult Literacy Tutors in Extending Family Literacy and the delivery of the *Read to Succeed Programme* to parents and grandparents in the community.

***Investment in Excellence* in Education in Roscommon**

This project evolved from research carried out by the Education Co-ordinator on Early School Leaving in Co. Roscommon. Investment in Excellence is a

five-day personal and professional training programme. Some of the concepts dealt with in the training are communicating goals, the importance of self-esteem and self-confidence, coping with change, motivation, understanding disadvantage. The training was organised jointly and funded with the support of the In-Career Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science, FAS and the Partnership Company.

The Pacific Institute has to date, delivered this five-day in-service training programme to thirty educators in Roscommon. The first programme was delivered for PostPrimary Principals, Vice-Principals, VTOS Co-ordinators Literacy Co-ordinators, Director of Youthreach and Director of Prison Education. This initiative provided a very interesting cross fertilisation of ideas and information and established valuable networking among sectors of education that rarely participate in training together. The response to this programme was unanimously positive from all participants.

Our involvement in this project has led to expertise from the United Kingdom visiting Roscommon on three occasions to inform us of the most recent educational developments. There are plans to deliver two further programmes in 2002.

There are also linked programmes for students, parents, VTOS students and the longterm unemployed. Some post-primary and VTOS students in Roscommon have also benefited from these programmes.

Youthreach.

There is one Youthreach Centre in Co. Roscommon. Transport is a major barrier to participation in education for early school leavers. The Partnership Company purchased the first Youthreach bus thereby increasing accessibility for these students.

Youthreach designed an innovative programme *Enterprise and Personal Effectiveness* with a focus on lone parents. This programme was initially financially supported by the Partnership and is now effectively mainstreamed.

Training for Child-Care Providers.

The VEC has continuously responded to the Partnership demand for certified training for child-care providers in Roscommon Partnership Company.

This is just a sample of joint initiatives. We examined our co-operation and collaboration under the following headings Challenges, Threats, Benefits, and what Integration really means. The following is a summary of our findings.

Challenges and Threats

The challenges centred on management of finances, planning and funding criteria. While the target group needed help in understanding the Partnership approach, the inter-agency approach was seen as the best way forward. Possible threats were identified as the lack of role clarification, the increased workload, including administration and the cost of adult education courses. However, the drawbacks were balanced by such benefits as maximizing the use of local resources in the context of a greater understanding of, and strategic approach to, local development.

Benefits

One of the prime benefits is that partnership helps to maximize the overall effectiveness of the interventions of individual organizations. It does lead to a greater understanding of local needs and Partnership has brought disadvantage centre stage. Resources and programmes are targetted more clearly and the use of local resources is maximised. The danger of duplication is eliminated as there is a much better flow of information between agencies

Integration of services however implies more than co-ordination. From our experience in Roscommon, integration means a sharing of interest, information and workload. It also means that an agreed strategy must be devised and there must be agreed collective responsibility. The aim is to arrive at a seamless provision and this can be achieved by careful evaluation and by stressing the joint sense of ownership.

Conclusion

Working to improve co-ordination and co-operation between individual agencies and organisations is understandably difficult for agencies that historically tended to do their own thing with little reference to other agencies and organisations operating within similar local areas.

However there is now a growing awareness and understanding that an integrated and co-ordinated approach involving contributions of resources experience and expertise can often maximise the effectiveness and impact of

individual agencies (Area Development Management Ltd., 1998). It can also open up a whole range of new possibilities for the target groups or beneficiaries.

Agencies or organisations must be comfortable with the idea of working together and developing closer working relationships in the pursuit of common aims and agendas. There has to be mutual respect, understanding and trust and this can take time to build. However, there is no doubt that the impact of co-ordinated and integrated services can be quite significant. Working in partnership with other agencies can be an enriching experience and can no doubt enhance the quality and effectiveness of ones own work.

There is a danger that the valuable experience, learning and trust that has built up within Partnerships is dissipated because it remains principally within the ambit of the individuals involved and is not sufficiently embedded within the wider institutional policies.

I think it is fair to say that integration between the two agencies in Roscommon has now become accepted thinking and practice in the operations of the individual agencies.

