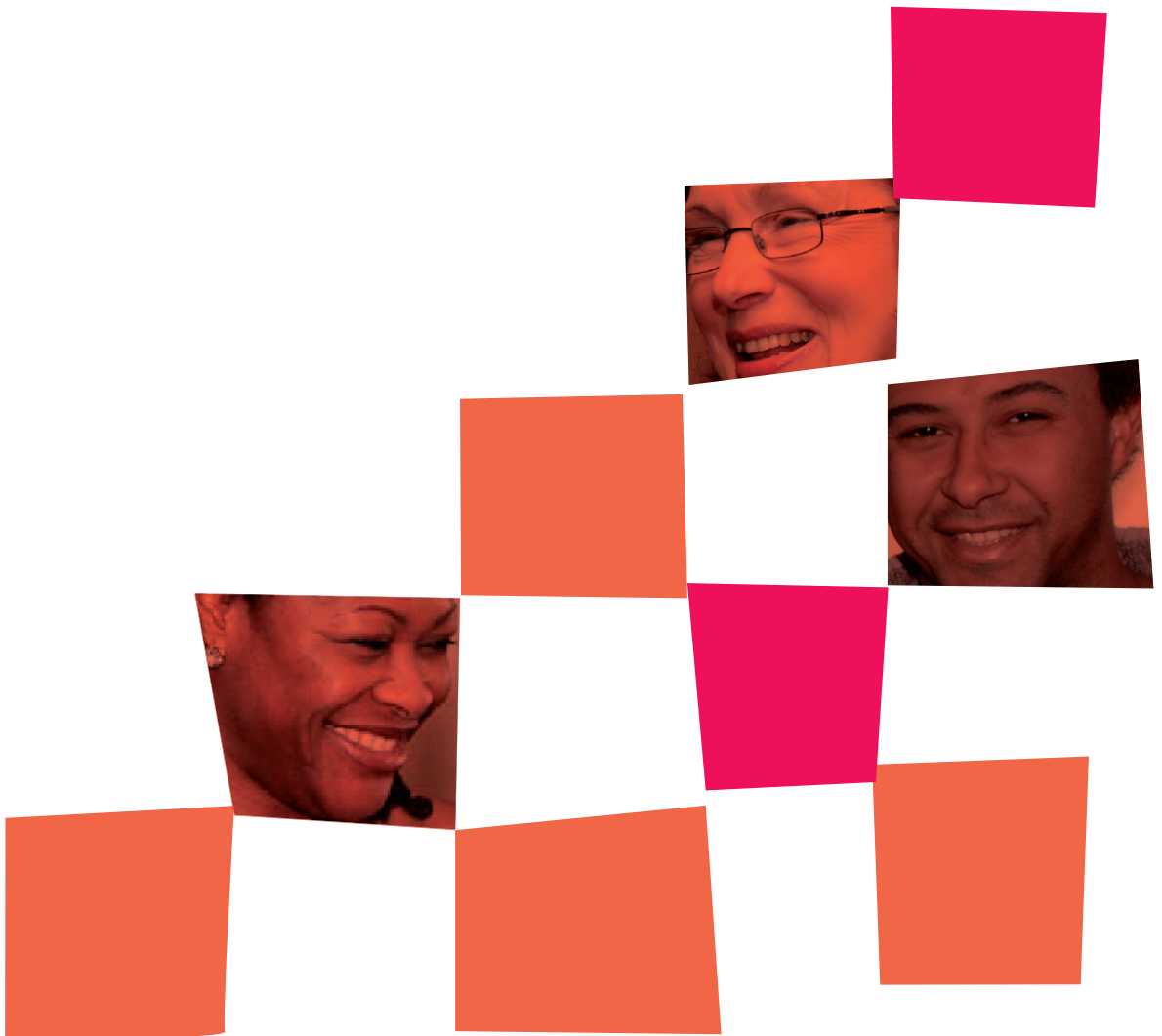


# The Adult Learner 2007

The Irish Journal of  
Adult and Community Education



THE ADULT LEARNER 2007

# The Adult Learner

## 2007

AONTAS  
2nd floor, 83-87 Main Street,  
Ranelagh, Dublin 6  
TELEPHONE: (01) 406 8220/1 FAX: (01) 406 8227  
EMAIL: MAIL@AONTAS.COM

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# Editorial Comment

For over twenty years The Adult Learner has chronicled developments in the field of adult and community education in Ireland. From its fledgling birth under the auspices of the then Adult Education Organiser's Association in 1985, it has provided a vehicle for adult learners and adult education practitioners to describe, document and reflect on their experiences and practices. Its primary purpose all those years ago was to highlight "innovative developments in the area of adult and community education" and "to comment on and debate the more important issues arising". A glance through previous editions of the journal shows not only how much things have changed but also how some issues have stubbornly remained with us.

From these beginnings the journal struggled to take its first faltering steps into a childhood and an adolescence filled not just with a sense of hope and expectation but also a sense of anxiety and trepidation. So much had started to happen. Adult literacy and VTOS programmes had begun, daytime education and women's groups were emerging, distance learning and modularised courses commenced. The late 1980s was a time when glimmers of light were scarce and the efforts of (a few) adult educators helped to sustain the hopes and dreams of so many who saw returning to adult education as a way of changing their lives. These were people beginning to find their voice.

During the early 1990s, AONTAS began its support of The Adult Learner. The late 1990s saw the production of a Green Paper on Adult Education and its subsequent transformation into a White Paper set the Learning for Life agenda that continues to shape the development of the sector today. The Adult Learner continued to document practice and progress and in 2000 began to take a thematic approach to its presentation. Over the years it explored in more detail concepts and practices in specific areas like community education, partner-

ship, difference and citizenship. These topics in themselves illustrate the evolution that was taking place in Irish society and how the adult and community education sector was responding to these new challenges.

Today, we find ourselves in the midst of an adult education sector which is more expansive than many had ever hoped or dreamed possible. Gains have been made. Issues of funding and structure still remain with us, perhaps they always will. The boom years have enabled us to make substantial progress and to establish foundations upon which we can build. The next phase will be critical. As a field of practice adult and community education has matured and there are now many more learners, practitioners and academics involved. Our dialogue and our demands are more sophisticated and it is important that the Adult Learner responds by providing a vehicle which not only documents change but which pushes the boundaries by offering critical analysis of that change.

This edition of *The Adult Learner* strives to acknowledge the aforementioned change and to reflect the demands of this time in adult education by providing a forum for critical analysis in the field. Accordingly, in its call for papers it invited contributors to provide articles for both a 'refereed' and 'practice' paper section. The refereed articles have been peer reviewed by academics involved in adult education and are reflective of concerns within the sector. The three articles in the refereed section are by Maggie Feeley, who looks at adult literacy from an egalitarian perspective, Anne Murphy, who explores accreditation for prior learning for sectoral professionalisation for care workers and Thomas O'Brien who asks if there is a way out of the clinic in his reflection on methadone treatment and the absence of rehabilitation from an adult and community education focus.

The practice papers examine practical developments within particular areas of provision. They document current practice and outline how their respective contributions might enhance good practice. Rob Mark looks at current policy on adult literacy, north and south, and asks whether current practice can deliver the kind of social change envisaged or whether we need to rethink our approach. Lucy Hearne describes her ongoing research into client progression in adult guidance and looks at whether progression can be effectively measured within the framework of a longitudinal tracking system. Linda Dowling and Orna Ryan describe how distance learners on their business studies degree programme are supported during their studies and the contribution which these

supports make to their participation and their outcomes. The final section comprises of book reviews on new writings within the field. This combination of the critical and the documentary will, we hope, offer the reader insights into topics which will enhance current practice as well as alerting us to other areas of endeavour where the voice of adult and community educators can make a contribution.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this edition of *The Adult Learner* and also the peer reviewers and readers without whose assistance this issue would not have been possible. Grateful thanks are also extended to the members of the Editorial Board, in particular Dr. Ted Fleming and Dr. Stephen O'Brien who assisted with the reading and the editing. I would also like to thank Sandra Fisher for her efforts in co-ordinating the book reviews and AONTAS for their ongoing support. To all the members of the Editorial Board thank you for your time and your energy.

**EILEEN CURTIS**

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# **SECTION ONE**

REFEREED ARTICLES

# Redefining Literacy from an Egalitarian Perspective

MAGGIE FEELEY

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## **Abstract**

*The equality framework developed in the Equality Studies Centre, University College Dublin (UCD), provides a useful base for thinking about literacy from an equality perspective. Neo-liberal, critical and situated approaches to literacy have made minimal impact in the Irish context where only 6 per cent of those with unmet literacy needs participate in learning. This paper explores what an egalitarian theory of adult literacy might have to offer by way of explaining this low participation and also indicating an alternative way forward.*

## **Introduction**

Mainstream literacy discourse since the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) studies in the 1990s has been dominated by crises of falling standards and their economic implications for individuals and States. By comparison, the social, cultural and political consequences of unmet literacy needs have received only marginal attention and considerations of the affective dimensions of equality in relation to literacy remain embryonic. The alternative, predominantly deconstructionist approach of New Literacy Studies (NLS)<sup>1</sup> is making an important contribution to challenging the mainstream message but does not, as yet, explicitly address the structural inequalities that continue to reproduce educational disadvantage. Altogether, neo-liberal, situated and even Freirean critical theories of adult literacy have made little impact on the reality of persistent basic educational inequalities. In practice, despite much government rhetoric, funding for adult literacy research and adult learn-

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<sup>1</sup>New Literacy Studies (NLS) brings together a range of theoretical and empirical writing that challenges hegemonic, mainstream views of literacy. Often associated with the 'Lancaster School', NLS proposes that literacy is not fixed but rather an evolving socially situated phenomenon that is deeply interwoven with historical and power-related societal patterns. Main proponents of NLS include Mary Hamilton, David Barton, Paul Gee, Brian Street, Roz Ivanič, Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel.

ing programmes remain relatively low and participation rates continue to be stubbornly unrepresentative of measured need. This relative stagnation may be rooted in a state of denial that it is layered structural inequality that perpetuates unmet literacy needs, rather than the repeatedly cited failure of individuals or educationalists to meet the literacy challenge.

