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Editorial Comment

Community Education is the theme of this issue of The Adult Learner. This is a topic which will of course have been dealt with in previous issues of this journal. In fact, the very first edition in 1985 had an article on community education by Ted Fleming, then Adult Education Organiser for Co. Louth VEC. Much of what Ted had to say in this piece still has relevance for practitioners today. For instance:

> *"It could be argued that developments are taking place too fast in adult education to allow time for reflection and debate but the speed of change makes this activity more important and not less.*
> *Some approach community education as a preacher seeking converts and encourage all to move in that direction. Others will approach it descriptively and describe examples of good practice. All necessary. But a critical analytical eye needs to be cast on the concept, practice and the taken for granted assumptions of advocates of community education."*

We have decided to return to the topic at this time because, for one thing, the appointment of the first Community Education Facilitators focusses attention on this particular area of adult education. It is an area of adult education which experienced spectacular growth and development in the 1980's, as community education groups sprung up and flourished around the country. They were as diverse as they were numerous but they did have this much in common: they were an attempt to make programmes of adult learning available to communities, based on the identified needs of those communities and planned, organised and administered by voluntary groups, sometimes with the support of statutory agencies, sometimes not. This then is an appropriate time to revisit the concept and the practice and this issue includes an account of some lessons learned in Scotland. It is interesting to note here the new emphasis on what is

referred to as active citizenship. This comes about because of the growing apathy shown particularly by the younger section of society to formal politics and politicians. We could be said to be experiencing a similar phenomenon on this island and in this time of the Bush approach to international diplomacy and the lack of leadership evident here, this is an area where adult and community education could make a considerable contribution. Active citizenship is something that we could do with right now.

This is the European Year of the Disabled and this country has just hosted the Special Olympics – a triumph for the organisers, another triumph for volunteerism and most of all, a wonderful triumph for those we term disabled. In a timely contribution, Marie Clarke looks at the situation facing adult education in relation to provision for the disabled. There is considerable ground to be made up here and while there are individual examples of good practice, in general the inclusion of those with disability needs to be tackled in a much more planned and committed manner. This surely is the year to begin.

Finally my sincere thanks to the members of the Editorial Board over the years, to all those who have contributed to the journal and to the staff of South Co. Dublin Adult Education Service for their support.

Liam Bane,
AEO Co. Dublin VEC
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Joint Editors

Community Education: Listening to the voices

Brid Connolly

Community education may have had a clear, concise definition at one time, but that definition has been re-worked by the dynamic interpretations that have imbued it as a result of the community education movement, over two decades. This article tries to capture some of those new meanings and to raise some issues for exploration. It cannot do justice to the entire scope of the field but it will consider three broad areas in relation to these trends. Firstly, it takes a brief look at the growth and development of community education in Ireland. Secondly, it explores the impact of community education on learning in a post-modern knowledge based society. Finally, it traces the role it has played in the emergence of communitarianism as a social movement in Ireland.

This article is sub-titled 'listening to the voices'. Voices have been crucial in the growth and development of community education in Ireland. Community education provided a forum for listening to the voices of otherwise silenced people, it developed a process which valued the stories and enabled the participants to interrogate their own words. In addition, community education has supplied the wherewithal for disparate groups to engage with empowering processes and become active agents in their communities. Women as a group have moulded community education, but, in doing so, they have advocated a model which has been adapted by others, to address particular social issues and disadvantage. These groups include marginal men, Travellers, people with disability, people with addictions, and homelessness, among others. Community education is a flexible, emancipating process, which enables people to become more agentic in their own lives, and to bring about change in their worlds.

Growth and Development

Community education has been created in that most dynamic of processes, that of generating knowledge by action and reflection. It was formed by people who wanted different ways of taking their place in the world. The influences in the early days of women's community education were multi-layered, as I perceive it. Ireland did not have the full legacy of workers education that characterised British and Northern Ireland's Workers Education Association. There were many very interesting initiatives in the world of adult education. For example, Adult Education Organisers had been employed from the late 1960s to provide adult education through the Vocational Education Committee system. Some universities and colleges provided Extra Mural Studies, in liberal education, arts and crafts, in vocational training, and so on. All deserve a full historical treatment, which is beyond the ambit of this article, which concentrates on the emergence of community education.

The literature on the sphere is sparse, due, perhaps, to the growth in a non-formal, non-academic, organic way, and this article just skims over the surface of the entire body of work produced over the years. Maria Slowey noted the early days of community education (Slowey, 1985), Bassett, *et al* (1989), made the case for adult education and emancipation, emanating from the work of AONTAS. I did a small study looking at my own experience of women's community education (Connolly, 1989). In the meanwhile, Tom Lovett brought these ideas to bear on his work in Northern Ireland, especially with working class men (Lovett, 1988). *From the Personal to the Political*, (Bassett *et al,* 1991) was published to provide a resource in women's community education. In Britain, Jane Thompson, in *Adult Education for a Change* (1980) and *Liberating Learning* (1983) proposed adult education to women and other subordinate groups, as a means in overcoming oppression. More recently, there have been many studies on community education: for example, Johanna McMinn's PhD thesis (2000); the evaluation of the impact of community education on poverty (WERRC, 2001); on men's experiences (Owens, 2000); on gender and learning (King, *et al*, 2003), and on feminist models of community education and lifelong learning (WERRC, 2003). However, community education has its roots in literacy initiatives also.

The high levels of literacy difficulties in Ireland have only recently been acknowledged as a result of the OECD report (OECD, 1997). However, the National Adult Literacy Association had been developing creative approaches to literacy education, and it is clear that Paulo Freire's work, *The Pedagogy of*

the Oppressed (1972) was highly influential, arising from literacy education in Latin America. Freire's ideas became more widely known in community work, and in adult education. Two strands underpinned Freire's philosophy: liberation theology and Marxism. Many of those who were working in these areas at that time, were closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church, and this was congruent with their social justice agenda.

Simultaneously, community education groups began to emerge, linking with some universities, and tutors and facilitators from the literacy, adult education and the counselling worlds. In many ways, the community education groups challenged the existing provision. As women comprised most of the adult learners availing of this provision, they found that it was not always suitable. Community education groups were mainly composed of women working inside the home and they set up their own programmes, with childcare as a basic condition. There were no classes without childcare.

A number of very interesting courses were designed and delivered in these new models. Many of them were premised on the social changes that occurred as a result of the women's movement and other social changes. The derogatory term 'unmarried mother' lost its judgmental sting with learning programmes designed to help mothers who found themselves as, or chose to be, lone parents. Women's Studies was, and still is, an interdisciplinary area of study, bringing with it the learning from the political movement, was offered at Certificate level in the early 1980s. Social and Human Studies, Creative Writing, Parenting, Personal Development, Assertiveness Skills, were all offered in these community education groups. Thompson coined the phrase 'really useful knowledge' to articulate how these programmes provided knowledge and insight for political and critical awareness (Thompson, 1996). There were around 1,000 groups running programmes in community education, in response to high levels of disadvantage, poverty and neglect, the brunt of which was borne by women (AONTAS, 2000).

Community education evolved with this complex, dynamic interaction of:

- grass roots organic growth
- ownership of the process by the participants
- the person-centred approach tutors developed in literacy education
- learners participate freely
- the centrality of the subjective experience of the participants

- location within and of the community
- feminist education, which is very complex in itself, but incorporating consciousness raising and gender awareness
- emancipatory education proposed by Freire (1972) incorporating praxis and conscientization
- Jane Thompson's 'really useful knowledge, (Thompson, 1996)
- the potential for societal transformation.

This evolution became central in all the education programmes, in pedagogical terms and in content terms. These are the themes I want to look at in the next section.

Impact of community education on learning

Community education is a transactional, dynamic process which is pluralistic, broad, energising, and subjective. Learning communities demonstrate how learning is not just an individual acquisition of knowledge, nor that learning can only take place in the classroom. Groups are integral to the notion of community education and group processes underpin the vitality of the arena. The key impact on learning emanating from community education and incorporated into the literature on adult education is group-based learning. Some of the influences are from the therapeutic world, especially in the adopting of the person-centred approach, first introduced in humanistic psychotherapy (Rogers, 1967). However feminist analyses uncovered the shortfalls in this model, in particular in the location of power, and moving from the personal to the social (Connolly, 1999). However, a person-centred approach is vital, provided that it is bounded by critical understanding of the person, and especially when it enables participants to create their own knowledge and value systems, as a tool in creating their worlds.

Facilitation skills emerged as key methods for enabling groups to meet their need to create their own knowledge and value system. Facilitators start from participants' own starting points, and enable students to engage with their experience critically. I contested the view that critical thinking is a cognitive process, and therefore cannot take into account the affective part of learning. I distinguished awareness and consciousness. As I understand it, self-awareness is basic emotional intelligence, where we develop the intimate knowledge of our emotional states. Self-awareness is prior to consciousness, which I perceive to have a social, as well as personal dimension. Freire's concept of conscientization, and the women's movement consciousness raising are experiential

processes and therefore more suitable to the emancipatory potential of adult education (Connolly, 1996). Self-directed learning is fundamental to facilitation, where, instead of the teacher controlling the syllabus, the participants control the process, identifying their own learning needs. The role of the facilitator is to create the critical environment and to provide expertise in the subject or topic. The facilitators' knowledge is a resource to the group. Group work is a democratic process, which fosters the equality of facilitators and participants. This is a radical departure from mainstream models of education, in which the distribution of power is uneven and teachers have the authority to exercise power over students in various ways.

Community education values non-formal learning. That is, non-formal learning takes place outside the statutory institutions, it does not have to adhere to prior criteria in relation to evaluation, assessments, and so on, and is, therefore freer to create its own templates. Community education also values informal learning, the kind that takes place during coffee breaks, or learning by doing. Some formal education has taken on board the lessons from these non-formal and informal approaches and incorporated them into their own programmes. However, this is not always welcome, as the appropriation of facets and elements into the formal system has the effect of diminishing the social justice agenda. I will pick up this point later, but I want to acknowledge that community education has stretched the reach of mainstream education, especially in the recognition of informal learning.

The key achievement of community education is the way in which those most closely involved have shaped it. I believe this idea would not be viable in any other sector. The notion that school children and traditional might have a say in what they want to learn, and how, and where, would have fierce opposition in the educational institutions. Yet, of all the initiatives in education over the recent decades, community education has been the one which has most potential for growth and development. It remains creative, flexible, dynamic, transactional and challenging. In particular, it has fostered the community and social dimension of learning, and brought with it a code of ethics, a core set of values for post-modern Ireland.

Emergence of communitarianism

The concept of communitatianism has been developed over the past 20 years or so (Bell, 1993). The model of responsibility to and for one another is central

to the concept and it proposes a code of ethics based on this responsibility, rather than, for example, religious morality. It encompasses the rights based codes of liberal humanism, but goes beyond them, in attempting to build active citizenship, social obligation and self-reliance. In Ireland we have seen community responses to many of the issues in society which have emerged as the outcome of the state's inability to address or to cope with difficulties inherent in modern society (Ó'Cinnéide and Walsh, 1990). It is an alternative to the harshness of individualism and it fosters self-expression and self-determination.

Community development has been a very powerful agent in raising issues around social and cultural inequality, such as poverty, discrimination, neglect and other disadvantages. Community development essentially entails members of a community – geographical or issue-based – identifying their needs in terms of development, sustainability and education, and collectively working together to meet those needs. Community education is an agent of community development and they have core attributes in common (AONTAS, 2000). Community Action Network and the Combat Poverty Agency have stressed that collective action, entailed in the process, challenges the status quo. However Ó'Cinnéide and Walsh are pessimistic with regard to the capacity of powerless, disadvantaged groups to bring about fundamental social change (1990).

The community education movement has made inroads in mainstream education and in asserting itself as a force in Irish society (DES, 2000). This connects with the point I want to pick up from the preceding section. Community education is often proposed as a means to reach marginal groups because of its success with developing relationships with people who are often silenced. However, this can be an inappropriate use of the learning from the sphere. I have referred elsewhere to this as 'the glass fence'. By this, I am trying to articulate the way in which community education is contained by depriving it of resources, while seeming to value it. In the meantime, the methods and skills of community education are appropriated for statutory agencies, such as employment and training bodies, and people are forced to attend. The glass fence acts like the glass ceiling: people can see through it, but cannot break through it. Practitioners and participants are safely fenced off, while their valuable knowledge is used to get to people who haven't necessarily opted for it. The fundamental condition for community education, the grassroots movement, where participants identify and self-direct their own learning stories, is

completely missing when people are forced to attend. Yet, looking in on any of these compulsory courses the pedagogy seems to be the same, the content may be similar, the environment may be very conducive, yet it is not community education. It is a top-down, compulsory imposition on people who have very little social power.

So, what is Community Education?

In discussions about the nature of community education, there is one aspect that most people are agreed on. Community education is complex. It is not simply a series of techniques, nor is it about the location; and it is not just about subject matter. The Green Paper (1998) and The White Paper on adult education considered community in ideological terms:

> 'a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level. …it is an interactive, challenging process, not only in terms of its content but also in term of its methodologies and decision making processes.' (DES, 2000: 110)

That is, an essential component of community education is its political dimension, in the desire to bring about structural change.

> 'Community Education is a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community, and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community.' (AONTAS, 2000:6)

Community Education has a number of defining characteristics identified in AONTAS Policy Series:

> 'Community education provides a learning environment, identified and located within the community, not just the physical community, but also the community of shared experiences. Community education groups retain control of the decision-making processes. The processes are rooted in emancipatory, person-centred values. The starting point of community education is the lived experience of the participants, and their critical reflection of it. Community education has a two-fold, interconnected aim for the participants:

- the personal acquisition of skills, knowledge and development of potential
- social and community transformation and empowerment.'
(AONTAS, 2000: 7)

The White Paper emphasises the non-statutory nature of community education, the focus on providing supports for successful learning, particularly guidance, mentoring, feedback and dialogue and, of course, childcare. It has a flexible, problem-solving approach, and it promotes participative democracy, seeing community education has a key role in the transformation of society. (DES, 2000: 113)

Community education takes place in groups, with group based learning methods at the core of its activities. Participants within the groups learn from one another, and engage with their experiences in a critical way in this process. In addition, group work models participative democracy and enables people to make the connection between the personal and the social (Connolly, 1996).

The defining characteristics of community education highlight a number of issues, which sometimes gets in the way of looking at the role of education in society (Lynch, 1989). Firstly, the characteristics show, without question, that learning and education are not simply psychological processes. The focus on learning styles, on multiple intelligences, on differences in the classroom and so on, shows that there is a belief that learning is an individual acquisition, a belief that individual psychological make-up is the essential factor in education and in subsequent benefits or disadvantages. This, in turn, supports the meritocratic system in schooling and it completely denies the social dimensions of education and learning. The social relationships that constitute society are of paramount importance in community education, and while it is able to respond to individual learning needs within the overall framework, it does not retain it in the individual. The personal is on a continuum with social and cultural.

Self-actualisation, a concept central to person-centred education, emanating from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1999), is not just about reaching one's potential at the expense of others in the learning group. Self-actualising in community education recognises the social nature of the human being and that becoming more fully human necessarily entails interaction, interdependence and dialogue with others. Self-actualisation not a selfish, individualistic goal: it connects with empowerment and emancipation.