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Book Reviews

Adult Education at the Crossroads: Learning Our Way Out.

finger, matthias & asun, jose manuel

(Leicester, N.I.A.C.E, pp.207, 2001, €24.98)

In the broad sweep of its global canvas this book offers a stimulating and provocative analysis of the current state and possible future directions of adult education set against the backdrop of contemporary industrial development and its concomitant 'turbo-capitalism'. On the basis of this analysis the authors outline what they consider to be a radical response pointing a way out of the 'dead end' path of industrial society and for an adult education theory and practice to which it has hitherto aligned itself and legitimised. Their response is based on the ideas of the 1970s 'deschooler' Ivan Illich whose best known works include 'Deschooling Society' (1970a), 'Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution' (1970c) and 'Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health'(1975) among others.

Something of the flavour of their approach will be evident in the following: 'Adult education has to learn its way out of a process which leads to its unprecedented success in terms of practice and to its demise as an intellectual discipline'; 'the explosion of learning in practice goes hand in hand with the implosion of adult education as a discipline'; 'all three schools of thought (in adult education) have one thing in common: the idea that it is adult education's mission to humanise development'. However 'industrial development ... in an age of turbo capitalism ... with its irreversible destruction of nature, society and cultures is no longer 'humanisable' and therefore leaves adult education in a profound intellectual and conceptual crisis' (pp1/2). 'Heady' stuff indeed in both senses of the word! The leitmotif of predatory finance, corporate

cannibalism, the casino economy and turbo capitalism (globalisation) permeates the discourse as the authors warm to their critique of industrialisation and its consequences for society in general and adult education in particular.

Published as a new title in the N.I.A.C.E. series 'Global Perspectives in Adult Ed ucation and Training', the book is divided into three parts after an opening chapter which outlines Illich's ideas upon which the perspective of the authors is based. Part I, over four chapters, describes and critiques the main traditions or paths in adult education from the 1960s onwards. These include: 'education permanente' endorsed by UNESCO in its dominant discourse since the 1960s and to which the authors ascribe adult education's purported mission to 'humanise development'; the essentially American pragmatic tradition originating with John Dewey and apparently continued through Eduard Lindeman, David Kolb, Jack Mezirow and the British academic Peter Jarvis according to the authors; the scientific humanist psychological tradition initiated by Carl Rogers apparently developed by the likes of Malcolm Knowles and Stephen Brookfield; finally, what is termed Marxist adult education is seen as exemplified in the work of Paolo Freire and in the practice of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in the South. Finger & Asun find all these traditions wanting insofar as they perceive them to be built on the same shaky foundation of 'the crushed stone of modern industrial development' because 'all aspire to humanise this development process by involving the people in shaping its tracks' (p96). The only potential exception is PAR.

This somewhat idiosyncratic account of the traditions and categorisation of various theorists (e.g. Brookfield's significant contribution to critical thinking/ learning is ignored, Lindeman is over identified with Dewey '... in essence Lindeman is Dewey' (p.37), and Freire is misread to the extent that 'conscientisation' is perceived as 'being the hidden agenda of literacy' (p.85) when Freire was always explicit on this matter) may be explained in part by a pervasive sense that the authors are, 'Procrustean' fashion, shaping their analysis and critique to support their thesis. It is diffiult to find any other explanation for the obvious over simplification and reductionism well exemplified in the following 'Pragmatism is adult education's intellectual core, at least for the overwhelming proportion of ... literature, which is American. In other words, adult education is pragmatism' (p.29).

Part II examines the contemporary context of adult education from a global perspective in three chapters. Having established, at least to their own satisfaction, that adult education has been historically 'rooted in the development paradigm' in the North and South, the authors set about showing that this

development ideal is becoming 'increasingly anachronistic' and 'so distorted that there is no longer anything much to be humanised' by the adult education project. They argue that the 'ideal of development is vanishing' because of four contemporary challenges. These are: 'globalisation or turbo capitalism which is destroying the very foundations of development by replacing it with trade; postmodernism which is ... replacing the entire project of modernity with individualism; the erosion of the state and traditional politics signalling the end of the most relevant actor for development; the ecological crisis which leads ... development into an overall dead end' (pp103–104 passim). This global context is revealed as a 'vicious circle' which marks the demise of the development paradigm and results in the increasing commodification, privatisation and instrumentalisation of adult education in North America, Europe and the South. Thus adult education has become removed from its 'historical' mission as 'a significant actor for social change'.