This paper will examine the scope for social change in the diverse conceptions of literacy and explore the transformative potential that might be offered by an egalitarian theory that contextualises literacy within a wider equality project. The challenge posed here for both egalitarians and the State is to embrace the political grounding that was consistently at the heart of Freire's pedagogy for real radical literacy work (Freire, 1970; 1972; 1985; 2000; 2003). I suggest that using the *equality framework* developed in the Equality Studies Centre, UCD (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004) may provide the theoretical basis for more closely and usefully associating notions of literacy and equality. The paper is informed by ongoing ethnographic research exploring the impact of affective aspects of inequality on marginalised groups in Irish society.

### **Mainstream literacy discourse**

By far the dominant literacy discourse for the past decade has been one of 'falling standards' and the perceived inability of the education system to furnish the market with sufficiently flexible and productive workers (CEC, 2001; DES, 2000; OECD, 1992; 1995; 1997). The now well-thumbed International Adult Literacy Study (IALS – OECD, 1997) of twenty countries, situated Ireland second last to Poland in the functional literacy league tables. These measurements revealed that 23 per cent of the Irish population aged 16-25 had not reached the level of prose literacy that would allow them to carry out the most basic reading tasks (OECD, 1997). Of these estimated 500,000 adults in Ireland with unmet literacy needs, only 6 per cent have since engaged in any formal literacy learning in the past five years and with largely unrecorded outcome (DES, 2006; NALA, 2005).

In their analysis of the IALS for Ireland, Denny, Harmon, McMahon and Redmond (1999) suggested that Ireland's relatively poor literacy performance is merely an *age cohort effect* where the scores of less-schooled, older participants, lowered the overall mean. Subsequent studies do indeed show overall Irish literacy trends in schools improving in relation to other EU countries but radically declining in schools in the most disadvantaged areas (Cosgrove, Sofroniou, Kelly and Shiel, 2003; DES, 2005; ERC, 2004; Shiel, Cosgrove, Sofroniou and

Kelly, 2001). So it becomes apparent that wider social patterns of inequality, and not just age, are reflected in the distribution of one of the most basic forms of educational currency. It is this currency that in turn unlocks the larger coffers of other forms of capital: economic, social and cultural, in its embodied, objectified and credentialised states (Bourdieu, 1997). The Dublin-based Educational Research Centre (ERC, 2004) report confirmed that 30 per cent of children in Ireland who attend schools that are designated 'disadvantaged', have serious unmet literacy needs. The then Minister's immediate response was to suggest more frequent testing in schools. In this, he is pursuing a wider neo-liberal agenda that (instead of tackling causal structural inequalities) sees stringent, prescriptive national curricula and literacy tests as the 'cure-all'. This approach has already been met with sharp criticism from literacy practitioners in the UK (Hamilton, 2000; Barton and Hamilton, 2000).

Mainstream measurements like OECD surveys, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>2</sup> and other such standardising approaches to literacy are contested both by critical literacy theorists and proponents of New Literacy Studies. Although they are based on an unproblematised definition of literacy, such quantitative studies continue to determine the dominant discourses that inform educational and wider social policy and expenditure. Not only do these instrumental views fashion meaning about the nature and value of literacy, they also (without meaningful consultation) attempt to frame our understanding about the nature and value of those who are literate or otherwise. Consequently, the implication is allowed to persist that unmet literacy needs are caused by dysfunctional families and groups rather than by a failure on the part of the State (in its duty of care role) to facilitate basic educational equality for all (Hillyard, Pantazis, Tombs and Gordon, 2004).

### **Critical literacy**

Prior to the 'invention' of the literacy crisis in the 1970s in post-industrial US and the growth of a socio-cultural perspective in studies of language and the social sciences, *literacy* was a term reserved for historical and global reflections about economic and social development (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). The now well-known work of Paulo Freire and his associates propelled literacy into the consciousness and vocabulary of western educators. Ahead of his time, his was a perspective that articulated the links between illiteracy and oppression

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<sup>2</sup> PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment, a three-yearly survey (2000; 2003; 2006) of 15-year-olds in the principal industrialised countries, tests how far students near the end of compulsory education have progressed in reading, maths and science.

and the futility of endlessly obsessing with the mechanistic side of literacy (e.g. Freire and Macedo, 1987).

In contrast to detached, instrumental approaches to literacy, both feminist and Freirean educationalists cite the significance of emotions and personal experiences as a basis of critical reflection and truth-making about the direction of social change (Hooks, 1994). Freire saw this *seeing* and *naming* the world as a vital precursor to meaningful, authentic literacy practice (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Words only took on relevance and authenticity as they were used to 'name the world' and describe the action for change, the praxis that was needed to make that unequal world more just. The *denunciation* of dehumanising, countering oppressive aspects of everyday reality, was inextricably linked to the *annunciation* of the path to transformation. This dual relationship was pertinent for oppressor and oppressed alike, both of whom are dehumanised by a continued, unequal relationship (Freire, 1972; 2000).

Critical literacy is therefore about the *practice of freedom* and the antithesis of the *banking* form of literacy named and discredited by Freire (1972) but still alive and well in standardised/standardising educational practice and assessment. Critical learning requires a progression from ideology to pedagogy and then ultimately and importantly to agency. It is only by taking us to the point of action that words exercise their full power to help shape a more equal society in which literacy will cease to be so unequally distributed (Barr, 1999; Hooks, 1994). Yet, despite much optimism around critical theory, translation into practice proves problematic. Freire stressed that his pedagogical practice could not be automatically transposed to other circumstances but needed to be part of a wider transformational context where conscious struggle for change is a present reality (Freire, 1972). For the most part now, adult literacy work in Europe takes place under the shadow of the Lisbon Strategy<sup>3</sup> and critical aspirations are consequentially restrained by funding imperatives and the demands for a core curriculum. Structural change is definitely not on the agenda. In the parallel context of women's community-based education, Joanna McMinn concluded that while feminist and critical pedagogies:

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<sup>3</sup>The European Council adopted the Lisbon Strategy in 2001 with the expressed aim of making the EU "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion and respect for the environment, by 2010" CEC (2001).

... provide valuable insights into pedagogical processes, neither seems to offer a strategy that can be grounded in a wider political context for remedying the inequalities of women's condition.

(McMinn, 2000, p.86)

I would contend that this also holds true in the field of critical conceptions of adult literacy.

In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire (1996) argues that neo-liberal discourses with all their talk of modernity are merely creating another ideology to be used by the dominant classes, which in turn cunningly silences counter-hegemonic challenges. Evidence on the ground suggests that valiant and often voluntary efforts in adult literacy have produced little more than a 'trickle-up' effect from literacy to higher levels of education or economic advantage. Unsurprisingly, for the most part, educationally disadvantaged adults remain unattracted to participate in existing learning opportunities.

### **New Literacy Studies**

Since the early 1980s a critical, socio-cultural or eco-cultural approach to literacy has led to an accumulating body of research and theory known as New Literacy Studies (NLS). This movement is part of a wider 'social turn' in literacy away from behaviourism and cognitivism (Gee, 1999). Using ethnographic research to explore and challenge the hegemony of the perceived, dominant literacy, NLS works to carefully build a picture of the diverse vernacular or 'local literacies' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) that are deployed in people's lives. A core task of NLS continues to be bringing together ethnographic accounts of local community experiences "that disturb the global homogenisation of literacy" (Clarke, 2002, p.120). New Literacy theorists question the validity of studies like IALS and the extent to which such studies provide really useful knowledge about literacy events in peoples' lives. Mary Hamilton illustrates one of the core concerns of NLS when she argues that we should be doing more to contest the solidifying international 'regimes of truth' that are fed by standardised assessment and testing procedures (Hamilton, 2000, p.7).

NLS suggests that imposed, dominant definitions and assumptions about the meaning and usefulness of literacy may help explain many adults' reluctance to participate in learning (Street, 2001). The view of literacy as an autonomous gift to be given to people is questioned and a shift is proposed to an ideologi-

cal understanding of literacy as a set of variable social practices that must be defined 'locally' and dialogically in the context of protagonists' lives (Hamilton, 2000). This involves a naming of diverse evolving worlds and the place of literacy therein. Indeed NLS looks at the wide-ranging formal and informal literacy practices that exist and proposes that there is not one literacy but many literacies (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; 2000; Gee, 1990; Giroux, 1987; Street, 2001).

Through contextualising and deconstructing literacy practices, NLS have sensitised us to the historical and power parameters in which literacy and the uses of literacy are defined. Their studied concentration on what people do and are required to do during literacy events is useful and counterbalances the growing *literacy deficit* narrative. Nevertheless, we are left to some extent circling in deconstructive mode while a vast number of people, young and old, are denied the most basic benefits of learning and all that comes with it.

### **Literacy and inequality**

Literacy has historically reflected wider inequalities in society. In the past the rich, the religious, the cultural and political elite and the merchant classes have all used literacy to assert their dominant position and to maintain the subjugated position of others (Clanchy, 1979; Graff, 1981; Mace, 2001). Today literacy also mirrors widening regional and global inequalities - one billion people are deprived of the right to any education and, at the turn of this century, Latin America counted 30 million more illiterate people than twenty years previously (Chomsky, 2000). These dismal global figures reveal further gendered inequalities, with clear evidence that women have a lower literacy rate than men in most societies (see United Nations Development Report, 2002, Table 22).

In Ireland, *illiteracy* generally defines part of the experience of the *other* poor, ethnic minorities, people of colour, Irish Travellers or those with learning difficulties and disabilities. For other groups, illiteracy may be a less visible issue concealing itself by more obvious causes and symptoms of oppression – such as those experienced by survivors of institutional abuse, women who work in prostitution, many Deaf people, young people bullied out of school because of institutionalised homophobia, people with addictions, prisoners, homeless men and women. These are inevitably:

... groups whose traditions and cultures are often the object of a massive assault and attempt by the dominant culture to delegitimize and disorganise

the knowledge and traditions such groups use to define themselves and their view of the world.

(Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.13)

Unmet literacy needs are frequently a by-product of what Katherine Zappone calls this systemic 'weighty disrespect' for otherness (NICE, 2002; Zappone, 2003, p.133) that persists throughout societies; impacts negatively on certain individuals and social groupings; and is reflected in the culture and power structures of our schools. In a 1982 interview in Ireland with Peadar Kirby, Paulo Freire said that "We really don't have pedagogical problems, we have political problems with educational reflexe" (Crane Bag, 1982). Tackling these 'political problems' that result in adult illiteracy is the role of a wider emancipatory project. Although it remains a basic component of full democratic participation and self-realisation, literacy itself will not deliver equality.

The consequential impact of unmet literacy needs is acknowledged in national and international studies and is part of the accepted wisdom that underpins national policy on education, poverty, social exclusion and related issues (DES, 1997; DES, 2000; OECD, 1992). Much less clarity and unanimity exists in relation to causal and transformational aspects of unmet literacy needs. Nevertheless, it should be clear that illiteracy is not something that occurs in isolation, without any recognisable pattern or root in the current organisation of social structures. Research in prisons, with diverse minority groups and excluded men and women, points clearly to the need for a more holistic, contextualised approach to adult literacy work (Corridan, 2002; Morgan, Hickey and Kellaghan, 1997; Morgan and Kett, 2003; Owens, 2000; Ward, 2002).

Kathleen Lynch (1999) names and documents how liberal theories of equal opportunities merely reproduce and sustain inequalities in the Irish education system. State managers, middle class parents' groups, teachers' unions and members have little or no interest in transforming the system that serves their vested interests. Lynch argues that only a radical and emancipatory approach to educational inequalities will be effective in bringing about just learning structures that end the disproportionate favour extended to those who are already privileged in Irish society (Lynch, 1999, pp. 287-309). In other words, as black women also deduced, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Freire and Macedo, 1987; Lorde, 1984; Lynch, 1999).

### **An equality framework**

The Equality Studies Centre in UCD has been developing an analytical framework of equality for a number of years (Baker, 1987; Lynch, 1999; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004). The most recent model (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004) identifies five interrelated dimensions that comparatively describe the differences between individuals and groups in relation to:

- Resources;
- Respect and recognition;
- Power;
- Working and learning;
- Love, care and solidarity.

As well as these *dimensions* of equality, four key overarching social systems are named within which inequalities are structurally generated, sustained and reproduced. These broad *contexts* are:

- The economic system;
- The cultural system;
- The political system;
- The affective system.

They provide the macro, systemic environment within which the complex web of dimensional aspects of inequality are experienced by individuals and groups (see Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004, Chapters 2 and 4).

Equality is not static or inevitable, as suggested by some, but dynamically associated with personal and community history, life experience and agency in relation to these five dimensions (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004). More importantly, degrees of equality are intricately linked to, and determined by the extent to which societal structures across the four *contexts* are justly and fairly designed and administered in the lives of different individuals and groups. Viewed in relation to uneven literacy outcomes, this framework suggests causal and consequential unequal allocations of wealth, status, power and care that need to be defined and addressed.

An equality framework allows us to more accurately understand, describe and elaborate the potential of (radical) literacy work in Ireland and beyond. There is a highly interactive causal and consequential pattern to the way that inequalities impact on literacy. Those who experience resource inequalities in childhood

are more likely to experience unmet literacy needs than those whose material needs are comfortably met. They are consequentially likely to suffer resource (and other) inequalities in adulthood. Those who belong to groups that are less valued in Irish society are more likely than others to have unmet literacy needs and to be consequentially culturally (and economically) disadvantaged in later life. Further, other structural inequalities of power and care will contribute to educational disadvantage and shape political and affective inequalities in adulthood. Many groups and individuals with unmet literacy needs experience all of these aspects of inequality in a generational milieu of injustice shared with their families and communities.

The interrelated nature of the dimensions and contexts of inequality suggests that only a cohesive structural approach will bring about the type of ‘root and branch’ change that will impact on persistent educational disadvantage. Because much of what is described as critical literacy practice fails to make the connection to any critical agency, its emancipatory potential remains untapped. Perhaps consequentially, adults are unmotivated to engage or persist in learning that perpetuates and heightens their oppression and so adult literacy programmes remain limited in their appeal, their reach and their impact.

### **Defining literacy in an egalitarian context**

Freire and others have argued that to be meaningful, adult literacy needs to be contextualised in a wider debate and struggle against injustice. In Ireland the equality movement is the most vibrant site of this holistic deliberation and the only initiative that approaches a ‘revolution’ in Irish political thinking. As an integral part of the equality agenda, literacy would become an important tool in the design, construction and development of a just and equal Irish society, vital for all citizens in the enactment of an inclusive, critical and emancipatory project. At the same time, it encompasses a sense of relevance in people’s lives and has the potential to reinstate their rights to full citizenship.

Accordingly, I propose that with the cultural and political insights of situated and critical theory we move forward apace to an egalitarian theory of literacy with a working definition of literacy as:

the full range of language capabilities that facilitate the acquisition of all forms of economic and cultural capital and that are necessary for the full and fair realisation and management of relationships of power and intimacy.

Defined in relational terms of inequality, it becomes clear that unmet literacy needs relegate individuals, families and entire groups to the margins of society. Educational disadvantage limits employment prospects and in turn threatens economic security. As well as being part of the culture of any society, language and literacy is the vehicle through which much cultural activity is developed. Unmet literacy needs stifle creativity and important aspects of self and group actualisation. Critique and dissent is silenced. Those who cannot use literacy are less likely to vote, to take part in community organisations or to influence decision-making processes that affect their lives. At the same time their access to 'equality of condition' with others across all institutions and structures is seriously limited and public and private relationships may be subject to stress and frustration.

Literacy is thus a relational concept. The mnemonic function of literacy facilitates the relationship between the self and the world outside. Through reading we access the ideas and messages of others, whether casually in scribbled notes from loved ones and peers or formally through the printed and published word. We encode messages as a means of creating, recording, exchanging and managing ideas and information with individuals and institutions from the most immediate to the global. Literacy is the vehicle for language that connects across continents and centuries, classes and cultures. We use literacy to move outside our own heads. We use it to connect and communicate, to dictate or to dialogue. We use it to sustain, participate in and critically develop organisational structures, and to uphold and nourish our interdependence. We use it for obedience and compliance as well as for critique, struggle and resistance. If we cannot use literacy we, and our dependents, are effectively disadvantaged and consequently at greater risk of marginalisation and oppression than our literate peers.

### **Conclusion**

By redefining literacy within an equality perspective we are moving the focus away from merely highlighting, and struggling to end an unequal distribution of skills and capital building capacity. This potentially deficit approach forms the basis of most adult education policy and implies that redressing unequal literacy distribution will in turn sort out other dimensions of inequality. Literacy alone, like education in general, is not emancipatory. Such a view fails to look at the wider implications of the relationship between literacy and the complex, interconnected patterns of equality of resources, power, culture and care. Neglecting the wider context in which literacy happens, unwittingly contributes

to the maintenance of inequalities that are rooted in social structures rather than in stigmatised individuals and groups. A radical egalitarian view of literacy could provide the theoretical base upon which to build more meaningful and relevant literacy practice. It would obviously have far-reaching implications for the way in which literacy work takes place but first and foremost, it may mean that the many adults in Ireland who have been denied the right to use literacy would see some point in participating in lifelong learning.

*Maggie Feeley is a literacy practitioner and PhD student in the Equality Studies Centre, University College, Dublin. She is carrying out ethnographic research with survivors of abuse in Irish Industrial Schools with particular emphasis on the learning of literacy in those establishments.*

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# A Scaled-up Model of AP(E)L for Sectoral Professionalisation: Lessons from the 2005 Valex Pilot Project (Dublin)

ANNE MURPHY

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## **Abstract**

*This paper outlines the policy and pedagogical outcomes of an AP(E)L Pilot Project in the social care sector undertaken as an element of the 2003-2005 Socrates-Grundtvig Research Project: VaLEx Valuing Learning from Experience, by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and the Open Training College (OTC). It deals with the experiences of the two providers in taking a scaled-up rather than an individualistic approach and considers the evaluation feedback from participants, facilitators/accompaniers and assessors. The paper recommends that accreditation for prior experiential learning AP(E)L / recognition of prior learning RPL could be managed more effectively and efficiently by linking it with pedagogies of work-based learning for professional development in communities of practice.*

## **Introduction**

The VaLEx Research Project, *Valuing Learning from Experience*, was an EU Socrates-Grundtvig 2003-2005 project that aimed to develop a theory-based model of AP(E)L for higher education which would be more holistic and inclusive than the competence-based, credit exchange model which has generally predominated in higher education in Ireland, the UK and elsewhere. The model took an existential/hermeneutic, future-oriented, capability approach to adults' learning plans, with the adult's life history of learning as central to the process. The model was heavily influenced by the French AP(E)L model - *validation des acquis professionnelles* - and by emerging literature on indigenous knowledges and biographical methods which emphasise the value of contextualised and socially constructed ways of knowing (Bailie and O'Hagan, 2001; Bertaux, 1981; Dominicé, 2001; Feutrie, 2003; Murphy, 2004; Pouget and Osborne, 2004; Pouget, Sallic and LeScouiller, 2004).

The VaLEx model was field-tested through local pilots by Glasgow-Caledonian University (lead), the universities of Warwick, South Brittany, Brussels, Turku and Tartu, and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) with a range of partner organisations/groups in the first half of 2005 and evaluated locally in Summer 2005 (Murphy, Megarry & Ní Mhaolrúnaigh, 2005).