Secondly, community education is not about training or up-skilling the labour force. While the outcomes may include the entry of people into the workplace, it is as critical citizens, rather than workers or consumers/customers. Many people have accessed jobs or further education, as a result of participating in community education, but it is a mistake to believe that a new labour force of hitherto hard to reach groups can be an explicit aim of community education. Community education serves the ideal of a more equal society. The economy is part of society, self-evidently, but work and employment are not the only indicators of participation and inclusion. Community education interrogates the values of consumer choice versus active citizenship.

Community education does not include all daytime education, adult education and training. Many community groups started out with the ideological agenda of structural change, but they lost the ideological dimension along the way. I discussed this more fully in Ryan and Connolly (2000), but the point I want to make here is that, while resisting the absolute and definitive definition of community education, it is clear that the ideological aspects are paramount. People describe personal change in very profound terms, but they may ignore structural inequality, perceiving no connection between the social and the personal. Linda Connolly has discussed this very fully, looking in particular at organisations which have educational programmes, but which focus on personal fulfilment and modernisation (Connolly, 2002).

This brings me to the final point in relation to the social agenda of community education. Adult education has been loaded with many agendas, from furthering the work of the Roman Catholic Church to modernising farming methods. When people engage with new ideas, they are naturally energised and enthused. However, it does not mean that they will be emancipated. Without critical analysis, it is likely that they will become more deeply embedded with the prevailing mores.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to combine the voices from many quarters to convey the sense of the concerted evolution which has created community education. I have looked at it from three broad vantage points, that of the essential influences in the development of community education, the impact on education provision and the part it plays in community development. I have tried to

show the complexity and fluidity of the area and to indicate the potential of community education to radically enhance the lives of those who participate in it; learners, tutors, programme co-ordinators, students and article writers. I consider that there are many instances of adult education which fall very short of being community education and it needs to be protected from inappropriate application and implementation. In particular, it behoves us who are very committed to community education to be mindful of the glass fence and to ensure that we are not trapped behind it.

Brid Connolly has been involved in adult and community education for nearly 20 years. She currently works in NUI Maynooth. Her research interests include community education, community arts, gender and social analysis.

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Donegal Second Chance Education Project for Women

Management and Staff of the Project

Abstract

The Donegal Second Chance Education Project for Women (SCEPW) was established in 1996 to further develop an understanding of the barriers affecting women in accessing mainstream educational courses in County Donegal. The project has pioneered two very different and complementary approaches to engaging with women.The first approach is a long-term supportive programme that aims to reach women unfamiliar with mainstream adult education provision; the second strand offers women an opportunity to familiarize themselves with returning to education whilst at the same time offering them a deepening political insight into why they are facing the barriers and difficulties they find in their day to day lives.

Background to the project

During the early 1990's the Letterkenny Women's Centre identified the need for a dedicated approach to addressing the educational needs of women in County Donegal. They noted that mothers of young children who were living on low incomes were not availing of courses, and that many women who had reared their children and wanted to return to work were early school leavers without any formal educational qualifications. They also noted the high proportion of women living in rural communities, 61% as compared to the national average of 35%. As regards formal educational attainment 40.9% of women in Donegal had no formal qualifications compared with the national average of 28.5%(McMinn and O'Meara, 2000). In the early 1990's access to adult-friendly education was extremely limited in County Donegal. The need for a dedicated approach to addressing women's educational needs, particularly those women who were most marginalized, was clearly identified.

In 1996 an application was made to the International Fund for Ireland Communities in Action Programme to establish a pilot women's education project over the next three years. In 1997 two project workers (a Neighbourhood Worker and an Education Coordinator) were employed on the SCEPW. Originally located in the Letterkenny Women's Centre, the SCEPW established its own management committee in 1999 and located to new premises.

At the end of 2000, the Project succeeded in obtaining core funding from the Department of Education and Science through a partnership with the Donegal Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The Project was also successful in securing funding in 2000 through the Education Equality Initiative to develop the Women's Studies Programme.

Underlying Ethos

The SCEPW defines itself as a movement for social change 'which reaches out to women and recognizes, values and promotes the unique contribution which women make in society.' A key component of its work is to promote women-centred education as an approach to working with women and women's groups in the region. The Project defines women-centred education as being:

> 'education centred around women and directed by women's needs. It is a space apart from the existing structures where women gather together to voice and reflect on their collective experience, and to acknowledge and value the talents they have inherited and the skills they have acquired. Women-centred education develops women's confidence; it is empowering, supportive and nurturing. It takes time and it gives time. It is informal, open to all, and locally driven. On a practical level, women-centred education is affordable and accessible.'
>
> **(Strategic Review – 2000, p3)**

As part of the process of incorporating this ethos into their work, the SCEPW developed two very different methods of engaging women in mainstream education. The first approach was based in local community neighbourhoods and became known as the Neighbourhood Work Approach; the second approach offered a more structured opportunity to returning to education through a Women's Studies Programme. Although the two approaches vary in style they are both deeply connected through the aims and objectives of the SCEPW.

Aims and Objectives of the SCEPW

Aim:

To inspire and enable women to reach their full potential through women-centered education.

Objectives to meet this aim:

- To give a voice to those most excluded by listening to the experience and educational needs of women, so as to inform and direct the work of the project.
- To raise awareness of the position of women in society through women-centred education in County Donegal
- To promote the concept of women-centred education
- To develop the capacity and sustainability of the organisation.

There are a series of actions the project has undertaken, including the development of neighbourhood work approach; researching and documenting women's educational needs and experiences; targeted programmes (Bright Futures Lone Parent Project); developing the women's studies programme; developing and documenting models of good practice. The Project continues to develop the women's education sector in the county. It continues to build alliances with a whole range of community groups, organizations and agencies at a local and national level.

A management committee of local women (participating on a voluntary basis) and representatives from other agencies and organizations, along within the current staff, has the responsibility for translating the aims and objectives into everyday practice.

Neighbourhood Work

Neighbourhood work has always been a key element of the SCEPW. It specifically targets the most marginalized and isolated members in the community.

> 'The groups least represented in education and training provision are those who are also the most socially and economically disadvantaged; long term unemployed people; low waged manual workers; people with poor literacy and no qualifications; members of some Black and Asian communities; older adults; homeless people; lone parents; full-time carers of sick or elderly relatives; ex-offenders; people with disabilities or learning difficulties; people on low incomes in rural areas or peripheral estates. Although educational oppor-

tunities and services may be available in the areas where they live, many members of these groups are either unaware of them or lack the confidence, time or material resources to take advantage of them. Others perceive learning as formal and irrelevant and something that other groups and social classes do. Encouraging these groups to engage in education is not simple or straight forward'

(McGivney, Veronica – Working with Excluded Groups)

Unlike other community approaches where general members in the community are called together and the process of involvement is very public, neighbourhood work acknowledges the difficulties that many women have to face to even attend a public meeting. These difficulties can include transport and childcare but there are also other issues including a lack of confidence, low levels of literacy and fear of ridicule in front of neighbours.

The aim of the work is to give voice to those most excluded and support them to bring about social change. It facilitates women in the community to get to know each other in a group context and to get to know a great deal more about themselves. The neighbourhood work is a slow, gentle, sensitive approach, which allows time and space for individual and collective growth. It starts by meeting women in the privacy of their own home over a cup of tea or sitting at the kitchen table. It continues to build and nurture this relationship. It motivates, encourages and supports women to be concerned about their own personal development and correspondingly, the development of their own community:

'She (the project worker) had come into my house, drank my tea and talked, and more importantly listened to my fears, my troubles and me. This did me a lot of good as I felt I had something worthwhile to give and that by us women getting together I felt we could build a little community'

There is a high level of skill required by the neighbourhood workers in sustaining a relationship over a long period of time yet ensuring that there is a route of progression for the woman.

For the initial three years 1997–2000 the Project employed one neighbourhood worker and the work was piloted in two communities, an urban local authority housing estate in Letterkenny and a rural border town. The success of this period is well document in the research document *'Developing Neighbourhood Work in Two Donegal Communities'*- (November 2000). This

research was a participatory action research. The aim of the research was to document the experiences of the work to date from the perspectives of both the workers and the women who had been involved in the programme. It built on Paulo Freire's model for community involvement and participation whilst acknowledging the gender dimension of women's experiences. Seven key areas were highlighted by the participants including many of the familiar: Childcare/Dependant care; Transport; Funding; Course Fees; Career Guidance and Counselling. A definite conclusion with overall support from all involved was the need for a neighbourhood approach in SCEPW. As one course participant described;

> *'Neighbourhood work allows us informally to explore our experiences and needs for lifelong learning and yet formally it gives us the opportunity to access mainstream education which otherwise would have been difficult to access'*

Funding in 2001 from the Department of Education and Science in partnership with Donegal VEC allowed for the continued development of this model of good practice. There are now five neighbourhood workers in the county (two working with marginalized men and three with women). Interest in neighbourhood work has grown in the county with a number of community projects and community workers incorporating this approach into their work. In addition to this there has been a demand for neighbourhood work training from other community projects in the county. This has opened a range of other possibilities for expanding this work.

The Project has gained considerable experience and expertise in the neighbourhood work approach over the last six years. A series of twelve workshops exploring neighbourhood work were held in the county in 2002. The Project has developed a 56-hour training programme *'Introduction to Neighbourhood Work'* in partnership with Partners, Dublin in Spring 2003 which 18 participants from a variety of projects throughout the county have just begun.

Initially the neighbourhood work was a pilot project in two Donegal communities. It has now expanded to become part of a number of projects in the county. It has promoted the participation of particularly disadvantaged women in second chance education and has been a crucial first step onto the ladder of lifelong learning.

Women's Studies

In October 1999 The SCEPW offered its first 'Introduction to Women's Studies' course. The aim of the course was to build on the social and personal development being explored through the local women's groups and engage with 50 women who would 'see themselves differently' as a result of undertaking the sixteen hour programme.

Since that time 186 women have completed the Introduction to Women's Studies course. SCEPW now has a core team of eight tutors who can deliver the course throughout the county in both Irish and English. The sixteen-hour course consists of 2-hour inputs on areas such as Education, Health, Spirituality, Image, History, and has provided women with the opportunity to explore their own experiences and the experiences of other women in the context of a political framework.

As a result of the success of the *Introduction to Women's Studies* course SCEPW went on to develop a third level Certificate Programme in Women's Studies accredited through the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre (WERRC), University College, Dublin. In October 2001 the first group of women to complete this course received their graduation certificates at a ceremony in UCD.

The certificate programme is accessible in two different formats; a yearlong course offered in Donegal Town, or through stand-alone modules that are rotated throughout the county. An important point to note is that the programme is developed and delivered by women in Donegal rather than delivered as an outreach programme from UCD, thus fulfilling the project's aim of developing the capacity of women locally.

The Year Long programme offers five modules:

1. Study Skills – develops the skills required to complete module assignments and provides ongoing tutorial support
2. Women, Work and Identity – looks at the history of women and their work choices
3. Women's Voices – looks at women writers of the 19th and 20th centuries and develops participants' own voice through creative writing

4. Psychology and the Female Mind – looks at gender and patriarchy within the social construct and covers such areas as friendship, sexuality, power and depression
5. Embracing the Feminine – encourages participants to explore the question 'who we are as women' through a variety of creative means and ritual. It explores women's spirituality from pre Christian times to the re-emergence of interest in holistic health in the 20th century.

Individual Modules

There are currently three stand alone modules written by SCEPW and validated through UCD; these are the Women Making Decisions, A Woman's View of the Economy and Mná sa Ghaeltacht.

Women Making Decisions

This module was compiled jointly with the Donegal Gender Focus group's project 'Restoring the Balance' – a sub group of the Donegal County Development Board. There is a concerted effort throughout the course to localize the issues as much as possible. Activities that participants have been involved with have included presentations to local area partnership boards as well as plans to target local political parties.

One of the offshoots stemming from this module has been the interest expressed by several women to stand for local election as independent candidates in the next local election.

A Woman's View of the Economy

This module was delivered in partnership with Banúlacht and examines the Irish economy and the localized implications of national and global economic policy. Again this course was designed to enable the women participants to use their own local knowledge and family history to assess what impact economic policy has had on their lives and the lives of those around them as well as looking at women's lives in developing countries impacted by trade agreements.

Mna sa Ghaeltacht

One of the first courses for women ever to be written in Irish, this course looks at the cultural identity and history of women living and working in Gaeltacht areas. Unlike the English language based courses there are no texts to refer women to and little has been documented in Irish on women's experiences. A lot of the development of this course has required SCEPW to develop their

own research and documentation and to begin to develop their own Irish language resource library.

Strategic partnerships and networking with other organizations

Co Donegal VEC

The project has developed a close working relationship with Co Donegal VEC through the Adult Education Service. The VEC has been involved in the management of the project since the establishment of the separate management committee in 1999 and offers free office space to the project in two of its adult education centres. Concern was initially expressed by the membership that being located in the premises of a statutory organization would compromise the project's ability to reach out to educationally disadvantaged women using its own unique approach. A funding application was made to the Further Education Section of the Department of Education & Science which reflected the way the project had agreed to work and which would allow it to retain its autonomy; three year funding was granted to allow for the development of the neighbourhood and strategic elements of the work and to employ a Team Leader, Neighbourhood Development Officer and an administrator. The Women's Studies programme is currently funded through the Education Equality Initiative. The VEC's Adult Education Service funds some programme costs through its community education budget and SCEPW is a member of the VEC's Adult Education Board and its Adult Guidance Advisory group.

County Development Board- Lifelong Learning Forum

SCEPW has actively participated in the development of the county strategy on Lifelong Learning and continues to be represented at the Forum during the implementation phase. It is also a founder member of the Gender Focus group, a sub group of the CDB which has accessed funding for a gender equality project 'Restoring the Balance'

The Neighbourhood Work approach is also referred to in the County Development Board Strategy Document as one of the models of good practice in tackling social inclusion.

The project looks for opportunities to be involved where it can at regional and national level and is a member of the Women's Regional Policy Forum, the National Women's Council and on the Executive Committee of Aontas.

Difficulties encountered

Women Educating for Transformation (WEFT) conducted research on women's education in the six border counties and highlighted several issues affecting women, that had been compounded by the impact of the border. These included:

> *'… the lack of a political voice for women, and the conservative nature of a society which continues to place the domestic and caring responsibilities on women. The lack of access to transport, especially in rural areas where there is no public transport, and the lack of childcare provision continue to be hugely important factors in preventing women from participation.'*

One of the initial problems, which faced the project, and one that is still impacting today is that of the size of County Donegal. As one of the largest counties in the country with pockets of sparsely populated areas, island communities and Gaeltacht areas, trying to bring localized courses to women has proven to be very challenging. With the limited number of resources available to the Project, the Project has become geographically divided with the Neighbourhood Work focused in the eastern part of county and the Women's Studies Programme centred in the south of the county in Donegal Town.

Another issue outlined by WEFT and which has implications for the work of SCEPW has been the intermittent nature of funding for women's education:

> *'Women's education currently suffers from a reliance on short-term funding. This mitigates against it being well-planned and progressive, since long-term strategies and objectives can never be developed.'*

Although the project has been successful so far in accessing funding, an issue for the future is the development of a long-term strategy to ensure core funding on a long-term basis.