There is much validity in Finger & Asun's analysis of global realities and the challenges these pose for adult education as a field not the least of which is its colonisation by the contemporary dynamic. However a number of weaknesses in their argument seriously undermine their thesis. For instance, while their own analysis of the adult education traditions reveals the essential fragmentation of the field (indeed as they state categorically in their introduction 'adult education has never been an intellectually coherent and unified field') their subsequent discourse seems to assume an essentially monolithic and relatively homogeneous adult education committed to 'social action' and to 'humanising industrial development' as a 'given' rather than as a proven fact. The evidence of the literature attests to the contrary – action for social change is the declared mission of the radical tradition (and some elements of the Liberal tradition) rather than of the field as a whole. Is this apparent contradiction merely another manifestation of the 'Procrustean bed' syndrome?

The third part of this work seeks to build a response, over four chapters to the analysis outlined in the earlier sections. This response is based upon Illich's critique of modern society and of the consequences of industrial development for society in general and for adult education in particular. Illich's alternative to industrial society is a call to build what he terms ' a convivial society....which would be the result of social arrangements that guarantee for each member the most ample and free access to the tools of the community'(p.12). 'Convivial' societies will be rooted in the local and based on'endogenous/people's knowledge'...the striving for which is 'a permanent struggle' neccessary to counteract

the 'exogenous' professionalisation and commodification of knowledge (p.144). However the authors are at pains to point out that ' the local is not the alternative to the global' but that 'learning our way out takes it as the point of departure' with a view to ' slowing down the vicious circle' of industrialisation (p.148). The alternative to industrial development is essentially a 'bottom-up' solution to 'slow down' this development through an adult education which is seen as the instrument of countercultural resistance at local level. Adult education's task is to promote the development of 'endogenous knowledge ... (knowledge creation by and for the people is the very essence of adult education'p.142) in support of the project of 'learning our way out' of the current impasse by way of commitment to the 'collective project of a sustainable society made up of sustainable communities'(p.165). This will involve 'a profound social learning process'(p.143) involving three steps – awareness, perspective (conceptual clarification) and praxis (pp. 152,165–169)to counteract the dangers that 'resistance will fall into the trap of fundamentalism, of being reactive ... localised, isolated and fragmented' (pp.163–164).

This then, in outline, is the theoretical framework Finger & Asun propose in response to their analysis of both the contemporary global context and the role of adult education therein. What are we to make of it all? It certainly represents an interesting, ambitious, stimulating and provocative attempt to address the question 'What is the appropriate role of adult education in today's world?' As such it will be of interest to students of adult education, academics and to those practitioners interested in reflecting on the larger questions pertaining to the field. However on balance it remains unconvincing, to this reader at least, for reasons already indicated and particularly because it seems to pay too little attention to the unpalatable fact that adult education always has been a 'bit player' consigned to the relative margins of macro-socio-politico-economic global realities. It is unlikely that it will ever become the major instrument of social change envisaged or assumed by these authors. Nor is it very likely that the model of adult education proposed by them in this work will galvanise an essentially fragmented field into a unity of vision, purpose and praxis based on a reactivation 'of the forgotten Illich'. Despite these limitations it is a useful contribution to a debate which is far from over. But don't just take my word for it – read it and decide for yourself!

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Globalisation, Adult Education and Training: Impacts and Issues

edited by s. walters

(Zed Books, London, 1997)

This book is an excellent read, introducing a wide variety of ideas and practices of adult and community education – world wide. The book is a collection of the papers presented at a conference on 'Adult Education and Training: Impacts and Issues', held in South Africa in 1996.

The book is best read at leisure, by dipping into the wide variety of philosophy and practice presented. It opens a global perspective on adult education and how it is used by various communities and societies as a key tool in community development. A wide range of projects cover many aspects of community driven education: these range from the development of basic survival skills, basic literacy skills, participation and empowerment skills to provision of accreditation, at community level and at governmental level.