The anticipated outputs of the overall VaLEx Research Project included the following:

- a pedagogical model of AP(E)L underpinned with educational theory which would be transferable across diverse European realities;
- an AP(E)L toolkit, evaluated through the pilots, which will include both electronic and paper-based resources;
- professional guidelines for teaching, advising and support staff.

#### **The policy context of the VaLEX Pilot (Dublin)**

The Dublin Pilot of the VaLEx model of AP(E)L was specifically planned to advance previous scaled-up models designed for the vocational/professional areas of childcare through an earlier DIT pilot project, the Omna pilot project (DIT, 1999), the training-of-trainers for the disability sector through NUI Maynooth (Murphy, 1996) and the training of literacy organisers through The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) (Mernagh, 2005) which had each used three different theoretical and pedagogical approaches (Murphy, 2003). What was significant about the timing of the Dublin VaLEx pilot was that it coincided with the development of AP(E)L/RPL policies and procedures for further and higher education providers under the regulation of the National Qualification Authority of Ireland (NQAI, 2005) and also coincided with a growing interest in the epistemology and pedagogies of AP(E)L fostered by the Irish Higher Education AP(E)L Network. The timing coincided, too, with the broader policy context of lifelong learning generally and the emerging, if contested, discourses of formal, informal and non-formal learning.

Of particular policy interest to the VaLEx Pilot (Dublin) was the NQAI's remit to bringing coherence and consistency to the recognition of prior learning through obliging providers and awarding bodies to make provision for AP(E)L for any individual who applied for access, credit or full award. The approach of all higher education awarding bodies has traditionally been to apply AP(E)L at

the individual learner/applicant level and not to offer a collective, or sectoral, approach, other than in the three models mentioned above. Education providers are now additionally obliged to outline progression routes for all learners on their programmes and to make both access and accessibility arrangements for mature students and RPL applicants explicit in their internal documentation and public information data (NQAI, 2003). These two principles obliged the VaLEx AP(E)L pilot (Dublin) to be linked explicitly to specific programmes and to provide for individual assessment of claims for module exemptions and credits.

A further principle of importance to the design of the Dublin pilot was that of *accessibility* which obliges providers to make provision for the successful progression of learners through development of capabilities. That notion was hinted at in the Green Paper on adult education, *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning*, where it was predicated that providers would become obliged to accompany learners throughout their lifelong learning careers:

It is likely that, as the demand for ongoing or continuing education grows in the future, educational institutions will look to ‘accompanying’ the student through their work life cycle rather than merely preparing them for it.

(DES, 1998, p. 33)

Conceptually and technically, then, such accompaniment could include accompaniment for entrants who used AP(E)L for access to programmes as well as for learners who gained access through other routes.

### **Reasons for resistance to AP(E)L in higher education**

As outlined above, provision for AP(E)L in Irish further and higher education is generally based on the individual applicant/learner and most models relate to access to existing programmes in the national framework in the case of higher education, or to occupational standards in the case of further education and training. Achievement of a full award through AP(E)L is rare, though the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) made its first, perhaps symbolic, award of a masters degree to an individual in June 2005 based on that individual’s life history of knowledge production and publication. Likewise, the Irish university sector has traditionally had provision for doctoral awards based on scholarly publications, and some education providers have traditionally accepted experiential learning as *equivalent* to accredited learn-

ing for non-traditional/exceptional case entry to postgraduate programmes. However, awards, or exemptions, based on experiential learning have been less favoured at undergraduate level despite enabling legislation and procedures, according to the audit of AP(E)L practices undertaken as the first activity of the Dublin VaLEx research project (Murphy, 2004b, 2004c). That audit, conducted by questionnaire in the first half of 2004, found that no higher education institution had an inclusive approach to AP(E)L provision, and that only one had a dedicated AP(E)L/RPL officer. Colleges which had discontinued AP(E)L cited lack of resources and cumbersome procedures as the reasons. Other weaknesses identified in the audit included: lack of conceptualisation of levels of learning appropriate to experiential learning; inappropriateness of traditional assessment modes; lack of grading; restriction of types of evidence; lack of uniformity; the need for constant updating and individualisation of procedures; the extensive resources required; and the cumbersome paperwork involved. Academic problems identified by colleges included: resistance by staff to the concept itself; lack of academic skills for future study; fear of lowering standards; over-caution with documentation; limitation to the range of evidence permitted in a portfolio format; negative impact on future modules; and lack of coherence in how experiential learning is expressed relative to traditional learning. A persistent problem was the confusion between the requirement to satisfy a number of learning outcomes and the percentage score required to reach a pass standard. Further weaknesses included: inconsistencies of models applied; pressure on individual applicants in pursuing claims; lack of staff training and lack of efficient resources and templates. The Dublin Pilot of the VaLEx AP(E)L model needed to address at least some of these concerns.

### **VaLEx AP(E)L Pilot (Dublin) rationale, research methods and objectives**

The VaLEx model was piloted with participants from the social care sector since it seemed to address particular immediate needs for professional accreditation of a large number of experienced practitioners. In this regard, The Health Executive Eastern Region (HEER), now The Health Services Executive-Eastern Area (HSE-EA), had requested the two main providers of social care qualifications, the DIT and the Open Training College (OTC)/St Michael's House, to devise a mechanism to professionally accredit unqualified staff already working in the residential care and disability care sectors, building on significant practice experiences and in-house training. A scaled-up AP(E)L approach was therefore essential, with key academic staff in the two colleges required to have a direct input into the processes of accompaniment and assessment. It was also required

that the model should also be approved within the quality assurance arrangements of both providers. The DIT and OTC formed a management team for the VaLEx Pilot, nominated generalist and specialist accompaniers, and consulted with academic staff on the adaptation of module assessment criteria and means of presenting evidence of learning.

It was agreed that the model would be piloted with fourteen, volunteer, experienced social care workers as participants, all of whom had no previous professional qualifications in social care or direct experience of participation in higher education, but who were keen to acquire formal qualifications on a part-time basis. Participants were selected through an advertising and recruitment campaign, supported by social care agencies in the regions. Existing part-time, in-service programme modules were made available by the two colleges to the VaLEx Pilot for AP(E)L by the participants as follows:

*DIT BA (Ord.) in Social Care Practice (in-service)*

*Modules:* (i) Principles of Professional Practice (10 ECTS<sup>1</sup> Credits)  
(ii) Health and Well-being (5 ECTS Credits).

*OTC/HETAC Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability)*

*Modules:* (i) Introduction to Disability (12 ECTS Credits)  
(ii) Health, Safety and Personal Care (12 ECTS Credits).

The participants met in the DIT for three hour AP(E)L sessions on eight occasions over a two month period between March and May 2005. The early sessions focused on learning from life and work histories and on the development of academic capabilities. The later sessions focused on the preparation of evidence of learning in support of claims for module exemptions. Seven participants completed portfolios for the DIT degree and seven for the OTC degree. Participants whose module portfolios were deemed to be of a pass quality were assured of exemptions from the modules when they registered on the degree programme.

### **Challenges for design of the VaLEx AP(E)L model**

One of the main challenges for the VaLEx model (Dublin) was to design a *scaled-up* process which would both meet the accreditation needs of all the individual learners involved *and* address the reservations of academic staff, particularly

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<sup>1</sup> European Credit Transfer System

around the acquisition of sustainable academic writing skills for future learning, and around the credibility of the assessment process. The VaLEx model would also need to be sustainable in terms of time and resources. Accordingly, the Dublin model initially claimed to include the following features:

- It was regarded as an ideal mechanism for practitioners who were experienced in their field of practice to have their experiential learning formally recognised and accredited towards a qualification;
- It offered guidance and accompaniment;
- It led towards a clearly identified learning plan;
- It focused both on current competence and on future capabilities;
- It was related specifically to existing course modules;
- It allowed for module learning outcomes to be synthesised into appropriate portfolio tasks;
- It allowed applicants to challenge module assessment tasks instead of preparing a portfolio of learning evidence;
- It offered a biographical/narrative approach to the identification of appropriate informal and non-formal learning;
- It allowed for flexible approaches to the presentation of learning for assessment;
- It expected to be subject to the same criteria for assessment and the same quality assurance controls as the target modules;
- It is specifically designed to be 'scaled up' to groups and sectors, as well as serving the needs of individual applicants;
- It was underpinned by current theory and scholarship on work-based learning (WBL) and on learning-in-practice for professional development;
- It took account of current research and policy development related to recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- It had explicit guidelines and procedures with potential for transfer to other professional sectors.

(DIT/OTC, 2005)

### **The VaLEx model of AP(E)L assessment**

AP(E)L is essentially about the assessment of prior learning towards accreditation. In this regard, the AP(E)L audit referred to earlier (Murphy, 2004c) had indicated that lists of discrete module learning outcomes designed for formal programmes were unsuitable for assessing experiential learning through AP(E)L. Taking this into account, and following discussion with the pro-

gramme directors and module assessors from both the DIT and the OTC, it was decided to offer VaLEx Pilot (Dublin) participants a choice of three ways of meeting module assessment requirements. Firstly, they could take the original learning outcomes as stated in the programme document and provide evidence from prior learning to prove that learning had already been gained in terms of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required by the module. They could request the assistance of the accompanier in this task. Secondly, they could ask to see the assessment assignments for the modules from the past and arrange with course personnel to challenge those assignments without the assistance of the accompanier. Thirdly, they could carry out a set of assignment tasks in their current context of professional practice and meet the learning outcomes in that way.

To make this third option more efficient, module learning outcomes were combined, or synthesised, into assessment tasks for completion within the duration of the Pilot and included in the portfolio for assessment. Participants could write an account as in the example in Table 1 below, or perform a task based on a learning contract as in Table 2 below:

**Table 1: Original and synthesised learning outcomes with written account**

<i>Original list of module learning outcomes</i>	<i>Synthesised Learning Outcomes as Portfolio Task</i>
Health, Safety and Personal Care	With reference to legislation, demonstrate your understanding of health and safety in the workplace (based on prior learning).
1. Outline the importance of good health and safety practices in your work;	
2. State the main provisions of the Health & Safety and Welfare at Work Act 1989;	
3. State the areas covered by the Health & Safety and Welfare at Work General Application Regulations 1993;	
4. List the responsibilities of the employer and employee with regard to the 1989 Act;	
5. State the main provisions of the 1981 Fire Services Act.	