Future Development

The SCEPW is at a crucial point in its development. Both aspects of its approach to enticing women back into the education arena are developing strongly. The challenge it faces now is to consolidate the work done to date and yet still retain the flexibility and resources to continue to develop further.

Whichever way forward the project decides to go it needs to be done within a new strategic framework and this will take time to develop. The SCEPW continues to build alliances with the relevant agencies both locally and nationally. The Project continues to develop and expand while still working positively for women in the county, maintaining and promoting a women's education centred ethos.

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Lifelong learning for all or some?

Reflections on provision for adults with disabilities.

Marie Clarke

The Learning Society

Although the ideas of life long education and life long learning have old philosophical roots and can be traced back historically to the earliest efforts to promote universal education, it is unlikely that they would have achieved their current status in education policies if recent trends and developments in the wider political, economic, social and cultural context had not also been favourable. Both lifelong learning and life long education have come to represent in different ways the expectations that societies now have of education and of the scope that should be provided for every individual to develop his or her potential. Learning requires individuals to progress from self-development for occupation to self-development for autonomy, choice and responsibility across all spheres of experience (Ranson, 1994) This approach implies more than lifelong education. Rather it suggests as essential belief that if an individual is to develop comprehensively throughout his/her lifetime they should be accorded value and support in this endeavour.

Making this a practical reality depends upon developing the necessary social conditions, which can provide a sense of purpose within society both for the self and others. Ranson argues that the historically conditioned prejudices about capacity, reinforced by institutions of discrimination, set the present context for the learning society. Youngmann develops this argument further and suggests that 'the choices made in the provision of adult education are made within a context in which the state's social policies have been determined by the material and ideological realities of the global political economy'

(Youngman, 2001, p. 4). This paper argues that this is the approach that has been adopted in the Republic of Ireland towards adults with disabilities.

Adult Education Provision

In light of the social and economic uncertainties that have characterised the start of the 21st century it is necessary to analyse critically the nature of adult education, and to understand its limitations and its potential (Youngmann, 2000). Ohligher has argued that the practice of adult education, which once prided itself on self- directedness as the hallmark of its independence from school-based education (which was teacher-directed), has largely come to emulate the demands of lifelong schooling (Ohliger 1974). Heaney has made the point that individual learners are recruited one-by-one, their only assumed common experience being the classroom in which they gather, their only assumed common goal personal advancement in a competitive occupational environment. In fact, the schooling model, with its reformed emphasis on learner-centred instruction and the attribution of needs to individual students, is wholly consistent with so-called self-directed adult education (Heaney, 2000). Law and Sissons suggest that programs for adult learning are constructed on the basis of assumed consumer demand and felt needs. They argue that 'the manner in which need reflects dominant ideas in the wider society, understandings about socially sanctioned pursuits, and workplace skills remain unquestioned' (Law and Sissons 1984, p. 72). The danger with totally accepting this approach is that adult education organizations and institutions will operate as socialization agencies in much the same way as formal schooling (Lovett *et al.* 1983; Lovett 1988).

In the Irish context the *Task Force on Lifelong Learning* has made the point that:

> Current delivery systems are not optimally adapted to Lifelong Learning. With the exception of community education, the predominant delivery model remains that of full time attendance during ''office hours''. The same tends to be true of those vocational training courses delivered by major state providers such as FAS.
>
> **(Ireland, 2002, p.35).**

Funding

Funding within adult education is a complex area, which many who seek learning opportunities don't understand. Indeed this is also true of educational providers, who work within restricted budget limitations and strict criteria, which in the past has made it impossible to offer flexible courses to meet the needs of those who required them. Limited funding has acted as a barrier to disabled adults those who wish to participate in courses. The implementation of a Back to Education Initiative, which started in 2002 with 6000 extra part-time places under PLC, Youthreach Traveller, and Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS) programmes, was a welcome initiative within the adult education sector. The fact that ten per cent of all expansion is earmarked exclusively for community education providers, is also a positive development. However these schemes have criteria attached that require consideration.

The DES Special Fund for Students with Disabilities has increased since it was introduced in 1994. However it does not provide certainty as to the availability of support for all students with disabilities. As outlined in *Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education* (Ireland, 2001) under the current Fund students with disabilities do not know from year to year whether they will be allocated funding, or when that allocation is likely to be made (Ireland, 2001, p.69). Students with disabilities may be in receipt of a range of disability related payments, administered by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs or by the Health Boards and may qualify for the Back to Education Allowance. This allowance has a six months criterion so many people have to wait that period of time. Students with disabilities who under existing criteria may apply for BEA are often reluctant to do so, as they perceive that difficulties may arise if they need to take time off to study, or that delays will be experienced in transferring back to the original payment on completion of a course of study (Access to Higher Education, 2001). The same situation arises when accessing VTOS support for courses offered. The conditions attached to most of the funding mechanisms emerged out of the view that adult education was primarily second chance education where people would be returning to the workforce. This type of approach has also informed vocational training for adults with disabilities.

Further Education

In 1993 the SERC Review made the point that:

> The provision at Third Level and in Further Education for people with disabilities is uneven. The lack of a coherent national policy implemented on a co-ordinated basis in all relevant institutions appears to be one of the most significant deficiencies at present.
>
> **(SERC, 1993, p.59)**

The Report on the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001) made the point that 'traditionally these adults would have entered training schemes and would not have been expected to progress within the education system' (Ireland, 2001, p.65). One of the difficulties is the fact that, currently no reliable information exists on the numbers of students with disabilities at second level or the numbers of people with disabilities in society generally (Ireland, 2001, p.67).

As the Post Leaving Certificate sector developed since the mid 1980's the student profile has changed from being predominantly young people who have just finished their second level education to a more mature student group. In this regard, the student population served by the PLC sector is distinct from that of the third level institutions. An examination of the age profile of the PLC population shows that school leavers are being replaced by an increasing number of mature students. (McIver, 2003, p.4). Many PLC colleges have dispersed VTOS students undertaking courses and part time mature students.

The Report of the Steering Group to the PLC Review established by the Department of Education and Science in 2001 (hereafter referred to as McIver) and prepared by McIver Consulting indicated that most PLC colleges with more than 150 PLC students are short of space, and some of the buildings are not of a good standard. Lack of sufficient equipment is frequently a problem, with facilities to undertake research very limited. Computer access was deemed to be insufficient as indeed were limited canteen facilities, social and recreational areas leaving little by way of student experience. These are serious issues that must addressed not only in terms of provision but also in the context of the opportunities for those who are disabled and who require support in order to pursue a successful course of study. Many of the colleges that provide PLC courses also provide part time adult education courses, VTOS courses

and BTEI courses so the same problems persist for people accessing those courses.

It is regrettable to note that despite this being the first and relatively comprehensive analysis of the Further Education sector in the Republic of Ireland that few references are made to provision for those who are disabled in the main body of this report. Where references do appear it is in relation to buildings and more specifically wheelchair access. The role of the access officer as identified in the report is not clearly defined. The area of socio-medical services does not identify specifically the needs of the disabled. Appendix B of the report analysed the responses to the qualitative element of the survey. A number of issues emerged in this part such as suitability of premises, the inadequacy of specialised equipment currently available; the inappropriateness of current timetabling and the need for support staff to deal with:

> Students experiencing learning difficulties, social or personal problems, or those having trouble with other issues and queries concerning their learning experience.
>
> **(McIver, 2003, p. 142).**

City of Dublin VEC,(hereafter CDVEC) the Department of Education and Science and AHEAD have conducted a survey of the schools and colleges within CDVEC to assess the needs of students with disabilities. In 2002/2003 there were 489 participants in part-time adult education in the CDVEC scheme. This is the number of participants in just one VEC (and there are courses available in many other settings throughout the country) indicates that adults with disabilities do wish to access adult education and provision must be made to ensure that their needs will be met either in a college or community context.

Community Education

The growth of community education since the early 1980's was part of a wider context of social change in Ireland. One important feature of this type of education is that it operates outside the formal system of education. Community education is regarded in the Green Paper on Adult Education as 'depicting an approach and a particular kind of relationship as opposed to a system of provision' (Ireland, 1998, p.89). The development of the community sector was directed by the state's funding framework and its centralised policy towards communities. This hindered their capacity in the short and long term in rela-

tion to planning, management, leadership and continuity of work (Lynam, p.50) With short-term contract funding for specific projects and training programmes, community groups had little resources or incentives to plan to develop their work beyond the period of the contracts. This in turn led to fragmentation. The appointment of 35 Community Education Facilitators throughout the country as recommended in the White Paper on Adult Education 2002 is a welcome development in this area of provision. The envisaged role of the facilitators will be to support the development of new community-based learning groups, to network providers, access funding, share good practice and monitor quality, and to promote the development of partnerships with the statutory sector, particularly in relation to outreach and referral. In the context of adults with disabilities the community sector in adult education has a vital role to play. It is within communities that adults with disabilities can learn; develop an identity and contribute to their communities as active citizens. It is also within this context that adults with disabilities can seek other opportunities like progressing to Third Level.

Access to Third Level Education

In the context of access to third level education the participation of students with disabilities had improved by the end of the 1990s. As pointed out in the *Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education:*

> this occurred against a background of legislative developments prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, the establishment of AHEAD by individuals working in the higher education sector and the introduction of targeted funding initiatives supporting access to higher education by students with disabilities.
>
> **(Ireland, 2001, p.71).**

Many barriers remain for adults with disabilities such as accessing the campus; difficulties in accessing personal assistants; accessing the academic curriculum; the lack of access to part time third level programmes, and the lack of disability awareness amongst teaching staff (Ireland 2001, p.65). These issues impact on the participation of students with disabilities in higher education, particularly mature adult students who wish to return to education after a long time. Within the academic tradition there is a need for more extensive research in the area of adults with disabilities in education so that policy and provision can be accurately informed about the needs that exist.

Barriers to Participation

Many problems still exist for those who have disabilities and this limits their participation and contribution that they can make to the education system and the community in which they live. One of the biggest issues for those who are disabled is that of poverty. Poverty and disability seem to be inextricably linked (CPA, 1995, p.1). In many cases courses are not available to people in their immediate area. Many people with disabilities are unable to travel independently and transport is a recurrent and major issue in terms of barriers to access (NIACE, 1999). Many buildings used for further education are still not accessible for people with physical disabilities, and this is a serious issue in the context of developing a model of life long learning for all.

Another issue is that of institutional discrimination. This is rooted in the assumptions of the traditional medical view of disability which suggests that individuals with a disability, whatever the cause, are unable to ensure a reasonable quality of life by their own efforts. This approach is rejected by a growing number of people and their organisations who argue that it is not individual impairments, which prevent people from participating but prejudicial attitudes and disabling environments. There is also the issue of negative past experiences of learning that some adults may have experienced in both the traditional school provision and that offered in special schools. This may have arisen out of prejudice against people with disabilities and the manner in which they were labelled because of their disability. This is also associated with low expectations from teaching staff which can also be a barrier to people learning (NIACE, 1999).

The transition to adulthood is a very important one in any persons life, but yet there is an expectation that for those with disabilities that their education would finish when they reach that transition point. Families and carers of adult disabled learners are often unaware of the opportunities that exist in the education sector for further education and training. This is due to patchy interagency collaboration and lack of clarity about accessing these courses. These difficulties also add to the barriers faced by disabled adults accessing educational opportunities (NIACE, 1999).

The issue of equality is very important for those with disabilities. Actual equality depends not simply on having formal rights to participate, but on having the resources to exercise that right. Equality of participation requires policies and practices which enable people with disabilities to be in a position to partic-

ipate on equal terms, that they have access to resources for capacity building; that they can access transport; that they can access information appropriately formatted; that they can access buildings; that they can have access to interpretation. Equality of participation also ensures that people with disabilities are motivated to participate and are accepted by others as full participants.[1]

The barriers faced by adults who are disabled accessing education are enormous. Providers who seek to provide meaningful opportunities for those who wish to participate face many challenges at local, and national level.

Overall conclusions

The central argument of this paper was that the state in the Republic of Ireland did not prioritise adult education for those with disabilities. Where adult education was prioritised it was in the context of its capacity to provide second chance education opportunities to enable people to contribute to economic development.

Adults with disabilities have received scant attention in the many discussions and debates surrounding educational provision for those with disabilities. The emphasis was firmly placed on children in receipt of primary and post primary education and the most appropriate settings for their participation in this process. Many pieces of legislation have been passed which focus on the rights of those with disabilities, but many weaknesses still exist in this regard. The state has much to achieve in the development of an education system that will adequately meet the needs of all participants. This is particularly the case in the adult education sector where the needs of those with disabilities has largely been ignored in educational settings. In the area of training many courses developed as a result of ESF funding. Central to this was the concept of open employment, yet links with industry were poorly developed. Many participants were unable to fully benefit from the training offered because they had not participated in educational experiences that would have enabled them to fully benefit from the training offered.

The role of state provision and its influence on the development of adult education for people with disabilities has not been researched in any great detail. With respect to the experiences of adults with disabilities there is a paucity of research conducted in this area at both international and national levels. If this remains the case it will be difficult to inform policy and provision in this area

when such a lack of knowledge exists. From research that currently exists adults with disabilities experience many barriers when they wish to access education. In many cases courses are not available in their immediate area, there are issues surrounding accessibility to buildings, institutional discrimination and lack of information in appropriate formats in relation to courses on offer. While some progress has been made in addressing the rights of people with disabilities many challenges lie ahead in the development of an inclusive model of adult education particularly in the context of a learning society.

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Community Learning & Development – a Scottish Perspective

Sean Stronach

This article is based on a presentation to the Adult Education Organisers' Association annual seminar in Westport, Co Mayo, 15th May 2003.

Community based learning is an activity that in one sense is very much rooted in the specific concerns of local people and groups. In another sense, a key part of such learning is an interest in supporting people to see the bigger picture beyond their own communities and, ultimately, internationally. From that perspective I hope that my experiences of community learning and development in Scotland will be of interest. It is already clear that there are areas of common interest, and while set in different historical and cultural contexts, I hope that drawing these comparisons will prove useful.

Community education in Scotland has always been a bit of an anomaly in that it has sought to bring together a range of disciplines focussed on community based learning. From my training as a community educator and my experience in youth and community work, I hope I can present a perspective on what it means to bring together a community learning and development approach. These can sometimes seem like quite distinct strands of work with communities – i.e. youth and community work approach and community based adult learning approach.

Communities Scotland

This, in essence, is the role of the unit that I work for within Communities Scotland[1], which is an executive agency of the Scottish Executive – the devolved administration for Scotland. Our role is to act as what they call an 'outward-facing delivery-arm' of the Executive – which in simple terms means we help people out there to make sense of what the Executive is saying that its policy is, and then maximise their contribution towards it and the impact that it has on individuals and communities. The remit of the organisation is very wide-ranging, covering many aspects of the regeneration of communities – both urban and rural.