What emerges from the book is a very complex picture of adult education as a service. Projects are locally driven. They address a need in a local community. Those who provide the service of education are often members of that community trained to deliver the service needed by the community. International funding and government partnerships are features of many of the projects.

The common themes are those of participation and empowerment. Each community identifies its own immediate learning needs. It works in consultation with providers to plan a way of delivering the learning. Providers use local resources and local people in their projects and thus build skills within the community.

Often the overseeing body is a government agency in co-operation with organisations from the first world. This brings a specific set of dilemmas for providers. The question of cultural colonisation is ever-present in many of the projects in the third world. This is addressed by using local people as teachers and trainers. However, reportage on the projects is often through those from first world cultures – as evidenced in the book itself, and in the contributors to the conference. As yet, the skills of researching have not been put in place in many of the projects

on the ground. The voice of the community is filtered through the western style of naming and describing problems and accounting for resources.

This is tackled in one article (Holt, Christie & Fry, pg. 188). A group of artists of Aboriginal Heritage speaking about community empowerment expressed the following about a proposed educational project in their area:

> At Walungurru the yanangu people know about schools – they are going to control their own school ... if the walypala [whites] remain solely in charge, our children will not learn properly at all.

They clearly saw the danger of cultural colonisation and economic colonisation. If one individual or group remains 'solely in charge', others 'will not learn properly at all'. Each has a contribution to make: each has something to learn.

The common problems are those we all face: resources and how to manage the tendency to economic and cultural colonisation which comes with those resources.

Reading the book in the aftermath of our own White Paper, *Learning for Life,* was interesting. We also face the dilemmas of managing to address the needs in co-operation with the funders while also managing economic colonisation.

Altogether an interesting and thought provoking read and well worth the effort. Above all the book highlights the range of philosophies and practices which influence thinking and practice in adult and community education.

Purchased in Hoggis Figgis, €16.99.

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Curriculum Matters

KLEAR Curriculum Development Project-Interim Report

u r s u l a c o l e m a n

The publication of the White Paper on Adult Education in July 2000 established the concept of lifelong learning as key to the development of education policy in Ireland. A central priority is provision for those adults with low levels of literacy and those who have not completed upper secondary education. The Adult Literacy Development Fund and now the Back to Education Initiative are responses to the need for new structures and funding but a response to these issues is not as simple as increased funding and commitment, essential as these are. The quality of what is delivered is vital to the success of any such programme. Curriculum Matters describes the first phase of a curriculum development project in Kilbarrack Local Education for Adult Renewal (KLEAR) which explores issues directly related to quality of provision and progression. As such it is a very timely and welcome report.

KLEAR is a community based education project initiated in 1980 and situated in Dublin's Northside. KLEAR 'aims to meet the Basic and Community Education needs of educationally disadvantaged adults' and is the base for the full-time City of Dublin VEC literacy organiser for the North Bay area. A crêche and playgroup run by FAS serve learners' childcare needs. *Curriculum Matters* describes an in-service course designed to involve tutors in exploring innovative approaches to curriculum development in the context of one-to-one tuition. It also looks at the KLEAR *Literacy Through the Levels* programme and a Continuing Professional Development programme related to this.

The in-service course, described in Chapter 2, gave literacy tutors an opportunity to reflect on their work within a theoretical context provided by the co-ordinator (who is also the writer of the report) drawing on the work of two theorists – Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. The concept of 'scaffolding' is introduced here. This is an interesting image for the way tutors can work with learners to enhance the learning process. Vygotsky's theory is that tutors need

to structure learning in such a way as to provide a 'scaffold' which allows the learner move safely towards new knowledge and understanding. In line with good adult education principles, learning is seen as student centred.

The tutor's role is one of support, providing structured learning activities and assisting the learner when she is unable to take the next step on her own. As the learner's mastery of the task increases, the 'scaffolding' can be removed.

What is also important here is that this is not just about learning new information or functional skills but about the development of understanding and critical thinking skills. The development of critical skills in the learner is expanded on later in the report when the writer describes a process model of curriculum. Concepts can be explored at a variety of levels and the process of exploring them is independent of the content of the knowledge or information used. Therefore diverse groups of learners can work and learn together. This is particularly relevant to community and other informal learning sites.