**Table 2: Learning Contract task to meet module learning outcomes**

<i>List of module learning outcomes</i>	<i>Synthesised Learning Outcomes as Portfolio Task</i>
Principles of Professional Practice in Social Care	Using Gibbs' reflective cycle write a 3,000 word analysis after completing the following task:
1. Have an understanding of the history and development of social care in Ireland;	1. Observe colleagues and clients over a five day episode of care and then identify, assess and discuss how models of service delivery meet clients' overall needs;
2. Have explored the principles of professional practice;	2. Illustrate your own and others' professional roles, responsibilities and contributions to the clients' needs;
3. Have an understanding of the needs of client groups and demonstrate awareness of appropriate responses to these groups;	3. Illustrate your own and others' professional roles, responsibilities and contributions to the moral and ethical values of the organisation in this regard.
4. List the responsibilities of the employer and employee with regard to the 1989 Act;	
5. State the main provisions of the 1981 Fire Services Act.	

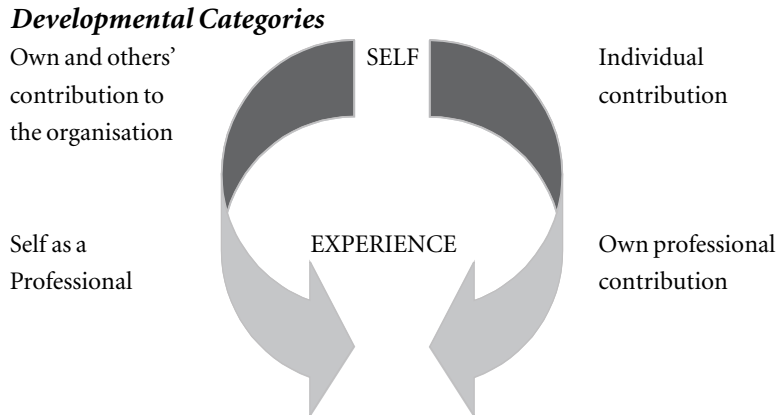
An optional *viva voce* was part of the VaLEx model of assessment in cases where a candidate did not fully meet the assessment requirements in the written submission alone. The accompanier could act as an advocate for the candidate in this process, but could not act as an assessor. Module assessors were required to prepare sets of module assessment criteria suitable for use in AP(E)L mode which would attract the same credibility with colleagues, examiners and quality assurance systems as the criteria for the taught mode. These criteria were made available to accompaniers and candidates.

**Systematic, critical reflection on professional practice for AP(E)L claims**

The VaLEx AP(E)L model regarded the development of critical reflection as central to the AP(E)L process and aimed to develop a model of reflection suitable

for a group-based process transferable to any sector of professional practice. In practical terms this was achieved by linking reflection on the practice context with the structure of portfolio entries to meet module learning outcomes. Each module required just one substantial portfolio entry to demonstrate learning. A model based on Gibbs' reflective cycle was used as an analytical framework to structure the process and the written accounts for inclusion in the portfolio, as follows:

**Figure 1: Developmental Categories with Gibbs' reflective cycle**



Source: VaLEx Pilot (Dublin) Participants' Handbook 2005

Through reflection on life history and professional experience the participants' personal learnings were identified and used as evidence to support the specified outcomes of the modules, and critical analysis was required to draw conclusions from individual practice. The developmental process began by analysing the *self*, or asking how experiences contributed to the participant's own world-view, values, personal development and learning. Then it progressed on to analysing *individual contribution* to the situation or experience and moved through the categories to analyse how the *profession* contributed to the situation. When focused on the profession the participant needed to revisit *yourself as a professional* and the final category helped put the experience into a holistic focus of *your own and others' contribution to the organisation's purpose*. For efficiency of implementation in the portfolio process, the individual's life history of learning was organised into two sets, *life narrative* and *biographical work record* as follows:

### *Life Narrative*

Personal Life Achievements;  
Life and Job Transitions;  
Personal Qualities and Values.

### *Biographical Work Record*

Evidence of work, life,  
educational attainments;  
Personal and Professional  
Development Goals.

This information was regarded as a tool to identify learning from experience, to evaluate personal and professional future goals, to link experience to module outcomes and for future lifelong learning.

### **AP(E)L developing academic capabilities for accessibility**

The Dublin VaLEx Pilot was informed by a keen awareness of the need to enhance the capabilities of AP(E)L applicants to survive in a higher education environment. This need had been identified in Irish higher education research with mature students (Fleming and Murphy, 1998; Inglis and Murphy, 1999) and in the AP(E)L audit results reported earlier above. Additionally, the explicit requirement of the NQAI for access and participation by mature students in higher education is that the principle of accessibility should apply. In practice this implies that the receiving institution is obliged to provide the appropriate supports for students who enter their programmes to enable them to succeed. The principle implies that all institutions must provide whatever bridging studies are required either at the point of entry, or at the point of transfer to another programme. In adherence to this principle it was agreed that participants on the VaLEx Pilot Project would be offered appropriate support in developing their skills in academic writing, in library research skills, in information technology and in the presentation of assignments for assessment.

### **Feedback and recommendations from participants**

Participant evaluation methods included sessional evaluation through evaluation questionnaires, a post-pilot questionnaire, a collective report to the VaLEx dissemination event in June 2006 and a focus group evaluation session. Feedback from participants stressed the needs for accurate information for potential applicants, including information on roles, responsibilities, workload and timescales. In particular, they recommended that the distinction between the roles of generalist accompaniers and subject-expert accompanier be more explicit. They also recommended that workplaces and employers should actively encourage and support staff engaged in the AP(E)L process with sufficient time-off and access to documentation, computers and other resources. The value of

group-based rather than individualistic AP(E)L was stressed by participants. The life-history model used in the VaLEx model was given a mixed evaluation, with the theory-practice conflict of valuing life histories of learning while only rewarding selected instances of learning questioned a process that devalued certain types of learning and valued others without any defensible rationale for the practice. In terms of AP(E)L pedagogies, participants valued the opportunity to develop skills and capabilities to survive the world of formal academic study and the presentation of written assignments. In particular, they recommended that colleges should provide specific literature which shows how college-theory relates to the real-life worlds of social care practitioners and to offer worked examples to applicants at the start in the same way that examples are offered to college-based students. They also recommended that the adult status of AP(E)L candidates should be respected with regard to how and when they were given access to materials and assessment exercises, since to do otherwise is to diminish the power of participants to control the content and pace of their own learning. Additionally, they recommended that e-learning technologies be used for AP(E)L candidates with irregular working patterns and for those who may be geographically removed from contact with other applicants and academic staff. Above all the participants recommended that the social learning opportunities provided by group-based AP(E)L be maintained and extended both with and between workshop sessions.

### **Feedback from the participating colleges**

Analytical reports from accompaniers and academic staff of the two partner providers, the DIT and OTC, concluded that the Dublin VaLEx AP(E)L model addressed a number of perceived blockages to the implementation of widespread AP(E)L in higher education in Ireland, especially with regard to the management of module learning outcomes and to assessment methods and assessment criteria for experiential learning. It also introduced the concepts of synthesised learning outcomes and learning contracts as pedagogical tools for AP(E)L. Additionally, it highlighted the value of group-based, social learning opportunities for continuing professional development for occupational sectors with strong commonality of contexts and experiences, emphasising the sharing of existing knowledge and the generation of emergent knowledges among communities of practice in workplaces. Both accompaniers and assessors valued the model as an opportunity for participants to develop what are regarded as the capabilities to survive in academic studies, the future-oriented accessibility factor identified in the NQAI documentation on access, transfer

and progression, rather than being predominantly an audit of current competences. Both partner colleges approved of the on-going accompanier model rather than the front-loaded, facilitator/tutor model generally used in AP(E)L. They also saw the model as easily quality assured and transferable to other contexts. There was a specific recommendation that AP(E)L should be viewed only as an assessment/ pedagogical activity and should not be confused with counselling or therapy. With regard to the further development of the model, the partner colleges concluded that the VaLEx model has the potential to link the scholarship and practice of AP(E)L with the scholarship and technologies of Work-Based-Learning with regard to curriculum design in higher education, and that staff training and development will be required in this regard.

### **Conclusions**

The VaLEx Dublin Pilot set out to demonstrate that AP(E)L need not be a marginal, individualistic and resource-hungry activity for colleges and that the reservations of academic staff can be allayed by collaborative design which is supported by acceptable pedagogical theory and academic quality assurance. It also set out to demonstrate the value of working at the interface between professional practice and academia where a more seamless approach to professional development can be achieved by a life history and professional learning plan model which gives more direct control to the learner than the traditional in-service training model. Since the Pilot ended, a complementary work-based, contract learning model has been developed for a number of modules on one of the degree programmes. It is likely that this mixed mode of learning will influence in-service professional development courses across a range of activities as some of the main academic reservations about AP(E)L have now been addressed and resolved in this scaled-up model for professional sectors.