This work was initially focussed on the built environment – housing essentially – but with a growing recognition among policy makers that regeneration can only happen when communities themselves are fully on board, the organisation has had to shift to having a focus on community empowerment as well. There is a recognition that a vital part of the empowerment of communities is about their access to learning opportunities that promote their ability to act together to improve the quality of their lives and that of their communities – which is why our learning focussed unit is now based within Communities Scotland.

This article will explore why that link between community learning and community empowerment has been made and what it means in practice. First of all, however, it is probably worth saying a bit about the history and in particular why we are now using the terminology of "community learning and development" to describe this type of work. In doing so it will also touch briefly on some of the history of the field.

The Challenge of Change

Community education as a concept, and as an approach to service delivery, became widespread in Scotland with the adoption of the recommendations in the 1975 Alexander Report "The Challenge of Change". The Alexander Committee had been set up with a remit to report on Adult Education in Scotland and in doing so identified a need to ground adult education more firmly in the needs and aspirations of local communities and in particular noted that a link with community development "provides new opportunities for reaching large sections of the population untouched by adult education". It saw potential for real synergy between these different strands of work and, though recognising that adult education had particular "characteristics and requirements", its aims could only be met by utilising the resources and experience available through the others.

The change that the report therefore recommended – that adult education be reorganised as part of community education services, alongside youth work and community work – was subsequently adopted by most, though not all, of the Scottish local authorities. However the extent to which that integration took place at local level is another question.

Over the next twenty years, the newly created community education services saw various ups and downs, but there was a general feeling that after the momentum provided by the Alexander Report, community education did not have the priority that it needed – particularly after 1979 under a Conservative administration that regarded community education with not a little suspicion.

The situation changed in 1997 with the election of the Labour Government and the subsequent commitment to devolution to the Scottish Parliament, which was carried through in 1999. In the period before the Scottish Parliament was elected the Labour Administration set up a committee to again examine the role of this area of work.

The report produced – "Communities: Change through Learning"[2] issued in 1999 – was used as the template for subsequent guidance to local authorities and suggested three central changes:

Firstly, that there should be a change in terminology from community education to community learning. This was suggested for two main reasons. The first of these was a view, particularly from practitioners and communities themselves that 'education' was a term that was likely to put people off becoming engaged. The second was that 'community education' had become synonymous with a service that was provided by local authority departments, and that it should in fact explicitly cover a much wider range of providers, such as voluntary organisations in a range of fields, e.g. social workers, health professionals, economic development workers and others whose activities could be defined as involving communities in learning.

Secondly there was a fresh attempt to put community education, now community learning, back at the heart of key areas of the new government's policy agenda. This focused on three areas:

- *Social inclusion*: where community education was seen to have a role in promoting opportunities for the most disadvantaged in society.
- *Lifelong learning*: this related particularly to the government's agenda in widening access to learning and the view that community based learning could provide the first step to further more formal education.
- *Active citizenship*: focussed around a concern that people were becoming less interested and more apathetic about mainstream political activity and that getting them more involved in volunteering or campaigning was a way to counter these developments.

The third major recommendation of the report was that a partnership-based approach needed to be developed to the provision of community learning. It suggested that local authorities take the lead in convening partnerships that would develop a Community Learning Strategy for their area. These partnerships should involve Further Education institutions, voluntary and community groups, economic development agencies, health boards, and any other agency with an interest in community learning.

Subsequent strategies should set a vision for community learning in the area and commit partners to joint action to work towards it. The principle vehicle for doing this would be the development of Community Learning Plans at local community level.

Active citizenship

These different initiatives sought to move community education to a role that was more central to key government agendas, while simultaneously making it a concern and interest for a wider range of agencies and sectors, who were increasingly being urged to 'engage' or 'involve' communities.

While the guidance issued in 1999 might have been expected to have a lifespan of five years or so, the policy agenda has continued to move quickly as the Parliament and the devolved administration have moved to make their mark in a range of areas. This has meant that social inclusion and lifelong learning continue to be high priorities but also that the agenda around active citizenship has taken on a new lease of life, although its direction has changed.

In particular, there is an increased concern that efforts by agencies to 'turn-around' disadvantaged communities have been characterised by a top-down approach and have been imposed on communities, rather than having been characterised by efforts to work with communities and enable them to take action to identify and act on their own needs and aspirations.

There is perceived to be a need for communities to be able to take on a more empowered role in making demands on the services that are provided for them, and in developing responses to their own perceived needs in terms of improving their quality of life.

Community Planning

This is particularly current in Scotland as new statutory duties have just been placed on local authorities and other public service agencies to engage in a process of community planning, which brings together all the key deliverers of public services, and voluntary and community bodies to determine priorities and make decisions about service delivery. If – as Scottish Ministers have repeatedly said – communities and their views should be at the heart of this process, there is seen to be a clear need to support people in communities to engage in it.

There was seen to be a clear role for community learning in achieving this. The key way that it could do so is to build social capital in communities, by increasing their knowledge, skills, confidence, motivation so that they could bring influence to bear on the issues that affected them.

In order for this to happen there was a perception from policy makers that there needed to be a renewed focus on bridging the gap between 'community education' (i.e. the provision of learning opportunities in communities) and 'community development' (i.e. the development of approaches that support the capacity of communities to act together to affect social change and influence the world around them). Of course this is an implicit admission that the original agenda of the Alexander Report, back in 1975, has not in fact been particularly successful.

Now in Scotland we are talking about a concept called "community learning and development". The Scottish Executive has now defined this in its new draft guidance on community learning and development[3] as "informal learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities. The aim of this work is to strengthen communities by improving people's knowledge, skills and confidence, organisational ability and resources."

What this means in practice for the different parts of the field of community learning and development, including adult education, is that the Scottish Executive is looking for them to support communities to tackle "real issues in people's lives, for example, better health, education, transport, more jobs and less crime". In addition there is also an implication that a key focus of all this work will be helping to empower communities to take action – particularly in terms of supporting them to work with providers of public services (whether health, education, social care or whatever).

Implications for community based education

While this particular initiative in terms of policy is relatively new, we can start to outline what it is likely to mean for those working mainly in the community based adult education field in Scotland.

Firstly it will involve establishing, re-establishing or building on the links that adult educators have with communities. Now and then there are good examples of projects and initiatives that have been very effective in connecting with people's issues and concerns, and supporting them through learning to act to improve lives in their communities.

However there is still a view that too much of adult education provision is about simply putting on classes or programmes for people that either do not really support them to move on and develop, or, where they do so in a way that is purely focussed on individual personal development.

While the Scottish Executive does not want to discourage the view that community based learning can be about personal development and people getting on in life, it does emphasise that it should go hand in hand, wherever possible, with approaches that support people to be aware of their situation and that of their community, and then build their capacity to take action to address it.

This increased emphasis will mean developing services and approaches with communities that start basically with an analysis with communities and groups of their needs and aspirations. This will mean adult educators not only working more closely with community development colleagues, but also with a range of other public service agencies that are working particularly with disadvantaged or marginalised groups and communities.

A good example of this which is currently ongoing in Scotland is in relation to adult literacy, where new funding from the Scottish Executive over the last couple of years has enabled community based learning providers to forge new links with a range of agencies and organisations working with different groups, for example homeless people, people with mental health problems, refugees and asylum seekers, and others, in order to build appropriate responses to their literacy needs.

Issues to be addressed

We now have a situation in Scotland where the newly rebranded field of community learning and development has a focus and place in the spotlight that many with an interest in the field have worked hard to achieve. However there are key challenges still to be addressed.

Perhaps the greatest of these is the need to find and develop people who have the skills, abilities, and – crucially – the value base to be involved in this fundamental engagement with communities. The value base which the Scottish Executive has recognised practitioners in this area include the following:

- Empowerment
- Participation
- Inclusion and equal opportunity
- Anti-discrimination
- Self-determination
- Mutuality and reciprocity
- Partnership

Employers tell us that they have great difficulty in finding the right people and the right number of people to undertake this work. In this area the Executive is looking to training providers to go to greater lengths to develop work-based routes into the community education-related professions, so that people in communities can themselves progress into employment in this area – they after all are the people most likely to have the skills, knowledge and experience to do so most effectively.

The second challenge relates to the nature of working with communities and the tension that lies between the priorities that communities might develop and the priorities that agencies and governments identify as important. The reason that policy makers are now so interested in this area of work is that they see community-based learning practitioners as having well developed and trusting relationships with communities. Of course these relationships, where they are successful, have been built up through a long process of working with and listening to communities.

Agencies have their own priorities and will be seeking to deliver on these. However, they are now also being told that they must have regard to the priorities that communities identify. There is obviously going to be a tension in that

situation, which requires skilful negotiation and a willingness on the part of organisations to engage in genuine dialogue with communities. In Scotland this will require a huge shift in culture in public service organisations.

The final challenge relates to another strand of policy across all levels of government that has really come into its own in the last couple of years, that of developing a focus on the outcomes of public service interventions i.e. the change that they actually produce in communities. There is now no escaping the reality that, because of the higher profile for this area of work, there is also a greater scrutiny of the effectiveness of the results.

A small-scale research project was recently completed into the recording of outcomes in community based adult learning in Scotland (the report is on the website). Not surprisingly practitioners and participants generally agreed that community-based adult learning has a range of important impacts for individuals and communities, such as building confidence and motivation, and raising expectations. These benefits are important in themselves but are also seen to underpin further impacts across a range of areas, including employability, promoting community involvement and in developing a learning culture.

However, providers found it difficult to record hard information about the full range of benefits they perceived as having accrued for individual participants (though much qualitative evidence is apparent). When it came to looking at the wider benefits for communities, this difficulty was even more pronounced and, though practitioners and participants again said that they perceived real benefits, the complexity of the issue made it difficult for practitioners to see how they could begin to record outcomes in this area.

I hope that this article has provided a useful insight into developments in Community Education in Scotland over the last 25 years but I should emphasise that many of the issues discussed are still the subject of lively debate. Perhaps the key message from this which is transferable to any context is the importance of having the debate and not being overly concerned about the tensions inherent in that. Furthermore, if the ultimate aim is to ensure a stronger voice for communities themselves, their place in that debate must also be considered.

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Endnotes

1 Further information on Communities Scotland can be found on its website: www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk

2 The report is available from the Scottish Executive website at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w3/cctl-00.htm

3 *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* (Scottish Executive, 2003)

Reflections

Liam Bane

Last season's fruit is eaten
And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail.
For last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words await another voice.
(T.S. Eliot, from Little Gidding)

The Adult Learner, the journal of adult and community education in Ireland, was first published in 1985, right in the heart of the black eighties. It was a bad time too for adult education and the Adult Learner was another attempt to raise the profile, to call the attention of the relevant authorities to the fact that we were out there needing attention. The stated aim of the journal was to provide a forum for discussion of relevant issues and to highlight the many innovative projects and programmes which were then being developed by Adult Education Organisers and by community groups.

I like to think that the journal has been successful in meeting these objectives and indeed, if nothing else, it has left a valuable record of these developments and some of the more important initiatives in this most beleaguered of education areas over the years. It has tried too to represent the different voices – the tutor, the organiser, the academic, the voluntary worker and the Adult Learner.

Now in the year of 2003 as I vacate the editorial chair and gladly hand on the post with relief and without regret, I have invited myself to make a contribution and to indulge myself in offering some reflections on times past and trends present and future.

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We first met back there in 1980 in the Gresham Hotel in Dublin, a diverse group of individuals, most of us lately released from the secondary school classroom - the first batch of fulltime appointments in the field of adult educa-

tion – the untilled field. Within this room were varying amounts of eagerness, ignorance, anticipation, apprehension, interest, apathy. To accomplish the daunting task of developing a comprehensive adult education service, we were equipped with an ambitious job spec and very little else. The Minister arrived and the Minister spoke the ritual words – we were, it seems, making history but beyond that he said little that was memorable but then the truth was that there was little to be said. In fact most memorable was the CEO's tale about the brilliant Dublin woman who went to work in Paris, a tale which doesn't need to be repeated here. Thus entertained, we went forth to view the green field.

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Reflection: What were we like back then? Like some demented medieval knight wandering about the territory, seeking out the windmills to tilt at - and if we found them, no doubt they would have been born again as adult education classrooms. Ideal in fact –old, cold and out of use for years. Like some ancient mariner, with the albatross firmly fixed about the neck, seeking an audience and inflicting the tale on any and all who would stop to hear. But was anyone listening?

Yes there were listeners and an audience was found. There were believers out there, mainly women, who wanted to take part and to be part. They took the concept and shaped and shook and moulded it until it was their own very thing. No matter that they weren't familiar with Freire. Because so much of their lives was spent in coping and shaping and moulding and creating, they knew instinctively what it was they wanted and how to make it happen.

It was fascinating to watch them, to see how another problem was just another challenge, another obstacle to be negotiated and they would stay with it until a solution was found. Perhaps not the ideal solution but always the practical, the one that allowed the learning to take place. All would be included, all would be welcome here as that inbuilt mother-instinct insisted that there were no outsiders. Such patience they showed and such respect.

No crèche, no class. No crèche? Alright then, let's make a crèche. Who will mind the children? We will mind the children, just as we will shift the furniture every morning and every evening, we will sweep the floors, we will plan the programme, we will clean the toilets, we will supply the heaters, we will enrol the students, we will make the tea, we will organise the open day, we will supply

the milk and biscuits….
"No one should leave here a lesser person than when they came in."

How do you know the adult education organiser? That's the one with the Super ser in one hand and the sewing machine in the other, looking over both shoulders at the same time. Some Really Useful Knowledge was acquired – start the temperamental heater, kickstart it if necessary.

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Unfortunately, the patience and the respect that they showed was not always reciprocated. At times it was not pleasant to observe and be powerless as managers and principals and people of my own profession felt free to present as abrupt and rude and disrespectful. Of course, we were intruders, of course we did not matter, of course it was obvious where adult education was positioned in the scheme of things. But it was shameful that people so patient and committed and respectful should be treated like they had no business here.

To watch school managers, usually clergymen, shifting in the chair or pacing back and forth when asked for a room in *their* school to house an art class for our senior citizens. Moving targets who would then, inevitably it seemed, never say no and never say yes but find a way out – usually it was referred to the Board of Management … the Bored of Management…

To hear a school principal when negotiating rent for a room in her school referring to 'middle class women passing the time'. To hear another school principal complain that all the toilet rolls were being used and not being paid for - we did offer to introduce a recycling programme. And another principal of a private school in glorious Foxrock when asked for a room for a literacy class for travellers. Can't you just imagine it? No, very sorry, a teacher's handbag was stolen from a classroom here the other day. Long and frustrating debate and then as you stand outside, a van goes by and the comment "There go your people".

"Dear Minister, we are finally appealing to you because we have explored every other option with varying degrees of failure..' Thank you, of course I will come and visit you and I will tell you what a wonderful job you are doing and I will give my word as a politician and I will get back to you. Not one but three Ministers of Education (no Science then) and none of them got back. The pub-

lic representatives democratically elected came to visit on open days and traipsed through and smiled and joked and said what a wonderful job we were doing and left.

Questions were raised and questions still remain. There was the inability of the formal system to either cooperate or understand, for this was a new phenomenon which was happening outside the formal system, designed and delivered with style and panache and downright good humour by people with no vested interest – people who organise and manage a programme of seventy classes with a thousand students and not a single post of responsibility, for which in the formal system one receives a handsome gratuity regardless of numbers.