This and other models of curriculum are explored in Chapter 3 which describes a Continuing Professional Development Programme for KLEAR staff. The coordinator led two groups looking reflectively at theory and practice. One of the most important points in the report is made here. Quoting from L and D Resnick 'the traditional view that the basics can be taught as routine skills, with thinking and reasoning to follow later, can no longer guide our educational practice.' (p.39) This has huge implications for curriculum development and staff training. Curriculum content must therefore nurture the higher order skills of reasoning and problem-solving. We can see how the 'scaffolding' approach, if well planned by the tutor, is a vital part of this process.

Many good tutors are constantly involved in 'scaffolding' and in practising aspects of a 'thinking curriculum' but are not articulating the processes as such. *Curriculum Matters* puts a theoretical framework on good practice, enabling practitioners to become aware of elements of what makes for good learning environments and to pass this on to newer tutors. The report is therefore of interest to tutors, tutor trainers and organisers. There are many well-chosen extracts from theoretical texts and texts prepared by the coordinator as well as examples of practical exercises. Teaching methodologies pertinent to curriculum development are explored and tutor responses recorded.

As stated earlier, the KLEAR report has come at an important time. Progression for adult basic education students has been a difficulty for us all. Guidance services now being set up are vital to help learners move on but a lot of work is needed at curriculum level also. Progression is not just about finding more courses to do or gaining certificates. Learning is about human development so the content of the learning must be carefully planned to form the building blocks of more sophisticated and diverse thought processes. The KLEAR experiment is aimed at doing just that.

It is evident that work must be done with tutors to give them the understanding and skills necessary.The report notes that the tutors involved in the reflective practice group would have needed a more intense, practical approach such as actually working together on a curriculum development project. This happened later and will be described in the final report which will include a detailed account of two experimental, cross-curricular programmes run by KLEAR. This interim report is informative and thoughtprovoking. I think we should all look forward to 2003 for the final instalment.

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Facilitation

t r e v o r b e n t l e y

(Gloucestershire, the space between publishing co., 141pp, 2nd edition, 2000)

This slim volume entitled 'Facilitation' does exactly what it says on the tin, as it were. Not only does it do what it sets out to do, that is, to explore and illuminate key aspects of facilitation as both process and practice, it also does it with style. This style includes an limpidity of language, a lightness of tone (which appears deceptively laid back) with a consequent accessibility which is at the same time refreshing, enlightening and stimulating. Bentley is upfront as to where he is coming from. His background is rooted in Gestalt therapy and his approach is significantly influenced by Carl Rogers' school of humanistic client centred therapy. However, this background does not mean that the facilitation principles and practice outlined here are only of interest and relevance to those working with groups in clinical therapeutic practice.

Indeed adult educators, especially those of us working in the non-formal sector, increasingly nowadays describe ourselves as 'facilitators' rather than teachers or tutors as we seek to distance ourselves from the teacher-centred approach of the schooling model of education and its association with the all-knowing authority of the teacher. Instead the focus is centred on the group – its needs, priorities, processes and tasks – in adult literacy, assertiveness training, leadership, personal development, capacity building and communication skills training programmes. This is also increasingly the approach adopted by trainers in business and industry in terms of promoting corporate team-building and in management and staff training workshops.

However, adult educators working in mainstream, formal and accredited courses may be somewhat sceptical of the validity and relevance of this group centred approach when confronted with the need to communicate effectively the content of a prescribed syllabus given the constraints of time resources and examinations deadlines. It would however be regrettable if such understandable scepticism and reservations were to lead to an outright rejection and dismissal of the facilitatory approach to adult learning groups by practitioners in formal/semi formal (i.e. certificated) settings.

This short book offers us all an opportunity to critically examine our practice and its underlying assumptions while outlining an approach to the principle and practice of working with adult learners which can enhance our skills and challenge some of our attitudes. It is structured into four parts headed: Working with groups, Facilitation skills, Intervention strategies and Managing Interaction. These are linked by way of a case study based on a real workshop run by the author. His commentary is leavened by gentle and pertinent quotations largely from Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* and A.A. Milne's *The Book of Pooh Quotations*. Others frequently cited include Haider – *The Tao of Leadership* and Gibran – *The Prophet*.