*Dr. Anne Murphy works as Learning Development Officer in the Dublin Institute of Technology where she is involved in postgraduate education programmes, in curriculum development and as joint editor of the DIT on-line journal Level 3. Her research interests include work-based learning, higher education policy and accreditation of experiential learning.*

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# Is There a Way Out of this Clinic? An Adult and Community Education Perspective on Methadone and the Absence of Rehabilitation

THOMAS O'BRIEN

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## **Abstract**

*This paper critically examines methadone treatment from the perspective of adult and community education and questions the absence of rehabilitation. It identifies biomedicine and the methodology of evidence based medicine as the discourses that determine our understanding of addiction and treatment. It is especially critical of psychiatry for the over medicalisation of addiction treatment and the communities uncritical acceptance of the assumptions of medicine. The paper then looks at the Crinan project, as a model of good practice in drug treatment and asks what makes adult and community education an effective component of treatment that works uniquely in a way that medical model does not?*

## **Introduction**

“Every revolution evaporates and leaves behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy”, (Kafka, cited in Preece, 2002, p.89). It too seemed like a revolution when in 1996 drug treatment, in the form of methadone maintenance, became more widely available in Dublin, after local protests about the increased number of drug related deaths among young people, during a time now referred to as the second heroin ‘epidemic’. The protests allowed the community to reclaim the streets as the heroin dealers were driven underground. The drug dealers, many of whom were heroin users themselves, did not go away and with the advent of the mobile phone they found new ways to sell heroin. Methadone clinics became key locations where drugs were bought and sold. Like the dealers, the epidemic did not go away either, as deaths associated with methadone became a feature of the drug problem. The new epidemic was a silent one. Death from a prescribed drug has a different impact. Drug users die silently from the long-term side effects of poly drug use, prescribed and un-prescribed and after years

of multiple failed or ineffective treatment episodes. The cause of death is often blamed on the drug users for their moral failure, diseased brain, flawed genetics and inability to remain drug free while on methadone.

Ten years later, methadone may have silenced the protesters and calmed the fears associated with HIV infection, but it has done little to help the majority of heroin addicts move out of the cycle of addiction. The drug problem has deepened over the intervening period and while today thousands of addicts can avail of methadone, there is widespread frustration in local communities about the lack of rehabilitation. Methadone promised to reduce drug related crime associated with the demand for heroin and yet, despite the availability of methadone, the demand for heroin remains. Heroin related prosecutions have increased significantly from 296 in 1995 to 778 in 2004 (Connolly, 2006). Alcohol, cannabis, cocaine and benzodiazepine use are widespread among patients on methadone and there are new fears associated with the introduction of crystalmeth, a new and even more dangerous substance.

The new bureaucracy left behind in the wake of this treatment revolution, has created a huge network of local drug task forces, national organisations and committees, professional bodies and local communities at an estimated cost of 70 million euro annually. The key positions within this new bureaucracy are held by consultant psychiatrists who effectively control every aspect of addiction treatment in Ireland. Underpinned by the powerful discourse of medicine, psychiatrists exert enormous control and influence over the management, delivery and evaluation of methadone treatment programmes.

### **Adult and community education; an emerging discourse in drug treatment.**

The drug treatment centre or clinic is not a site usually frequented by researchers from the adult education tradition and yet it is a research site with profound consequences for personal learning and development, conscientization, empowerment and social change. It is also a site that reflects disturbing inequalities, injustice, oppression and individual suffering within society. Equally, it is a site inhabited by powerful professionals with competing interests that include patient care, publishing research, continuous professional development, maintaining the status quo and sometimes, career progression.

Rooted in the tradition of conscientization (Freire, 1972), adult and community education helps us to unmask oppressive power, overcome alienation and engage learners in a process of liberation. Freire believed the role of education was to liberate people from systematic oppression. The conscientization of methadone patients involves connecting them with the hidden curriculum that has shaped their addiction and now shapes their treatment. The hopes of methadone patients should not be limited by lifelong treatment but instead should be transformed through a process of lifelong learning, leading them away from dependency toward liberation. The methadone patient as a lifelong learner is encouraged to become a critically reflexive and politicised human subject (Ryan, 2004).

This analysis is also rooted in a radical philosophy of adult education that seeks to challenge dominant ideologies, contest hegemony and resist discourses of domination that bolster the position and power of elite groups at the expense of others. Supported also by critical theory, adult education engages in a process of examining how meanings are constructed through the socio-historical structures in society and looks at how individuals and groups re-constitute relations and the social world in every day life (Hyde, Lohan and McDonnell, 2004). Critical theory has been particularly useful in examining discourses, seeing them as historically, socially and institutionally constructed statements, beliefs and practices that we take for granted (Ryan, 2004). They do not simply reflect or describe reality, but play an integral part in constructing it (Lupton, 1998). Turner (1987) examined the biomedical discourse and underlined the relations that exist between medical practices and institutions, and the distribution of power and resources in contemporary societies. He suggested that biomedicine has created an unhealthy reliance on drugs and doctors, as well as a questionable use of resources in healthcare systems.

Illich (1976) suggested that medicine was contributing to the growth in iatrogenic diseases. These are diseases caused by the excessive use of medicine. Treatment services for heroin addicts in Ireland, have become overly reliant on the use of methadone and other drugs as the primary solution, to what is fundamentally a social problem. The continued medicalisation of heroin addiction is unsustainable. Increasing the numbers of people on methadone, without investing in sustainable rehabilitative pathways to facilitate people eventually detoxifying and exiting methadone treatment, may in fact be increasing the harm caused to society. Within communities affected by the drug problem,

there is a subdued acceptance that methadone is not as effective as the evidence suggests, in helping people move out of the cycle of addiction. More and more people are becoming trapped in the cycle of methadone treatment because of the insufficient number of rehabilitation pathways. The cost effectiveness of committing resources to the provision of methadone without a proper rehabilitative infrastructure must be questioned. Political leaders have generally not encouraged or participated in explicit debate about methadone or other harm reduction measures (Butler and Mayock, 2006). The psychiatrists dominate the debate through research published in medical and academic journals. The government in turn trusts the psychiatrists and the research they generate to support the efficacy of methadone. In the absence of sufficient research transparency and the gap between the evidence and the reality on the ground, there is a need for a closer and more independent examination of methadone maintenance treatment programmes as they operate in Ireland.

Psychiatrists cannot be blamed for all the problems associated with methadone or the lack of alternative and sustainable rehabilitative pathways out of addiction. They are a highly committed group of professionals contributing to solving the drug problem and, for the most part, work collaboratively with communities and other professions. It is in their interest to see people recover from dependency and move beyond methadone and into rehabilitation. The community and voluntary sector must share some responsibility for where we are today in relation to drug treatment. The social analysis of the structural causes of poverty, unemployment and drug addiction may have been effective in a pre-Celtic Tiger economy but 'the rising tide', has not raised all boats equally. The social analysis of the 1980s and 1990s on its own will not challenge the dominant position methadone holds in treating heroin dependence.

The community sector has been strong in analysing the structural causes that impact on drug use in marginalised communities and also in lobbying and negotiating for more services, but in the process may have become disempowered by their uncritical acceptance of the assumptions of medicine and psychiatry in treating addiction. Many communities are feeling tired and disempowered by the lack of progress in implementing the National Drugs Strategy (National Drugs Strategy, 2001). While the strategy has been successful in increasing the number of people on methadone to 7,074 by May 2004, it has also created a treatment bottleneck.

This paper seeks to unmask the medical hegemony behind methadone treatment, question some of the evidence that emerges through the methodology of evidence based medicine and cast doubt on some of its claims for effectiveness. Clearly methadone should form part of treatment for dependent heroin users in the context of real multi-disciplinary teams, organisations and communities, which are not subjugated or eclipsed by one profession or philosophy to the exclusion of others. The problem is not methadone itself, but the way in which the medical profession continues to dominate and control how addiction is defined and treated. Following on from this critique, I will examine the case of the Crinan project and outline some of the ways it has managed to counter the hegemony of medicine and integrate adult and community education with medical and psychotherapeutic models of treatment. First, let us look at what has happened to addiction treatment under the dominance of the biomedical discourse.

### **Addiction treatment under the biomedical discourse**

Dominant beliefs about how addiction research should be conducted are constructed through the philosophy of positivism and the scientific method. By applying statistical techniques to test competing theories positivism asserts that it is possible to uncover the laws of nature and produce objective ontological truths about the world. Positivism has played a central role in advancing the agenda of biomedicine and ensuring its continued dominance.

The biomedical discourse became dominant early in the twentieth century and continues to exercise control over how we define and understand illness, disease and treatment. According to Baer (2001) a combination of economic growth, social change and the discovery of germ theory and other medical advances gave biomedicine a greater political and economic advantage over other forms of medicine in what was a pluralistic field of practice that included homeopathy, botanic medicine and osteopathy. Discourses like biomedicine are maintained through hegemony, a process that explains how dominant classes persuade subordinate ones to accept, adopt and internalise their values and norms through structural rather than coercive means (Gramsci, 1971).

Along with securing a hegemony over medical practice, biomedicine extended its influence into psychology and addiction through the practice of psychiatry. As a medical specialty, psychiatry's primary goal is to treat mental illness and behavioural disorders such as substance dependence, clinical depression, bipo-

lar disorder, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders. A great deal of psychiatric research has been carried out to try and determine the influence of biochemical imbalances and genetic influences on various mental illnesses. Psychiatry holds that these biochemical imbalances can be corrected, changed or controlled through a chemical intervention in the form of a psychiatric drug (Davies and Bhugra, 2004).

There have been criticisms of the scientific method of psychiatric classification with specific criticisms of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) the dominant system for the classification of mental disorders and diseases including addiction and substance use dependency (Crowe, 2000). According to Duffy, Gillig, Tureen and Ybarra's (2002), critique of the DSM is part of a larger debate about the major competing theories of knowledge or paradigms of positivism and social constructivism.

When science reigns and medicine and the governments are united in a therapeutic state, people perceive countless human problems as the products of diseases and seek to remedy them with medical interventions such as drugs.  
(Szasz, 2001, p. xxiii)

Psychiatry has been criticised for its over-reliance on psychiatric drugs and its close links with the pharmaceutical industry. Prescription-related disease is a pandemic according to McGavock (2004). Prescribed drugs are now a major cause of morbidity and mortality. McGavock argues that the uncritical application of evidence-based medicine, unnecessary prescribing and the excessive and unjustified promotion of drugs has made this problem worse. The medicalisation of everyday problems has expanded the market for pharmaceutical drugs. As a vulnerable population with higher levels of educational disadvantage heroin users are at greater risk of being over diagnosed and over prescribed. Access to addiction treatment data or to participants in treatment is strictly controlled by psychiatrists who have a vested interest in the outcomes of any research in this area. Evidence based medicine (EBM) is the dominant scientific methodology employed to examine addiction treatment and is central to the continued dominance of the biomedical discourse in the treatment of addiction. Studies are generally designed, monitored and controlled by a consultant psychiatrist or clinical psychologist and are published in prominent medical journals.