Yes, even 'thank you' would have been nice at the time.

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The introduction of the ALCE (Adult Literacy and Community Education) fund in 1985 is a significant milestone in according adult education a status and a recognition which were previously lacking. The importance of this funding was not certainly in the amount of money allocated – one million pounds among 38 VECs – but its importance lay in the fact that it was a statement of need. The money was specifically allocated to facilitate the development of education programmes in areas of greatest need – the term 'disadvantaged' was used at the time. This relatively small amount seemed a princely sum then but to those accustomed to famine, the crumbs are welcome and the ALCE fund was crucial in two important areas:

a) It provided a minimal security for Adult Literacy Schemes, which were struggling and entirely dependent on voluntary effort. It was also a breakthrough in that it was the first time a government, while still refusing to acknowledge the extent of the problem, did recognise the existence of a literacy problem on this island.
b) It did enable Adult Education Organisers to set about developing some kind of coherent adult and community education service.

Community education programmes, too, were accorded an element of security and continuity. There were of course, and still are, fundamental problems to be addressed in relation to accommodation, staffing and resources but it was

wonderful to experience in those early days groups of adult learners coming together in community centres, halls and prefabs to sit with a tutor and debate, discuss and support one another. Those magnificent part-time tutors who from very early on had grasped the fact that essential to any imparting of knowledge or facilitating of learning was the development of self confidence and the need to foster a sense of self worth and repair damage inflicted by previous experience of 'education'.

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Reflection: The late Mao Tse Tung wasn't right about many things but he might have had a point when he promoted the notion of university professors being sent to work in the fields every five years. It would maybe be a good thing for those involved in the formal system to take time out and spend some time in the non formal arena. It brings an appreciation of the distinction to be made between education and learning and with that comes the full realisation of the damage done to Irish education by the imposition of the ill conceived so called points system. Quite simply, the points system was the introduction of a competition for places at third level and those who had the means set about making it their own, going so far as to finance a thriving education factory or grind school industry to compensate for those teachers who were not skilled in delivering the points – it may even have been to compensate for those teachers who had a different perspective and who thought maybe that education was not counted in points. To ask the question 'How else can we allocate places?' is to pretend that there was a real quest for a viable alternative and to opt for the expedient did a major disservice to the concept of education in the Irish context and the idea of a university did not receive the debate and discussion which it merited.

The points system presents difficulties for school authorities. 'What do points make? Points make prizes' was the cry of Bruce Forsyth and it is not inappropriate to introduce the analogy of game show because that is what we are reduced to. The points system presents difficulties for teaching, in regard to both content and method.

Most of all, the points system has presented difficulties for students, whose native talents have been too often been sacrificed on the altar of achievement. Too many students have not been involved or interested and this is borne out by the manner in which these students later in life become learners, interested

and involved and committing what used to be the ultimate sin, taking pleasure in it.

A rapprochement will have to be found between the formal system and adult education provision, especially now as schools and colleges with falling student numbers have discovered the need to accommodate and even welcome adult learners.

Some schools and colleges have made the transition to places of adult learning by a partial adoption at least of adult learning methodology and by promoting an adult learning ethos. Others, however, perhaps seeing the move primarily as a means of retaining teaching posts, have simply continued as an extension of the second level system with the old formalities still firmly in place and the old production method with teacher as the fount of all knowledge wired for transmission only. There is an issue here which requires urgent attention and it is one which, I would suggest, ought to be high on the agenda of the recently formed (or is that imposed) National Adult Learning Council. If this issue is not addressed satisfactorily, then much of the progressive and innovative developments of the past twenty years will be undone and colonisation will be complete.

One question immediately arising from this: Where now the much cherished Adult Learning Centres, with classrooms, resource rooms, crèche and canteen facilities, long held by the Adult Education Organisers' Association to be the ideal situation in which to host all kinds of programmes of adult learning?

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Finally, *reflection* or what now? Over the past six years particularly, we have seen a significant injection of funding into the adult and community education area. The work of agencies such as AONTAS and NALA in promoting adult education over the years and the genuine commitment and sheer persistence of individual AEOs working within resource starved VECs have finally been recognised and rewarded. There is now a climate of support and encouragement and real progress is being made in important areas. Although much has changed, much too remains the same. A more organised and planned approach is being attempted, but our old friend Ad Hoc is still loitering with intent – witness the manner in which the recent Back to Education Initiative was rolled out. There is an urgency in spending the money, there is more

reflection required on how best to spend it. There has been an increase in the employment of fulltime staff, the exploitative situation of part-time tutors has not changed.

The role of the Adult Education Organiser has changed. In future, recruitment notices may read:

Wanted. AEO to manage adult education system. Accountancy skills essential.

Liam Bane is Adult Education Organiser with Co. Dublin Vocational Education Committee and he has been Editor of the Adult Learner since 1985.

Towards A Pedagogy of Demystification

Aideen Quilty

The ethos of women's Community Education has been described as 'being based in *non-hierarchical, autonomous, democratic* and *participatory* principles, involving a critique of existing structures and curricula, and the development of alternative educational models and materials' (Smyth: 2002).

Given the historical connection between community education and feminist empowerment methodologies, the expansion of community/university partnerships within Women's Studies is not surprising. The point of confluence between the academic discipline of Women's Studies and the ethos and practice of community education offers a powerful opportunity to explore the inherent tensions and learning potential of a radical adult higher education practice.

Whilst the praxis informing such pedagogy derives from my involvement with the WERRC[1] Women's Studies Community Outreach Programme, this article aims to locate such teaching and learning experiences within the context of the abstract knowledge-base of the institution and the centrality of experience to community education and feminist empowerment methodologies. By exploring some of the underpinnings of this relationship, which I term 'Pedagogy of Demystification', I hope to contribute to the broader debate on higher educational participation from the particular position of the mature learner.

Women's Community Education

The development of the Irish community education sector stemmed from the nationwide, organic explosion of women's groups in the 1970's and 1980's. Emerging mostly in "urban working class areas, badly effected by high rates of unemployment and dealing with high youth dependency" (DES: 2000: 111),

these women's groups generated valuable knowledge and experience. This provided the impetus for the broader community education and community development movements, described as 'amongst the most dynamic, creative and relevant components of Adult Education Provision in Ireland' (DES: 2000: 112).

Acknowledged in the *White Paper on Adult Education* as meriting particular recognition for its significant contribution to defining the character of community education in Ireland, the women's sector was specifically lauded for its capacity to target those most disadvantaged or 'hard-to-reach audiences' (DES: 2000: 71). While this recognition is welcome, there is an implicit danger that the sector's contribution be perceived within policy and funding arenas as limited to non-accredited, in-formal learning.

Community education does not exist in a vacuum. It is contextualised as a branch of the more generic adult education, itself a contested arena. As described by O'Connell, "the field of adult education is a diverse and eclectic mix of agendas, practices and experience and is not necessarily characterised by consensus" (2002: 13). In addition, community education is situated within the broad policy framework and growing discourse of lifelong learning thus benefiting from the "legitimised arguments for progression, credit accumulation, diversification of provision and flexible route ways between home/work and education" (DES: 2000: 69). Therefore, perhaps a more useful tool is to conceive adult, second-chance, community and continuing education as practices that centre on the adult learner's re-engagement having exited from the system at an earlier stage in life (DES: 2000: 28).

The reality of this contextual matrix is important. Capturing the ideals of lifelong and lifewide learning, sectoral development and expansion within women's community education have resulted in educational provision across non-formal, in-formal and crucially formal learning settings.[2] Of significance is the key role played by women learners themselves in demanding formally accredited programme provision, accessible to them in their communities. In this context it is not surprising that FETAC[3] awards are now common-place.

Connections and partnerships are being forged with Universities and Higher Education Institutions resulting in, though not limited to, significant community outreach provision at tertiary level.[4] Such provision offers a range of accredited programmes and progression pathways for students.

Community Outreach Programmes – The Easy Solution?

McGivney refers to the 'monotonous regularity' with which barriers to adult participation in learning emerge (cited in AONTAS: 2002: 9). In terms of institutional responsibility we can identify the physical structure and organisation of the learning situation as key. On one level outreach provision addresses this barrier, provided it is organised at a time suited to participants[5]. However, to regard the simplistic physical interpretation of 'outreach' as the panacea to participation barriers is erroneous. Community outreach implies more than simply relocating the institution. Beyond this we need to take cognisance of the fact that psychological and learning barriers mitigate against full participation and are as predominant in outreach programmes as they are on-campus.

It is this notion of psychological (identity) and learning (educational context) barriers that I wish to expand upon. I hope to move from the 'learner problem: learner solution' approach by interrogating the role of the Institution within the learning process. As Taylor argues, "curriculum, pedagogy and the structure of the learning experience have naturally been uniform and relatively inflexible" (cited in AONTAS: 2002: 9). Radical solutions, I suggest, require a re-imagining of the learner context and a deliberate acknowledgement of the development of the learner's identity both prior to and during the programme. It is within this re-imagining that a 'pedagogy of demystification' can be situated.

Demystifying Learner Identity and Context

Drawing on Weil's categorisation of Learner Identity (the individual learning needs) and Learner Context (the needs of the institution)[6] is a useful starting point (cited in Fleming: 1999). However, I extend the concept of learner identity to involve the complex process of interaction with education that results in the student owning their identity, or sense of self, as a learner.

Fleming and Murphy, in their research on adult learners at NUI Maynooth, attest to the fact that mature students are marginalized within the higher education process due to dissonance between their learner identity and the learning context. They found that "it was the learning process itself that presented students with the most difficult barriers to achieving a degree" (1999: 57). They suggest that a latent conflict exists between the unstructured, experiential knowledge of the mature student and the highly structured, theoretical knowledge of the institution, referred to respectively by the authors as 'common' and 'college' knowledge.

This dissonance is captured succinctly by a participant within the WERRC Research study:

> *A Whole New World (2003: 44):*
> Doing the Certificate got me used to the type of, you could say academic discourse with quite a lot of stuff I read which otherwise would have made it very difficult for me to take that step [onto the Modular Degree programme].

However, such conflict is not simply limited to on-campus provision. That the 'learner identity' is of central importance to the community education process is clear. One of the key challenges for the mature woman student is that of psychological alienation from the educational process. Debilitating past-experiences constitute a major learning and participation barrier for the student, in particular their prior experience of exams and assessment procedures. This has resonance with the 'Educational Self-Concept' referred to by Bowman et al (cited in McGivney: 2001: 71). They identify a direct correlation between what individuals believed about themselves educationally, their personal sense of capacity and their perceived educational status, as 'thickie', 'brainy' etc. and their participation levels in education.

Fleming suggests that learner dissonance or learner conflict is largely manifest in the essay writing and examinations, 'causing major anxiety for students and creating dissonance for their learner identity' (1999: 57). The question is: how do students communicate their knowledge and educational development in a manner that meets with the requirements or needs of the institution? In other words, how can the student harness their new knowledge and translate it academically through the assignment structure. Clearly there are implications for both teacher and learning institution. Simply replicating traditional teaching practice within higher education programmes could have serious detrimental consequences for the learner. Keeping in mind the centrality of examinations to the 'educational-self', a system of supports in relation to writing within the academic convention, and direct demystification of the assessment process, needs to be initiated.

The forthcoming CHANGE[7] report furthers this analysis outlining that women, while wanting tertiary educational opportunities leading to accredited awards, experience deeply rooted fear and anxiety in relation to the accreditation aspect of such levels of participation.

> The system has failed so many people – the level of fear at any mention of assessment – the feeling that without some formal accreditation I am not really good enough – how traumatic the process of accreditation can be for people cannot be underestimated.

Conversely, the development of a positive education self-concept occurs as part of an organic process of positive educational participation and recurring success. As the CHANGE research project highlights, accessing accredited programmes within community settings has an impact on learners' self-esteem and confidence, as "someone has said you have made the grade".

For many women, community-based feminist education offered them the first real chance at education following their traditional 'schooling' experience, which inhibited their development, and was marked by negativity and disempowerment. Nyland (WERRC: 1999) captures this empowering aspect of the process, arguing that feminist education emphasises an atmosphere in which feelings of inferiority and ignorance are replaced with self-esteem and self-determination. This development has been a crucial one for women. Maintaining this dynamic within the context of third level programmes affords participants the opportunity to address their personal or psychological barriers to participation whilst simultaneously being supported within a programme of study, which leads to recognised accreditation. I suggest that unveiling or demystifying learner's lived experiences, as both process and product, can be viewed as a central pedagogic tool in addressing 'learner dissonance'.

Higher Level Community Education: Critiquing experience

Whilst locating learner experience at the epicentre of adult educational processes is a generally accepted adult education and feminist empowerment principle, it is not an uncontested concept. Brookfield, by inserting the work of Herbert Marcuse into adult educational discourse, offers a provocative critique of traditional processes:

> Marcuse implicitly questioned the wisdom of "starting where the students are," long a prized tenet of the progressive adult education cannon. If 'where the students are' is living a falsely concrete existence, then we need to get as far from where they are as possible, chiefly by insisting on conceptual analysis (2002: 272).

Brookfield captures the tension between experiential and conceptual thinking, a tension inherent in mature student participation at third level, a tension played out within the assessment process as discussed. However, critiquing experience and subsequently "insisting" on conceptual analysis seems intrinsically flawed, as the move toward conceptual or abstract thinking is part of the educational process itself. A more learner centred approach is adopted by Fleming et al who ask how the student "can be helped to move" from the safety of common sense or experiential knowledge to a more critical abstract and unknowing space (1999: 60).

Gurin et al argue that thinking, which is active, effortful and conscious helps people develop new ideas and ways of processing information. Drawing on the work of Langer, they state:

> People will engage in such modes of thought when they encounter a situation for which they have no script or when the environment demands more than their current scripts provide, such as an encounter discrepant with their past experience (2002: 7).

Interesting here is the notion of experience as an effective conduit towards conceptual thinking. They suggest that discordant experiences, generating from student diversity within the classroom, facilitate this learner development. It could be suggested, therefore, that the in-group diversity characteristic of community education provides a real opportunity to extend the scope of personal experiences, thereby supporting the development of conceptual reasoning and critical thinking. Nonetheless, there is an implicit suggestion that such experiences must themselves be critically assessed.

Dewey refers to the quality of the 'human experience' within the teaching and educational context, implicitly recognising the relationship between experience and learner identity formation. Of particular interest is his notion of the 'experiential continuum', wherein Dewey argues there are experiences in education that are worthwhile, and those that are not (1938: 33). The key point is the forces outside the person that influence the experience of which he states (1938: 39-40):

> Experience does not simply go on inside a person…we live from birth to death in a world of persons and things…when this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an individual's body

> and mind…There are forces outside an individual which give rise to experience. It is constantly fed from these springs.

Similarly, Knowles afforded central importance to both the self-concept and experience as key assumptions about the characteristics of the adult learner: He has spoken of the growing reservoir of experience a person accumulates as they mature, becoming an increasing resource for learning (Smith, M,K: 2002). Nonetheless, experiences, like resources, are valuable only when tapped into and harnessed.