According to Bentley 'whenever a group meets…a group process comes into being. This process belongs to the group' (p.5) This statement both summarises and underpins his entire approach to and understanding of facilitation. Thus he defines facilitation as 'The provision of opportunities, resources, encouragement and support for the group to succeed in achieving its objectives and to do this through enabling the group to take control and responsibility for the way they proceed' (p.36)

Nothing if not consistent, Bentley argues that the group should be allowed to set its own agenda from the outset. The advantages he sees in so doing include that it develops the attitude of group ownership of the agenda, enables the group to work together and take responsibility from the start for what is happening and provides a sense of freedom for facilitators to concentrate on the group process rather than struggle to be the group's source of information, knowledge and wisdom (p.4). While there is nothing particularly new here for adult educators working with groups in the non-formal sector, this approach may appear impractical, too idealistic and perhaps even naïve for adult educators tutors in the formal sector. Perhaps this may be so, but it does at least have the merit of challenging an all too common pre-occupation with content and the dominant role of the tutor which increases group dependence and tutorial control of the learning process to the detriment of maximinising group responsibility for the ownership of the learning. If we are convinced of the value of the principle of group centred approaches in adult education, it is surely possible to at least calibrate such a principle to our particular situations and circumstances even in formal learning contexts.

Again and again in the course of the case study Bentley continually pushes responsibility for its own procedures, decisions and activities back onto the group despite frequent demands/requests from participants for directions, answers and interventions from him as facilitator. One frequently senses the anxiety and frustration this causes initially which is only dissipated gradually as the group slowly learns to rely on itself, gains confidence, takes ownership of and responsibility for its own learning processes.

If group control and ownership of the learning process is central to effective facilitation, what then does the facilitator do, if anything? For Bentley, key skills of the facilitator include listening, questioning and leadership but fundamental to all these is an attitude which puts the facilitator at the service of the group when and if it so wishes. He outlines six situations which require the facilitator to listen and eight different levels of listening (pp.43–47), describes three reasons why questions are so important for the facilitator and nine different forms of questions asked in the course of effective facilitation (pp.80–84). Listening and questioning are forms of facilitatory intervention techniques which include the apparent non-intervention strategies of the effective use of silence and non-rescuing behaviour. He outlines an interesting intervention spectrum for facilitation (p.71) which ranges from gently/supportive through persuasive to directive/forceful interventions. The first includes doing nothing/silence/support/questions to clarify, the second includes questions to change/move, suggestions for choices/paths/action, sharing ideas and the third guidance/choosing for the group/directing. While acknowledging the validity of each type of intervention in the life of a group, Bentley tends 'to work mostly towards the 'gentle intervention end of the scale' (p.75). His attitude is best summarised when he states 'I am mainly concerned with serving the group rather than being served by the group. I have … no outcome that I am determined on and no particular view of where the group goes and how it gets there. My choice of intervention is entirely based on what I think will help the group get to where it wants to be '(p.75).

As an adult educator, I have difficulty with two aspects of facilitation addressed by Bentley. These are his discussion of leadership and extended discussion of manipulation. On leadership his views are internally consistent with his view of the centrality of the group in facilitation. But his notion that leadership consists mainly of knowing how to follow: 'We have to learn how to follow!'(p.33)

seems to me very similar to the political leaders mantra 'There goes the crowd. I must follow' which seems to indicate the need to abdicate the inevitable leadership role ascribed to the adult educator in the learning process and to my mind raises questions about the validity of his concept of leadership. It is arguable that facilitatory/democratic leadership means more than mere following. On manipulation his suggestion that 'any action on the part of the facilitator that moves group members towards satisfying what the facilitator thinks should be happening is manipulation' seems to me to be too sweeping a generalisation since on his terms almost any intervention by the facilitator must be manipulative to some extent and his conclusion, 'manipulate if you can't see any alternative, but be aware that you are manipulating', seems excessively pragmatic and self-serving. Manipulation it seems to me always implies elements of deviousness and self-serving control mechanisms and strategies.

These few caveats apart, this is a book which can be recommended unreservedly to any adult educator whose work involves facilitating group learning in any setting. It can offer both inspiration, practical skill pointers and space for critical reflection on our own practice.

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