### **Evidence-based medicine**

EBM uses techniques from science and statistics, such as meta-analysis of scientific literature, risk-benefit analysis, and randomised controlled trials to inform healthcare professionals to make better decisions regarding current best evidence in their everyday practice. However, EBM continues to provoke debate and has been criticised on for its over reliance on positivism, its narrow definition of evidence and its inability to integrate other non statistical data such as professional experience and patient specific factors (Sehon and Stanley, 2003). Jones and Sagar (1995) argue that EBM can only answer those questions for which it is suited and often clinically important details may be hidden, overlooked or simply ‘averaged out’ by the methods of the study. Studies can be designed to produce certain outcomes making it easier for sponsors to purchase the results they seek. EBM research strongly influences what research is conducted, who receives funding, who conducts the research and what research is published. Questions that could potentially present aspects of addiction treatment negatively are less likely to be funded from government or industrial sources and unlikely to be published in medical journals. Editors of medical journals play a central role in the promotion or suppression of ideas in medicine (Miettinen, 1999). In addition, pressures on researchers to succeed, to publish and to bring in increased funding or to meet the expectations of governments appears to be increasing and may be a contributory factor (Breen, 2003).

Random Control Trials (RCT), the gold standard of EBM, are expensive to run and so researchers often turn to the pharmaceutical industry to fund research trials. Recent studies have demonstrated a statistically significant association between industry funding and authors’ conclusions in medical RTCs (Djulbegovic, Lacevic, Cantor, Fields, Bennett, Adams, Kuderer and Lyman, 2000). It is clear that clinical research sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry impacts on how doctors practice medicine. Physicians are affected by their interactions with the pharmaceutical industry. There are extensive ties between the pharmaceutical manufacturers and clinical researchers (Blumenthal, Lambert and Jenny-Avital, 2004). This relationship has a significant effect on the research process and how pharmaceutical products are represented and marketed.

### **EBM and methadone**

EBM is the dominant framework within which researchers have evaluated methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) which has been the gold standard treatment for heroin addiction for nearly 40 years and is generally claimed to be

'effective'. However, there is an absence of independent research with most of the EBM studies supporting the efficacy of MMT coming from medical sources with a vested interest in presenting evidence in such a way that any negative or unfavorable findings are obscured. This raises questions about the real effectiveness of MMT.

MMT has been generally associated with a reduction in criminal activity among individuals participating in treatment (Rothbard, Alterman, Rutherford, Liu, Zelinski and McKay, 1999). However, calculating this reduction is complex and much of the evidence comes from small-scale studies affected by selection bias where programmes have high dropout rates resulting in exaggerated programme effects. Recent studies have been more cautious in their claims for MMT.

Unemployment remains a common problem among methadone patients with vocational training having no significant impact on employment (Zanis, Coviello, Alterman and Appling, 2001). Segest, Mygind and Bay (1990) found in their study an 87 per cent unemployment rate among a cohort of methadone patients and found no clear relationship between MMT and improved employment. Lidz, Sorrentino, Robison and Bunce (2004) examined three models of vocational training, none of which improved employment or rehabilitation rates. Peters and Reid (1998) examining methadone treatment in Scotland found no improvement in employment status. Studies on the impact of MMT on employment from within psychiatry tend to report better results (Drake, McHugo, Bebout, Becker, Harris, Bond and Quimby, 1999).

According to Hickman, Madden, Henry, Baker, Wallace, Wakefield, Stimson and Elliott (2003) MMT is associated with a decrease in mortality among drug users in treatment. However, methadone remains a significant factor in the number of drug related deaths, which mortality statistics tend to under-report or fail to reflect the wider causes of deaths associated with methadone or side effects of prescribed and non prescribed poly drug use. Studies have shown that the proportion of accidental overdose deaths attributed to methadone alone can differ substantially. While the factors associated with accidental overdose are complex and usually related to a combination of factors, there is reason to be concerned with the number of deaths associated with methadone. The fact that many patients continue to use a combination of drugs including heroin, cocaine, cannabis, alcohol and benzodiazepines in addition to their prescribed

methadone gives cause for concern. An Irish study of 851 patients in North-Dublin, carried out by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Royal College of Surgeons Ireland, 2006) found that 77 per cent of methadone patients had a history of cocaine use while in treatment. Many patients terminate their treatment prematurely and return to regular drug use. Peters and Reid (1998) found in their study that only 39 per cent remained in treatment for at least 12 months. Fischer, Rehm, Kim and Kirst (2005) in their review found that evidence of MMT's effectiveness on primary treatment objectives is mixed and appears to be largely short-term. They conclude that the quality and methodological standards of the evidence of the effectiveness of MMT are limited and far less impressive than usually presented.

It is clear from this analysis of the biomedical discourse and the methodology of evidence based medicine that supports the efficacy of methadone treatment, that psychiatry should not be allowed exclusive access or control of this research domain. There is a need for greater transparency and partnership in how treatment programmes for drug users are designed, managed and evaluated. While within medicine there is a move towards a holistic model of treatment, this move is constrained by the dominance and power of the biomedical discourse and the control exerted by psychiatrists over addiction treatment in Ireland. One project that has managed to develop a more holistic approach to treatment is the Crinan project in the north inner city of Dublin.

### **Adult and community education in practice: The Crinan project**

The Crinan project was established in 1997 in response to the needs of young adults seeking treatment for addiction to heroin and other drugs in the north inner city of Dublin. Managed by a partnership between the statutory sector, the local community and a voluntary group, the project has managed to combine and integrate an adult and community education approach with medical and psychotherapeutic models of treating heroin and cocaine addiction. In examining the Crinan project as a model of good practice in drug treatment, I will seek to outline how adult and community education is an effective component of treatment that works in a way that the medical model does not.

### **Community development**

Medicine is limited to treating the symptoms of addiction. A community development approach tackles the causes of addiction. It recognises that the deeper systemic causes of addiction must be addressed, if the benefits of treatment are

to be sustainable. Crinan is a community-based project rooted in the principles of community development, working in partnership with other organisations and professionals seeking to bring about long-term community change. The project participates in and is represented on various networks and policy fora influencing policy at local and national levels. As a community based project, its analysis of the drug problem looks at the broader causes of addiction and addresses these through adult education and community development. Addressing socio-environmental, cultural and economic factors, as well as demographic variables such as gender, age and ethnicity is central to this approach. Addressing issues of educational disadvantage, economic and social development as well as the provision of adequate housing, recreational facilities and parks is central to building communities where people have choices other than to use heroin or methadone.

### **Community education**

Medicine requires compliance. Within the medical model, the patient normally becomes a passive recipient and consumer of treatment. As a result, a dependency is created between the patient, the doctor and the medicine. Adult and community education nurtures a degree of resistance to oppressive discourses and an awareness of relationships based on imbalances of power or knowledge. It seeks to enable the patient to become an active participant in their own treatment and rehabilitation process. Barr (1999) suggests that community education, a process of generating liberating knowledge is central to the way the project engages the local community by promoting fresh thinking, new ideas and directions and by placing a greater focus on the systemic and socio-economic circumstances and variables that shape addiction. In Crinan, family support and education groups have been central to this approach. Working with a Parents' Group on changing the family diet or on managing family pain in a non-medical or addictive way, may have a more sustainable and positive effect on the family system or the life of their son or daughter, than a psychological or counselling session.

Bancroft, Carty, Cunningham-Burley and Beckett-Milburn (2003) have shown that support for families of drug users is an integral part of the treatment process and has been shown to be effective. The family is a critical part of the socialisation process for young people and has the potential to guide young people away from problem behaviours and drug use (Kumpfer, Olds, Alexander, Zucker and Gary, 1998).

### **Arts education**

Medicine treats the pain and numbs the emotions. The pharmaceutical industry profits from producing medicines that are supposed to regulate or control the emotions of unhappy, sad or depressed people. Art provides a way for people to come to terms with emotional conflicts, increase self-awareness, and express unspoken and often unconscious concerns about their illness and their lives. The Crinan project engages its participants through art in the form of ceramics, mosaics, paintwork, woodwork and music production. There are no limits on the type of art involved. The mosaics in fact, now form part of the interior design of the project, creating a warm, welcoming and open environment. The Project's art programme is actively helping to create a treatment space, which is very different from the impersonal and clinical environment that is found in the medical led methadone clinics. Arts education provides adults with new contexts for learning, understanding and for constructing new ways of being. It promotes a way of learning and reflecting that focuses on the creative process. The majority of those who have become involved with heroin use have had negative experiences of education and have left school early. Arts education works by facilitating adults to become self-directed learners, to find and apply solutions to their problems and to construct their own pathways out of the addiction cycle. Finlay (2000) documented similar work carried out in the Soilse project where they also used art in an adult and community education context to promote recovery and rehabilitation.

### **Theatre as adult education**

Medicine has become confused with health with more and more people relying on medicine, doctors and hospitals for better health. The expanding medical system is unable to meet the demands being placed on it. In the same way the drug addiction system is becoming overly reliant on doctors, clinics and medicine with more and more people remaining dependent on methadone. The Crinan project has tried to counter the over medicalisation of addiction treatment by applying the works of Boal (1979) and Freire (1972) in both conscientizing and empowering participants to become more aware of the connections between the external and internal oppressions that influence decisions to use drugs. Boal (1995) has demonstrated the effectiveness of theatre as a site for transformative learning among adults experiencing alienation, depression, addiction or any kind of personal oppression. The theatre programme has helped participants to engage more proactively in treatment and the issues that affected their daily lives. O'Brien (2004) applied these techniques as research methodology

in his qualitative study of the Crinan project which looked at drug treatment discourses. He found that while the biomedical discourse dominated the treatment of heroin addiction in Ireland, the Crinan project had managed to hold a different balance between the treatment discourses of medicine, psychotherapy and adult education resulting in the development of a more integrated model of treatment.