This analysis of experience has serious implications for the teacher. Within a demystifying approach, the role of tutor is interrogated and located centrally in relation to maximising learning from the starting point of the learners' experience. However, this position must be challenged and extended in order to promote a thinking continuum that bridges the gap between comfortable or experiential knowledge and more abstract knowledge. This forces the teacher to discriminate and challenge experiences in order to harness them as a radical educational tool.

The methodologies concomitant with feminist education principles deserve consideration. Barr, drawing on her experience of the radical Scottish women's education movement in the 1970's, offers a useful distinction between 'sharing' and 'dialoguing' experience. She argues that creating opportunities within which experiences are 'simply shared' amounts to nothing more than a process of sharing limited knowledge the women already have. She states:

> Those involved in dialogue help each other examine their understanding of the world, develop more complex understandings and, through identifying and clarifying problems and new questions to be asked, create new knowledge (1999: 42).

This reflects the "critical and dialectical" relationship advocated by Horton and Friere, which is necessary to create the conditions in which students can move beyond a knowledge based on experience, which they bring to the classroom.

Conclusion

To facilitate full participation by the mature woman learner within university accredited programmes, the education process needs to be humanised and demystified. In this way the learning process is not blocked either by unfamiliarity with academic convention or inadequate learning opportunities. The confluence of women's studies and women's community based education, due to their harmonious aims, ideals and ethos, provides some possibilities for exploring an alternative pedagogy. Re-imagining the role of the teacher in higher education is an essential starting point. I suggest that teacher intervention aimed at relocating experience within broader social contexts facilitates the student's progression towards the acquisition of more abstract knowledge bases.

Taking the lived experiences of the women participants as its starting point, feminist methodologies reflect the fact that experiences, like identities, are socially contextualised. Each teacher is committed to an educational philosophy grounded in understanding the woman's experience, and supporting students to critique such experiences by challenging the social, cultural, political and economic structures that have helped shape them. Making this journey is central to the development of a positive educational self-concept. Nowhere is this more apparent than in innovative outreach provision that extends beyond the 'menu' approach of ready-made courses simply delivered following traditional university methodologies. Effective outreach resembles more the 'ready steady cook' approach, which, in educational terms, implies utilising local knowledge and student capacity to generate dialogue beyond the texts or individual learner experiences thereby building the bridge to more conceptual thinking processes.

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Endnotes

1 The Women's Education Research and Resource Centre, at University College Dublin

2 See Thompson (2002:10) for a useful definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning settings.

3 FETAC: The Further Education and Training Awards Council

4 The CHANGE Research Project (Pending, Summer 2003), outlines a number of case studies referring to effective partnerships at tertiary level. (see Footnote 7)

5 Situational barriers are closely connected here and refer particularly to childcare and other care issues, transport and finance all of which constitute major barriers to participation especially for women.

6 Whilst I delineate both learner context and learner identity here, I do so for heuristic purposes. In reality both contexts are intertwined as they operate within a matrix of intersections between experience, self-worth, skills acquisition, information and analysis.

7 CHANGE Report commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, under the Education Equality Initiative, forthcoming: Summer 2003.

8 Cited in Fleming and Murphy: 1999: p. 60

Twenty Years a Growing

A View of the Development of Community Education in Ireland.

Berni Brady

In June 2003 the first programme of training and support for 35.5 newly appointed Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) took place in Dublin. The programme was organised by AONTAS, the National Association for Adult Education which has been given the responsibility of providing a training and support framework for the CEFs in collaboration with the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and the Department of Education and Science (DES). The recruitment of these workers whose role will be to support and develop community education was the outcome of a campaign by AONTAS for the recognition of community education and for the resources to support it. The White Paper, Learning for Life (2000) had devoted an entire chapter to community education, finally recognising its potential as *'amongst the most dynamic, creative and relevant components of Adult Education in Ireland'* (p.112). It also made a distinction between community education and education in the community thus drawing attention to how community education is understood differently by different stakeholders. AONTAS viewed it as the former and constructed a definition as follows:

> Community Education is a process of empowerment, social justice, change challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision making and policy formation within the community. It is distinct from general Adult Education due both to its ethos and to the methodologies it employs
>
> **(AONTAS Policy Series, 2000)**

After the publication of the Green Paper, *Adult Education in an Era of lifelong Learning* (1998), AONTAS, following a consultation process with its members and other key stakeholders had put forward the proposal for Community Resource Workers who would work locally as members of the adult education team to create links between formal and non-formal adult education.The thinking behind this proposal was based on the knowledge of a vast range of educational activities taking place outside the formal system which were attracting large numbers of learners who were unlikely to come to night classes in schools, and who were more than likely ineligible to participate in specifically funded programmes. It was no surprise that most of these were women who during the eighties began to come together in their communities to develop their own learning opportunities in response to issues such as poverty, unemployment and social exclusion.

By the time the White Paper was published in 2000 AONTAS had had more than ten years experience of working with community-based women's groups and seeing at first hand the important role they played in reaching the most disadvantaged learners. Not only did they provide individual education and training options based on the learners' needs, they also provided an opportunity for ordinary people to look at the bigger picture and to support them to become actively involved in their own communities. They also provided childcare and other supports for learners, supports which were generally missing from adult education provision at that time, but which are crucial to the involvement of people with families, particularly women, in education.

The number of groups mushroomed towards the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties and survived mainly on small grants from various sources including the then Department of Social Welfare, and their own fundraising activities. The women's groups spearheaded the development of community education and its uniquely learner-centred approach which was underpinned by the twin principles of consciousness-raising and empowerment . Their contribution to the development of individual women as well as their families and communities while enormous was still largely invisible, undervalued and grossly underfunded. In an attempt to gain recognition as a vital part of adult education provision the groups looked to AONTAS as an organisation within which they could form a lobby. The first groups began to join AONTAS in the early nineties, with six members in 1991 expanding to more than 70 individual groups and 27 networks catering for between 10 and 40 groups each by 2002.

New Opportunities for Women

In 1991 AONTAS set about accessing funding under the Community Initiative, New Opportunities for Women (NOW) and in 1992 began the first programme of support and training for the women's groups. AONTAS also began to lobby on behalf of the groups and in the process encountered a great deal of resistance to women's education from policy and decision makers as well as many of its own statutory members. The subsequent attempts by some members to block access to membership for community based groups almost split the organisation in two. Perhaps the combination of dynamic women and the notion of organising one's own learning opportunities proved to be too much for some traditional providers to stomach. However the external context in which adult education was operating was changing and once the groups saw the value of their own contribution they were not going to turn back. A further NOW programme from 1996-98 followed by the Women's Education Initiative (WEI) from 1998 and 2000 saw the groups moving from strength to strength building their capacity not just to expand learning activities, but to lobby for recognition, resources and representation.

A parallel development during the nineties was the establishment of the Community Development Programme (CDP) by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. This programme ensured three year core funding for groups addressing an anti-poverty agenda. While the women's groups were not defined as community development projects this programme recognised their contribution to women's educational and political development through the provision of specific core funding. This funding enabled the groups to plan their educational activities over a three year period and also provided financing for premises and key staff. This recognition of the value of the work of the groups was one of the key foundations for the development of women's community groups and networks.

By the end of the nineties, many other groups were also active on the ground responding to a range of needs and issues such as men's exclusion, disability, social inclusion for asylum seekers and refugees to name but a few. Many of the groups were also receiving support from local VECs as well as other agencies but there was little coherence in the sector. The Educational Equality Initiative (EEI), the successor to the WEI was already supporting a number of projects engaged in combating educational disadvantage and addressing the needs of a very broad range of target groups.

In August 2000, Minister Willie O' Dea, launching the White Paper on Adult education described adult education as 'the *last area of mass education to be developed in Ireland*' and 1997-2002 saw the biggest changes that had ever happened in the adult education sector. Spurred on by unprecedented resources and with the support of the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science providers began to expand and develop their work and, more importantly, to describe and think of adult education as a service. The use of the term adult education service promotes the notion of a more holistic and integrated approach rather than a series of targeted programmes or ad hoc developments which had hitherto (and to a large extent still are) been the case within the sector. Community education which provided a stepping stone for the most disadvantaged now had the opportunity to become a legitimate and important part of the adult education service.

Community Education Facilitators

The recruitment of the Community Education Facilitators by each Vocational Education Committee throughout the country has been an innovative development not just from the point of view of developing community education but also in that, for the first time, professional workers could be recruited on the basis of their experience of working in the community rather than just on the basis of qualifications. The flexibility achieved by this agreement has resulted in a group of professionals with a very wide range of experience of working with many of the target groups as well as within the formal strands of adult education. The recruitment has also meant that the VECs which are the lead providers of adult education are having to rethink their definitions of community education, thus providing an unprecedented opportunity for dialogue about and reflection on its development and how it will be supported financially.

Already the CEFs have started to take stock of what is happening within their local communities and to examine how they can assist the development of community education as part of a coherent whole. The Vocational Education Committees in taking responsibility for the development of community education faces many challenges. Perhaps the most important one is the challenge of integrating community education with their other services within a lifelong learning context, without affecting its essential ethos. This will require a more flexible approach to delivery and a trust that local communities know best what are their own needs. That is not to say that there shouldn't be accountability but a deft and sensitive approach is needed in order to build strong part-

nerships. Community education needs to be recognised for the added value it brings to the adult education service rather than being viewed as something people do before they start 'real education' Already there are some good models of practice operating within the system where the statutory providers have worked strategically with community based providers but such practice is inconsistent across the country. In many cases support for community based groups is often dependent on the interest of one or two key people rather than being a strategic objective of the statutory provider.

In order to do their job effectively the Community Education Facilitators will need to work as members of a team and in this context be supported by key personnel in their VECs in particular the Adult Education Organiser. This requires team building and consistency in approaches which are invariably linked into effective strategic planning at a local level. As the sector develops, specific programme funding will be required to do developmental and capacity building work. This funding should come under the auspices of the Adult Literacy and Community Education (ALCE) budget and be specifically ringfenced for community education with clear eligibility criteria and accountability processes. Such funding should be available separately from the BTEI community strand which is essentially used to fund individual courses. The development of local structures will also be key to the growth of a coherent integrated service where learners may progress from whatever starting point they choose to take.

Community education in Ireland has therefore come a long way from the wilderness in which it languished during the late eighties and early nineties but in reality it is only at the beginning of a new and exciting stage of development. If we in Ireland can build a system which is flexible enough to allow for organic growth, to listen to and act on the articulated needs of adult learners and to preserve the ethos and principles of community education while creating integrated progression routes for adult learners then we will indeed have achieved a great deal.

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An Education Initiative for Men

Noel Bradley

I see myself as a facilitator. I like to support and facilitate individuals or groups in their development. I learned to do this kind of work as a missionary priest in Africa. There I had come to realise that teaching, preaching, lecturing, telling people, did not change things very much but that listening, facilitating, empowering offered a better hope of change. More recently as a married man with two small children, I have tried to continue this same work in Ireland. Just over two years ago, a part-time job came up, with the Mevagh Resource Centre, in Downings, Co. Donegal, to work with marginalized rural men. Downings is a small peninsula in the North of Donegal. The aim of the project was 'to identify men's educational needs; to encourage them back into education and to provide appropriate courses to promote learning for men as a normal and acceptable male activity'. I thought that it would be something I could do. It would be something steady and fixed for me to do while I could do other kinds of facilitation work on the other days. It was a contract for three years, so I thought it should be fairly easy, in that time span, to gather some men into a group and get them moving. Not so easy, as I was to find out. The remaining part of this article is the story of what we tried to do.

Personal Contact Through Visitation

The first objective of the project was to use a 'neighbourhood' approach. The idea here is to listen to disadvantaged men talking about their needs and then try to deliver workshops or courses that meet these needs. This fitted very well with my ideas about facilitation and empowerment, so it was all very attractive. We had marginalized men, I had skills in facilitation, and I was going to get paid for work that I enjoyed. Everything seemed bright!

I knew from experience that sending out invitations for men to come into a

Centre for a group meeting would not work. In my hometown I had tried to start a men's group some time back. I sent invitations to all the groups in the area that I could think of. Two men came from another men's group as a support, two friends came along on my request, and one man responded to the invitation!

I began by trying to contact men personally. I went to some key figures in the community (the doctor, the parish priest, a retired sergeant) to find out who they thought were the marginalized men in the area. I got some names and some directions to where they lived. Off I went. If you don't know the area, a lot of time can be spent in just trying to find the house. Then of course, there is a good chance that the man won't be in when you find the house. If it is wintertime, you can be sure it will rain. You need a lot of faith and hope at this stage of the project, especially if you are working alone.

I found that I always got a hearing from men. They were welcoming. Some even invited me in and gave me a cup of tea on my first visit. But they were also very cautious. They were very keen to know WHO you were. I think it helped me that I was not a local man myself. I was kind of 'an outsider' and safe to confide in, in some way for them I think. I also was 'up front' about who I was and shared generously about myself and my experience if the opportunity came up. Whatever chance I had of making friends around the place, I thought that honesty and openness was the best policy with them.

There was a FÁS scheme in progress in the place, so I took it on myself to visit the men wherever they would be working. I have cold memories of standing chatting to men while they were building a wall and a north wind coming up Mulroy bay that would go through you.

The idea of this stage of the project was to go out and meet the men, listen to them, gather as much information as possible and build up trust between the men and myself. We were hoping at the Centre that on the basis of this listening we might be able to offer support on an individual or collective basis. The underlying principle here is based on the pedagogy of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. This states that time must be spent on building some basic trust between people so that they are able to dialogue together about issues that are of concern to them. Hopefully, with some support, encouragement and facili-

tation they will move on to acting on these issues. The key words then in the whole approach are: RESPECT for men in their respective situations, LISTENING to them and the issues they have strong feelings about, FACILITATING them around some of those issues. It is THEIR agenda that matters, THEIR feelings about things. In the strong feelings and emotions we have the energy to facilitate movement. 'Emotion', 'movement', 'motivation' are all linked at their root. The facilitation involves getting them into a learning environment, where they will be agents of their own development. The Combat Poverty Agency 2000 (The Role of Community Development in Tackling Poverty) puts it well "*Empowering people is, therefore, not just about saying that in principle people have a right to a say in how things are run or decisions are made. It has to be about transferring power by providing the appropriate resources, support, training and access to information that enable people experiencing disadvantage or poverty to act effectively*". The inspiration for this approach also came from neighbourhood work done by the Second Chance Education project for women in Letterkenny.

Educational Outings

After about three months I invited some men to come to a meeting where I shared with them what I had picked up and noticed in the community. We decided that a good way, perhaps, to get men together was to have a bus outing to some interesting place. We decided to go to Derry to visit a museum, the Heritage centre and the Bogside. We had lunch together. We had about twelve men. We continued to have these educational outings over the next two years (about three a year). We went to places like the Ulster American Folk Park outside Omagh and Tory Island. This was a good way to get men out of their fixed routine. It helped to get them used to being in a group and talking to one another. I think if I was doing it all again, I would actually spend more time meeting the men and listening to them. As the project grew I found that there was less and less time to actually meet the men and listen to them. The management team was keen that I begin to get something going for the men and I felt my own inner pressure to get something going as well, so that I would be seen to be doing something. On reflection now I think I should have tried to resist that temptation and should have spent more time listening, gathering information, and building trust. There are many isolated, marginalised men in the area that I have not met. I could have cast my net in a much wider way, but this needs time. But it would have given me a bigger pool of men (that I had met) to draw from whenever a particular event would be coming up.

Men's Health Is An Issue

We have been hearing a lot about the increase of male suicides in the media recently. We also know that men are more likely to die of heart attacks than women. There are more of them in prison and more of them die in car accidents. I could see from my visits and contacts that isolation, unemployment or underemployment, sometimes an excessive drink pattern, or arthritis or depression was taking its toll on men's health. Men also were interested in the health issue even if a lot of them would be reluctant to go to a doctor. In the light of all this we decided to have a Health day on a Saturday morning where men could get their cholesterol, blood pressure and body mass checked on a one to one basis. We are grateful to the Irish Heart Foundation for helping with this. While this was happening we ran a workshop that included a mime that posed a problem about poverty, depression and bad health. This was followed by a discussion. There was a quiz about local events and people with a prize for the winning team. We had some photographs to look at and share our thoughts and feelings on and we had a talk and discussion on men's health. We offered the men a complimentary lunch. Some of the men found it really difficult to be in a room with other men in this kind of open workshop setting. Most of them enjoyed it and thought it was a good idea. We had thirty-one men in attendance and since it was so successful and they wanted more of 'this kind of thing' we put on another health day on prostate and testicular cancer and heart disease. This went down well and we had twenty-four men present. One of the things that emerged from this meeting was that rural men need a particular kind of facilitation around these issues. For example humour helped a lot, the simplicity of the language used, the atmosphere set up by the presenter or facilitator. (You cannot presume that everyone in the room can read if you use an overhead projector! or understand if you use big words like 'vascular' or 'cardiac'). These health days went down so well that we have decided that we will have an annual health day for men. There has also been some commitment to the 'Go for Life' programme of physical exercises run by the NWHB. We hope that with time men will get used to being in a workshop or learning atmosphere and that it will be 'normal' to discuss personal and social issues in a group context.

Sharing Our Stories

We thought we would try to put on seven evenings where men could share some of their life experience. We advertised it as the different stages of a man's life: Growing up as a boy, Adolescence, Adulthood, Mid-life, Old Age,

Celebrating your life, Evaluation. We got two men to share something of their story and then hoped that this would encourage others to share something of their story. We began with about eight and finished with twelve. What happened during the process was that men just started talking about their past and did not really get to mid-life or old age. They were really interested in each other's stories. A lot of them had emigrated and worked in England and Scotland, so they had a lot in common. The whole experience convinced me that men will share and enjoy sharing each other's experiences once there is a bit of trust in the group and someone models it for them.

An Emergent Core Group

It is interesting that after this attempt at sharing our stories, this group wanted to continue to meet about every three weeks. We have continued to do that and some new people have joined this regular meeting. So far the meeting is taken up with just checking in with each other how we are and maybe looking at what might be coming up in the Men's Education Initiative. There have been suggestions to discuss certain topics, if only we could fit that in within the two hours of the meeting. We hope to offer some training in listening, communicating, dealing with conflict, making a speech or presentation, building community, social analysis, dealing with stress, in the Autumn of this year. But we will try to gear all this to their own concerns and interests. We are hoping that this group might form the core of the group and attract others. It would not be realistic to offer this kind of training before this. To talk of personal development, communication skills, assertiveness training is quite literally a foreign world to them. It does not even get a hearing. The same is true, I think, for talk about accreditation. When it comes to the really marginalised men, I often think that, accreditation is the 'pigs can fly' theory!

Other Activities

On a few occasions we have had key speakers to talk to the men e.g. about the situation in Northern Ireland. But it is mostly the other educated men and not the really marginalised ones who come to this kind of thing.

We also got seven men to do some FAS training (welding, cabinet making, plumbing, joinery) in Letterkenny about 26 miles away. One difficulty here was organising transport since the courses were held on different evenings and there is no public transport.

One key activity that goes on quietly while meeting the men is MENTORING. This might take the simple form of making a suggestion to a man to go for a medical check up or getting the St. V. de P. to cover a TV licence for a single man living in poor conditions or just taking an interest in a man's ongoing worries and concerns.

In the background to the work there are the usual management meetings, quarterly reports and evaluations. The neighbourhood worker in this particular example was working on his own so it was important that he would get good support from the management group responsible for the project and other members of staff at the Centre. Fortunately, in my case, this was provided. The management group supervising the project had representatives from FÁS, V.E.C., North Western Health Board and staff from the Resource Centre.

Finally, the men that we try to reach seem to be marginalised in all the areas of life. At a very basic level they don't have the economic or money power to improve their lot (usually unemployed or underemployed). They have no influence politically. You won't see them on TV or hear them on local radio. Many left home and emigrated with a primary education. Many are in poor health. They are not involved actively in the community. So while we try to reach out to them personally and facilitate them as a group, we are aware that the various structures (economic, political, transport, educational and medical) do not serve them well. They lose out in one or other, or a combination of all of them. The way society is organised and structured is also a huge part of the problem and not just the men personally. This raises further and deeper questions for all of us about the kind of society and the Ireland we want.

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Community Education Facilitators – Salvation for Community Education?

Susan Cullinane

A Community Education Facilitator (CEF) has been appointed in each VEC area since the beginning of this year. I was appointed CEF in Co Kildare, however I have been doing this work since 1998 in the post of Community Education Worker (CEW). This was one of the posts that provided a model for the CEF positions. In this article I propose to look at three main areas. What Community Education is and how it developed, the Community Education Service in Co Kildare and the opportunities and challenges that face CEFs in their work.

What is Community Education?

Community Education Defined

When the White Paper on Adult Education 2000 was being written there was much discussion about the definition of Community Education. One view is that it is any education that physically takes place in the community - in the local parish hall or community centre for example. Another view states that it is an approach to education in response to and rooted in the community (Learning for Life 2000). The definition proposed by Aontas is as follows:

> 'Community Education is a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community. It is distinct from general Adult Education provision, due both to its ethos and to the methodologies it employs.'
>
> **(Community Education 2000)**

This is the definition that informs my work. It makes clear that Community Education is about meeting the needs of individuals for learning, but also about addressing the needs of the community to critically analyse the society in which they live, and to engage in strategies for social change. If we focus solely on the needs of individuals then social change may happen, but as the cumulative effect of individual change. It does not automatically follow. Having collective action as an objective influences the way Community Education is planned and implemented. From this viewpoint Community Education can be seen to have a number of different levels moving from the Personal to the Community, Social and Political.

Historical Background

Community Education developed from Women's Community Education that began during the 1980's, a time of high unemployment and poverty. Women were precluded from accessing education and training due to a range of barriers including timing of classes, eligibility criteria, lack of childcare support and fees among others. Women realised that if they were to access the kind of education that would suit them, then they would have to develop it themselves - so they did. Women's Community Education began with small numbers of women meeting in local venues, deciding what they needed to learn, who should teach them, time of classes, arranging childcare and so on. Sometimes they had the support of the local VEC or parish priest - sometimes not. Groups raised funds themselves or applied to various agencies for once off grants. These groups developed and multiplied. According to research, there are 'in the region of 1,000 daytime women's groups throughout the country, with an estimated 30.000 women participating in them' (At the Forefront 2001: 27).

It did not stop there. Others saw how women developed educational opportunities for themselves, that it was local, flexible, non-threatening and provided a stepping stone to other opportunities. People tried the approach with other groups such as Travellers and Lone Parents to see if it could be successful with them too and it was. Community Education is now widely recognised as a successful method to reach marginalised groups.

Ethos

Community Education operates from a particular ethos. It is local to the participants; the group are in control of what, when, where and how the learning takes place: barriers to participation are recognised and supports put in place

to overcome them; the previous experience of the participants is taken as the basis for further learning. The outcomes are at two levels. At a personal level participants gain knowledge, skills and options for progression. At a collective level it builds the capacity of local communities to critically analyse the society in which they live and to take action to change it.

Co Kildare Community Education Service

The Adult Education Organiser (AEO) saw the vibrancy and potential of the sector in 1994 and appointed a part time CEW to support it. When that person left in 1997, Community Education groups made representation to the VEC to have the post reinstated on a full time basis. They saw the need for someone to do this work. I was appointed at the end of 1998.

Within the Community Education service the work falls into a number of areas:

- *Outreach* that includes support to existing and new groups as well as initiating groups in particular situations. It includes developing interagency responses with particular target groups e.g. Travellers, Asylum Seekers, Young Children.
- Supporting the *Networking of Community Education Groups.* In Kildare the umbrella support group for Community Education groups is Network Kildare. This is a voluntary management committee that provides support, publicity and educational opportunities for member groups. This includes mail outs, newsletters, representational roles, once off workshops, first step courses and accredited courses.
- *Course Development.* Support is provided through assistance in designing courses, sourcing tutors and through our annual in-service programme.
- *Funding* is provided through Community Education grants and groups are assisted in accessing funding from other sources.
- *Networking* for the sharing of resources, ideas and to avoid duplication is essential. We network both internally and externally. Externally we link with OAK partnership, Action South Kildare Community Development Company and Aontas among others.
- Influencing *policy* by feeding grass root experience into the policy process.

Opportunities and Challenges for Community Education Facilitators

With the appointment of CEFs there is an air of expectancy and excitement about the future of Community Education. However there is also a danger that

the CEF will be seen as the answer to all the difficulties Community Education faces.

Within a Community Education Service

- Community Education Ethos

It is important that the Community Education ethos permeate the work of the CEF. For instance, the work should take place in whatever local venue is appropriate for the group. There is likely to be a push from local schools with falling numbers that C.Ed use their premises and tutors. This may not be suitable for participants who have had negative school experiences. Successful secondary school teachers may not always make successful Community Education tutors.

Control of the Community Education project lies with the Community Education group. They decide what is to be learned, the methodology and the tutor. In other areas of the VEC service there is a series of courses offered and participants can choose from that or go elsewhere. Many groups ask for the 'VEC list' of Community Education courses that we can provide. They are surprised and relieved when they hear that there is no list, that our approach is to discuss with them what they have identified as a need and to explore with them how best to meet that need. It may be possible to do this through the Community Education service or to provide assistance in contacting a more appropriate agency.

- Moving from the Personal to Collective Action

As discussed earlier, an integral part of Community Education is the capacity building to address the educational and structural factors that result in the marginalisation of groups. There is a danger that Community Education becomes involved at the level of providing classes that meet individual needs at a personal level, without facilitating collective solidarity, social analysis and strategies for collective action. For example, Network Kildare offers a series of introductory courses that begin with Leadership Skills then moving on to Community Development, Social Analysis and Social Policy.

- Tutors

Due to the fragmented and dispersed nature of Community Education, tutors and committees are often isolated in their work and have few opportunities for

reflection. Bringing tutors and committees together for in-service makes them feel part of the Community Education Service and is an opportunity to acknowledge the work that they do. In Kildare there is an annual in service programme consisting of three full day sessions and a residential weekend.

- Accreditation

Accreditation can be a double-edged sword for many groups. While accreditation gives external validation to the learning that has taken place, it does not mean that without it no learning has occurred. Often the personal or group learning is valuable in itself regardless of whether it is accredited or not. The accreditation process can be arduous with many requirements to be met by the learners. Some institutions offer learner friendly continuous assessment and Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) which allows participants to gain exemptions for learning already achieved through their experience. One such institution is Waterford Institute of Technology with whom Network Kildare are jointly hosting a National Certificate in Humanities (Adult and Community Education) for people working in either a voluntary or paid capacity in community education or development.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is currently aligning accreditation and progression routes. It is crucial that Community Education is recognised as part of this system so that participants can enter at a first step course but have clear routes for progression.

- Funding

In Kildare the Department of Education and Science Community Education budget is the responsibility of the CEF. This budget includes a programme component from which we operate a Community Education grants scheme. Unlike other funding sources we have broad criteria, no closing date and we do not publicise in the media. For the most part the budget is intended to support groups that are in the early stages of development, rather than to provide long term sustainable funding. Once a group is up and running we will encourage and assist them to source additional funding elsewhere. We do not publicise because we would get many applications from groups who are in a position to make an application but who are not necessarily the most marginalised groups, who are the priority. Instead we advertise through our own newsletter and mailing lists. We target particular marginalised groups that are not receiving support from other sources.

Community Education at Local Level

VEC

In Co Kildare the Adult and Community Education sector of the VEC operates the team approach outlined in the White Paper on Adult Education. The AEO heads up a team that includes Community Education (including Back to Education Initiative), Information and Guidance Service, Literacy, Youthreach and VTOS. We have regular in-service days where the co-ordinators from each service meet and work on various issues that relate to the sector as a whole e.g. Long term planning, supervision, annual reports. This has the advantage of providing a forum in which relationships are built, so that we understand each other's work, can initiate joint projects and make referrals. Where VECs work in other ways strategies may need to be developed to make links with other services, to maximise the potential for collaboration and minimise the threat felt by some that a new staff member is going to encroach on their target group.

Representation on Local Adult Learning Boards (LALBs)

The issue of representation is outstanding in relation to the proposed Local Adult Learning Boards. Four representatives for Community Education to take account of Traveller and Disability interests, as well as the broader Community Education groups, is too little relative to the level of activity on the ground. This is something that needs to be addressed if the Community Education sector is to participate on an equal footing. The setting up of a local Community Education forum or network where discussion can take place and representation be made to the evolving structures is crucial if Community Education is to have a say in ongoing developments.

Interagency and Countywide Approaches

In each county there can be multiple agencies working with the same target group. It makes sense, therefore, for agencies to come together to develop joint projects for particular groups or to form a countywide grouping that has the advantage of addressing the issue more comprehensively, shares expertise, avoids duplication and maximises the benefits from resources. One example of this in Kildare is the New Communities Steering Group. This group developed from a one-day seminar. The first task the group set itself was to source funding to commission a piece of research to assess the current position of asylum seekers, refugees and low income migrant workers in the county. This was used to develop an action plan to address the needs identified. The group is current-

ly working on delivering awareness raising days and training for agencies in developing anti racism policies.

Community Education at National Level

CEF Support Structure

Each county has a different mix of agencies, groups and needs. VECs work in different ways and have various levels of engagement with the Community Education sector. It is appropriate, therefore, that a national support structure be put in place to provide the opportunity for CEFs to meet, share successes and develop strategies to maximise the potential there is in Community Education. It is important that this happen at an early stage so that there is some common approach within the CEF work.

National Adult Learning Council (NALC) and the Community Education Unit

The Community Education Unit when set up, will provide support in terms of research, a forum for discussion and technical inputs. I would hope that a coherent method of maintaining statistics for Community Education would be developed. It is difficult to collect statistical information across a sector that has so many types of projects. We do not want to make the reporting procedures for groups so onerous as to be off putting, but as we all know statistics are necessary to justify the case for increased resources.

There needs to be a clear line of communication between the Community Education partners on the LALBs and NALC so that the voices of Community Education participants and lessons from the ground can be fed into the policy process.

Funding

A key difficulty for Community Education has been the lack of sustainable mainstream resources available to it. Most groups have a variety of piecemeal funding sources, each with its own application process and criteria. This means that participants are continually chasing small sums of money to stay in existence. The BTEI is the Department of Education and Science's (DES) way of giving funding to Community Education. Ten percent of this scheme is to be allocated to Community Education each year. The BTEI is a positive step. It is the first time funding has been available from the DES for Community

Education groups and it will be an ongoing source of funding at least until 2006. However the application, implementation and reporting procedures are so complex that it poses a dilemma for groups. Of course they want the funding but unless the group has a worker or support person it is difficult to set up and administer. If this funding is only intended for groups that are at the stage of having paid staff then there is still a gap for local groups that are not at this stage and would like support to develop projects. It could be said that this is the role of the VECs and CEFs. If so, then the budget available to CEFs would need to be increased to allow for this.

In spite of the challenges that the Community Education sector faces it is an exciting time. Things are changing, progress is being made – there's much to be done. On a personal note – I am glad to have 34 new colleagues also working in the area – Welcome!

Susan Cullinane is Community Education Facilitator with Co Kildare VEC

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Book Reviews

Critical education against global capitalism: Karl Marx and revolutionary critical education.

Paula Allman

(Westport Conn: Bergin and Garvey, pp. 275, £47.)

Whatever happened to Karl Marx? He appears to have disappeared as a contributor to our understanding of the world. In this book, Paula Allman brings him back. Marx has suffered from over exposure, from being the guest at too many revolutions. For those who regret his appearance in the dustbin of history this book puts Marx back again at the barricades of anti-capitalist protest and debate. This is a big book, big ideas, and big explanations, unfortunately a big price.

The critical work of Marx is alive and well, now again a willing ally in unearthing how the capitalist system continues to exploit and dominate. Marx predicted the inherent drive in capitalism to become a global system of socio-economic domination.

Important questions are asked. How has capitalism spread so globally and all pervasively? How do we continue to agree to be exploited by its unreasonable demands? How does it continue to get such widespread support in spite of its ability to undermine our relationships and best interests? Where market imperatives drive out concerns for a more democratic, fair and caring society, what is the role of education? Allman is asserting that education has a key role to play in bringing about critical and revolutionary social transformation. If you are not interested in this agenda this is a good time to stop reading. If any of these questions are of interest, your read of Allman will be rewarded.

Paula Allman has for many years been one of the foremost writers on radical adult education. If capitalism is a monster, we inherit its genes and reproduce them in our social relations. Marx is difficult to read and Allman takes this into account and in a subtle re-reading and critical engagement she makes fresh again what may be the most important body of critical insights in the past two hundred years.

If Marx knew so much, it is important to return to *Capital* for a rethink. This she does expertly. Her language is lively. How about this: She lists the cheerleaders of the capitalist system as those 'Third Way' politicians who have quenched the thirst that their constituents had for social justice with the velvet of neo-liberalism and "watered-down meanings of fairness, social justice and human rights." She makes Marx rage again across history. In a country where the rich continue to get richer, the gap increases between rich and poor and where profit continues to drive business it is worth revisiting a system of critique that asks, 'how is this done and how do they get away with it?' She offers an accessible account of Marx's dialectical critique and expose of capitalism, clearly demonstrating the real enemy for the anti-capitalist and anti-globalization struggles. This account explains why the focus should not be on individual capitalists, corporations, the World Bank or IMF but on the global network of capitalist social relations and consequent habituated human practices in which we are all involved. These, together with capitalist wealth, are the essence of capitalism that must be abolished so that humanity may have some hope of social and economic justice. If you think, as many do, that the system can be reformed and made more caring, can redistribute wealth and eliminate some of the worst excesses, read Allman. There is no chance of this. The future is revolution. This book is not for the faint hearted.

She applies Marx's dialectical critique and expose of capitalism to an educational response – a revolutionary critical education. Her proposal for educators is to implement the ideas of Paulo Freire. So much of the edge has been removed from Freire's proposals she suggests that his work has been domesticated. To recapture the edge, she argues against the educator as a passive facilitator. It is not a distortion of Freire or a shift to becoming prescriptive towards students to insist that educators read the world critically in order not only to understand it but to transform it. Educators might be more assertive and authoritative in promoting their critical reading of the world and their understanding of Freire. Facilitation is the prescription of non-prescription.

The aim of education is revolutionary social transformation to abolish capitalism. In trying to understand Freire some may find his work easy. But Allman invites the reader on "a slightly more arduous journey, one that will take them quite a distance toward 'critically reading' the world of *global* capitalism – far enough, in fact, to fully grasp the absurdity of capitalism and the impossibility of humanity's survival if it remains shackled to the inherently crisis-prone and totalising system of social and economic injustice and domination" (p. 3). The level of theory she deals with is quite difficult (true of Chapter 3) but it is not onerous or unnecessarily difficult and theoretical.

Marx saw that the way we think about our situation helps to sustain and perpetuate the unjust system of capitalism. He postulates a dialectical inner connection or relation between human practice and conscious thought – a reciprocal relation between sensuous human activity and thought, in which each of the components in the relation mutually shapes and is shaped by the other. There is an inseparable unity between thought and action, his theory of praxis. For those of us who encountered praxis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* it is important to go to the roots of this concept in Marx and understand the full resonances of Freire's use of the term.

Chapter 1 deals with the absurdity of global capitalism. Chapters 2 & 3 deal with dialectical explanations of capitalism. They explain why capitalism is necessarily a global system, a fully internationalised and integrated system of socio-economic control and domination. It follows *Capital*, which unfolds the definite laws and tendencies that can only be grasped by a mode of conceptualising that conforms to the inner essence or underlying contradictions of the system. Marx is the key to unlocking this understanding. Devoted Marxists or lapsed Marxists will find this a fresh investigation of the conceptual tools that Marx invented for understanding reality.

Critics often ask, well where is this happening, now that the Eastern Europe has rejected the socialist vision? Allman puts forward the Zapatistas in Mexico as possible examples of revolutionary politics.

In Chapter 5, the theory, principles and aims of a revolutionary critical education are outlined, based on the work of Paulo Freire. To understand Freire, one must understand Marx (and others). Otherwise we get the watered down versions that pass as 'Freire inspired.' Too many see the implications of what Freire is saying about transforming the relationship between teacher and

learner as the teacher becoming a facilitator maybe knowing, or asserting to know, very little or not being assertive about what they do know. Not the case at all. Knowledge, even that put forward in formal conventional presentations by a teacher, must become the object of collective critical scrutiny using the different knowledges that both the teacher and students have at their disposal – each must engage in dialectically reuniting the processes of teaching and learning within his or her self so that the group can undertake a critical co-investigation of reality. The teacher's knowledge must become the object of critical examination. For the teacher to know more, he or she needs another subject of knowing. The teacher cannot relate differently to knowledge without the student. The teacher-student relationship is transformed, as is the relationship between each of them and knowledge. This is a radical reworking of Freire. If you want to co-investigate, why facilitate? If a teacher is a co-investigator with students the teacher does not just facilitate, they join in the investigation, active, critical, debating, questioning too.

In Chapter 6 Allman outlines the experience of trying to apply this education in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Nottingham. After each class for many years Allman kept diaries of her teaching writing two pages of reflection in a form of vigilance on her practice. Her course on Freire and reflections on it are a good example for anyone attempting to use personal or subjective material in an essay, an article, a learning journal or a thesis. Dialogue, study circles, generative themes, teacher-learner, residential weekends, group writing projects, co-investigation, group projects, ideology, evaluations and assessments are all part of the reflection on practice. Not enough of us teachers have presented our reflections and experiences of what it is like to teach in the often messy and always less than perfect world of the classroom.

In Chapter 7 various strategies that critical educators might implement in their own contexts are suggested. This chapter and book is a worthwhile exercise in how to say NO to capitalism.

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Mentoring in Community Education: A Case Study

Fennell, Bernadette, McCann James, Celesta, McDermott, Mary and Nyland, Teresa (2003)

(Mentoring & Research Development Group: Greater Blanchardstown Development Project, Dublin. (79pp. no price given))

Community education in this country is largely synonymous with women's education in that it is usually provided by women's groups at local community level to groups of (mainly) women and mostly taught by women tutors. Courses offered are many and varied, often unaccredited and occasionally provided through outreach programmes of third level institutions. If you are interested in learning more about the kind of supports needed by a group of women learners from a working class community with limited experience of formal education if they are to successfully complete a university accredited certificated course in Women's Studies, then you could do worse than get your hands on this recently published case study.

Community education initiatives are seldom enough written up for publication and that is one good reason for welcoming this brief report of the case study's research findings. The fact that it coincides with the theme of this issue of The Adult Learner is another. Apart from the need for local accessibility, subsidised course costs and childcare facilities, the essential prerequisite for participant success, according to this study, lies in the provision of a mentoring service. Mentoring, as Ailbhe Smyth, Director of WERRC, explains in her foreword, 'is first and foremost about providing students with the intellectual, material and affective supports that will enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills they need or desire at a given moment of their lives and to do so with a sense of real empowerment and enrichment, personally and as part of a learning community'.

Mentoring in this instance sprang from the needs of second chance students following two certificated courses in Women's Studies run under the joint auspices of UCD'S Women's Education Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) and the Greater Blanchardstown Development Project(GBDP). The mentor-

ing programme emerged in response to the participants' need for support in order to complete their course work and to graduate. What did it involve? According to the authors mentoring aimed to support the students in four main areas viz. written work and presentation; reading, analysis and conceptual work/critical thinking; integrating the personal impact of course material and finally practical support to complete Certificate requirements. In other words mentoring involved attending to both task and maintenance/product and process issues or as the authors put it , focusing 'on the technical and psycho-social support areas' which involve a combination of 'strong headwork and heartwork'.

Core objectives of the mentors are listed as: *training the students in the use and production of texts* - since for many students unaccustomed to academic work dealing with books, essays, articles and projects represents considerable challenges and generates significant fears and feelings of inadequacy; *develop argument and logic in debate* because 'when faced with an array of ideas students must learn to sort out what they think for themselves'; t*each students that knowledge is for them* - a process of demystifying knowledge - which has as its task to 'translate any body of knowledge or use of language into accessible terms' so that 'any discipline, author or book can eventually be translated by the student'; *keep a constant reference to students' lives* by ' being aware of the personal, social, physical and financial hardships which face many students'; *the psycho - social impact* as students and mentors 'explore the personal consequences of integrating new ideas into older viewpoints'. This is neccessary because 'not only can course content disrupt a world-view but education itself often triggers hope and fear about self-identity and personal agency'. It is particularly the psycho-social area that requires considerable sensitivity as well as clarity around the boundaries between mentoring and counselling.

The operative definition of community education mentoring in this case study is supplied by one of the authors Mary McDermott, to the effect that 'Mentoring is a radical educational practice designed to increase intellectual ability and confidence, to encourage analysis and, quintessentially, to connect abstract ideas to everyday life.... Mentoring aims at working with and expanding already existing knowledge...this means developing critical capacities in reading, thinking, writing and presentation ... More generally, mentors are effectively 'translators' between informal(sic) and formal educational settings ... the power of mentoring is essentially political...' While the radical and overt-

ly political aspects of mentoring highlighted may raise eyebrows in certain quarters, this definition provides a refreshing, upfront antidote to much of the anodyne approaches to supporting adults learners in current practice which seem to make a virtue of adopting an apparent apolitical stance as if education is ever politically neutral.

This case study set out to evaluate (through quantitative and qualitative research) all the learning supports provided from the perspectives of both participants and mentors. Quantitative data was generated from responses postally distributed to all participants on two Certificate Courses in Women's Studies(30questionnaires distributed and 15 returned completed). Because of the small numbers involved, quantitative findings and conclusions, the authors advise 'are therefore specific to the course participants in Blanchardstown'. In summary, quantitative findings revealed a profile of mature women with children of whom less than two-thirds were married; formal educational backgrounds were low with two thirds having negative memories of education; over 50% would not have participated in the programme without access to funding; a course completion rate of 73% (11 respondents) was achieved; two thirds identified group participation, networking and social connections as positive and beneficial and a similar number listed course content and mentoring as positively significant in their evaluation of the certificate programme; when asked to identify how mentoring helped respondents highlighted attitudinal change and/or increased confidence together with improved reading, writing and language skills, critical thinking and concept development; 80% of respondents reported the availability of mentoring as helping them to stay on the course and complete written assignments/projects and three quarters that it provided personal support both academically an emotionally.

Qualitative data was garnered from 17 face-to-face taped interviews with available participants, one focus group and three similar interviews with course mentors. The qualitative research largely confirmed and complemented the quantitative findings with the exception of one area viz. respondents experience of family support. While the statistical data revealed that 80% of participants considered their families/partners supportive of their learning, the face to face interviews revealed that women were often discouraged or ridiculed by family members as the following comments show:

The family thought I had got a bit cocky. My brother stopped talking to me for a while. They didn't like the changes in me;
I did not always have total support at home. My husband was afraid I was getting too confident, not dependent on him anymore. I had overtaken him developmentally and now I am trying to encourage him to get involved.

This raises an important question for mentoring, especially on Women's Studies - should it not seek to address the challenge of whole family support in the learning process by including partners in at least the early stages of the programme?

In conclusion it is fair to say that this case study represents an original though admittedly limited piece of research on mentoring at local community level and raises but does not address a number of questions which will require further study and research. These include the specific difference between academic study skills training and mentoring; the precise boundaries between mentoring and counselling in the psycho-social area and issues around the political and power roles of the mentor in her/his 'translating' or mediating role between formal and nonformal education systems. Finally it could be argued that the authors' proposal for the establishment of a Department of Education and Science Mentoring Agency for adult education would have been assisted had it included some indication of the costings involved in the Blanchardstown initiative. Copies of this case study are available from The Greater Blanchardstown Development Project by telephone on 01-8201745 or by e-mail on gbdb@eircom.net

Tony Downes
Adult Education Consultant

"Community education provided a forum for listening to the voices of otherwise silenced people, it developed a process which valued the stories and enabled the participants to interrogate their own words."

"Many problems still exist for those who have disabilities and this limits their participation and the contribution that they can make to the education system and the community in which they live. One of the biggest issues for those who are disabled is that of poverty."

"Community education in Ireland has therefore come a long way from the wilderness in which it languished during the late eighties and early nineties but in reality it is only at the beginning of a new and exciting stage of development."

"If it is wintertime, you can be sure it will rain. You need a lot of faith and hope at this stage of the project, especially if you are working alone."

"However there is still a view that too much of adult education provision is about simply putting on classes or programmes for people that either do not really support them to move on and develop, or does so in a way that is purely focussed on individual personal development."

"The aim of the work is to give a voice to the most excluded and support them to bring about social change."

"Community outreach implies more than simply relocating the institution. Beyond this we need to take cognisance of the fact that psychological and learning barriers mitigate against full participation and are as predominant in outreach programmes as they are on-campus."

"In spite of the challenges that the Community Education sector faces, it is an exciting time. Things are changing, progress is being made – there's much to be done."

"Like some ancient mariner with the albatross firmly fixed about the neck, seeking an audience and inflicting the tale on any and all who would stop to hear."

AONTAS

AEOA
Adult Education Organiser's Association