### **Alternative and complementary holistic treatments**

Access to medicine is limited and treatments are expensive and sometimes exclusive. The cost of health care is rising and low-income earners are often excluded. The growing awareness of the limited effectiveness of medicine in certain domains and its increasing cost, has led many people to turn to alternative and complementary medicine. Alternative and complementary holistic treatments have become part of Crinan's integrated programme of options that includes methadone. Treatments include auricular acupuncture, yoga, herbal therapy and massage. Combining the biomedical approach of methadone substitution with holistic treatments has enabled the project to maintain a comparatively low methadone dose. In an environment where addiction treatment is highly medicalised, the Crinan project has been innovative in educating participants, parents and staff members to seek alternative ways to respond to the pain and stress associated with detoxification. The project has created an environment of detoxification rather than long-term medicalisation, which is the case in many of the methadone clinics. The educational sessions are designed to reflect the various core components of the treatment philosophy in Crinan. All sessional, educational and psychotherapeutic staff come together at regular intervals throughout the year, to review the practice and delivery of this treatment model which integrates psychotherapy and adult education.

### **Conclusion**

What one may ask makes adult and community education work, in a way that medicine does not, in treating drug addiction? Medicine alone treats the pain. Adult and community education engages the non-medicated part of the person and invites them to become an active participant in their own treatment and rehabilitation process. Medicine does what a drug like heroin does; it numbs the pain, treats the symptoms and gives temporary relief. Adult and community education, on the other hand, conscientizes the person to the causes of their drug use problem and equips them with the knowledge and skills required to re-engage with their problems and their underlying causes. This process does

not exclude medicine, but shifts the focus to a process of dynamic engagement with a menu of treatments and options facilitated by a multi-disciplinary team that is not dominated by one knowledge tradition. The Crinan project is currently conducting a qualitative research project in the form of an outcome study to test what it believes to be significant findings based its own observations and project data.

*Thomas O'Brien has spent 15 years working with early school leavers and drug users. In 1997 he helped establish and manage the Crinian Project in the north inner city of Dublin. He also spent two years managing a multi-disciplinary team working with mainly homeless teenagers in The Drug Treatment Board in Dublin before moving to Spain.*

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# **SECTION TWO**

PRACTICE ARTICLES

# Too Many Left Behind: Can Current Policy on Adult Literacy Address the Need for Social Change in Ireland?

ROB MARK

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## **Introduction**

This article traces the development of adult literacy as a field of practice in Ireland. It examines how literacy is understood and looks at key moments in the recent development of policy showing how adult literacy has become a central focus of Government policy in both the Republic and in Northern Ireland. It concludes that while the development of literacy has been largely influenced by economic concerns, there is a need for re-thinking policies if they are to meet a need for change in both parts of Ireland.

Much has been written about adult literacy particularly its meaning, its relationship with the wider socio-political debate about education and how it might be organised. A wide variety of theories and opinions exist and there is no consensus among educators, policy makers or Governments on what should be done to promote a more inclusive literate society.

Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001, p.1) note that "definitions of what it means to be literate are always shifting". Assumptions about what literacy is are constantly being challenged by new research and practices, which are redefining the meaning of literacy. Street (1984) defined two models for understanding literacy that he referred to as "autonomous" and "ideological". Each of these discourses generates very different ways of thinking about literacy. The autonomous model postulates that literacy is a set of normative, unproblematic technical skills that are neutral and detached from the social context in which they are used. The 'correct' skills are defined or fixed (by the powerful group) and learning becomes focused on the reproduction of 'correct' skills learned in the classroom and which it is assumed can be easily transferred to real life situations.

The alternative ideological model, sometimes called the social practices model or discourse, recognises the socio-cultural, diverse nature of literacy. Arguing for a social practices model, Hamilton (2000, p.1) notes “Literacy competence and need cannot be understood in terms of absolute levels of skills, but are relational concepts, defined by the social and communicative practices with which individuals engage in the various domains of their life and world”. Here power to determine content and curriculum lies primarily with the learner rather than the educational organisation. This approach responds to issues that are derived from people’s own interests and knowledge of the world. A critical approach adds a further dimension to an understanding of literacy by linking it to social and political issues in society. Shor (1991, p.15) notes “critical literacy ... points to providing students not merely with functional skills, but with the conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices”. Lambe (2006, p.17) notes that in general literacy definitions reflect the ideological perspectives of their creators as well as the social, cultural, political and economic environment of the time, making it almost impossible to find a satisfactory and comprehensive definition that suits everybody. An examination of the development of adult literacy in Ireland shows that it has been understood in quite different ways in different contexts.

### **Adult Literacy in the Republic of Ireland**

Bailey (2006, p.199) notes that prior to the 1970s, there was no official recognition of the adult literacy problem in the Irish Republic and no commitment to equality of educational opportunity or to a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the national school system. It was not until the publication of the Murphy Report (1973) *Adult Education in Ireland* that the needs of adults with ‘low literacy skills’ was fully recognised. The report detailed twenty-two points necessary to develop the adult education system in Ireland, including a recommendation for a special report on the needs of adults with low literacy skills. Bailey (2006, p. 200) notes that while this report had little impact in terms of official recognition at Government level, at community level, people were beginning to volunteer as tutors for individuals who wanted help developing their literacy skills. Because of the stigma attached to having a literacy difficulty, much of the early tuition was offered in people’s homes on a one-to-one basis, protecting the identity of learners from the social stigma of illiteracy. This also kept the adult literacy movement low-key and the problem invisible.

A significant milestone in the development of adult literacy was the establishment of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in 1980. Initially NALA was set up as a membership organisation for all those interested or involved in adult literacy and after five years of lobbying, the organisation was given a small grant to open up an office. Since then, NALA has acted as a coordinating body, harnessing the efforts of all those involved in adult literacy, raising awareness, and lobbying the government for funding and recognition of the issue.

The Kenny Report (1984) was the first Government report to have lifelong learning as its central theme, highlighting the importance of developing a structured adult education system catering to the needs of all adults, including those with basic education needs. In 1985, the Government granted NALA its first funding and the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), the local bodies with responsibility for the organisation of adult education across the Republic, with their first dedicated resources for adult literacy and community education.

During the 1990s, while educators became focussed on the idea of lifelong learning as an integrated part of the philosophy of adult education, the Irish Government became focused on the promotion of education and training courses for workers to develop:

the skills and aptitudes of those in work and those seeking employment by both addressing the needs of the productive sectors and by integrating those who are marginalised and disadvantaged.

(Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 272)

By the mid-1990s, the Irish economy experienced an unprecedented boom, and the education and training system, played an important role in providing trained people in sufficient numbers to contribute to employment growth at this time.

The *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS), conducted in 1995 and published in 1997, provided the Republic with its first profile of the literacy skills of adults aged 16-64. The study found that about 25 per cent of the Irish population scored at the lowest level (Level 1) and had some degree of difficulty with everyday literacy and numeracy tasks. (Morgan, Hickey and Kellaghan, 1997). The survey drew attention to the substantially lower levels of literacy in Ireland especially in the older age groups and an association between low levels of lit-

eracy and low levels of participation in second chance education and training. The IALS study also showed how poor literacy skills among the adult population negatively affected family, community and work life. This led to the government recognising the importance of improving adult literacy levels for wider social and economic development. It led to substantial improvements in funding for adult literacy provision in various settings and the numbers of literacy learners and tutors has significantly increased. The study focussed attention on the significant mismatch in the resources being allocated to adult literacy provision and the scale of the task. It also showed that younger adults were less likely to experience literacy problems than older ones.

### **The development of adult literacy policy in the Irish Republic**

The publication of the White Paper, *Learning for Life* (2000) confirmed the Irish Government's commitment to the establishment of a national policy for lifelong learning and specifically to the establishment of a well-funded adult education system. The policy document also recognised that adult education can make a major contribution to meeting the skill requirements of a rapidly changing workforce, as well as improving social cohesion and equity in the emergence of a broadly inclusive and pro-active civil society. The White Paper (2000, p.34) went on to acknowledge the findings of the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (1997) that focussed public attention on the urgency of the adult literacy problem marking the first clear recognition by Government of adult literacy as a funding issue. Bailey (2006, p.197) notes that prior to this White Paper there was no national literacy policy and only a very small fund to cover minimal adult literacy services. Since the publication of the IALS, she noted that funding has increased 18 fold and participation in literacy services has increased almost six-fold. So the literacy issue moved to being a top priority in national policy on further education, and to being firmly embedded in policy agendas outside of the education sector.

Adult literacy is also part of the *National Development Plan* (2000-2006), which outlines a vision of the future that provides for greater economic and social development (Bailey 2006, p.198). It is seen as a contributing factor to upskilling the workforce and facilitating greater participation of those on the margins of society (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.191).

The upskilling of the workforce was not however, the main focus of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) which has responsibility for co-ordi-

nation, training and policy development in adult literacy in Ireland. In its revised *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work* (2005) NALA defines literacy as involving:

listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change.

(NALA, 2005, p.3)

It's understanding of literacy recognises the importance of the needs and interests of individuals and it is concerned with personal development and building confidence as well as technical skills. NALA's view is clearly that while literacy is linked to economic development and employment, it must not be limited to issues of economics.

literacy is deeply connected with the rights of individuals and communities: it is about their right to have a voice in society; to continue and extend their education; to read and to be read.

(NALA, 2005, p.7)

The NALA guidelines note that the basic philosophy and approach which underpins adult literacy work is based on a belief that effective learning builds on the wealth of life experience which adults bring to their work on literacy development and is informed by the writings of a number of key thinkers in particular Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers and Jack Mezirow. For example, an important focus of literacy development in the Republic has been the expression and analysis by learners of their own lives, views and experiences as an essential part of the process of developing their literacy based on the pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire in Brazil in the 1960s.

### **Adult Literacy in Northern Ireland**

Adult literacy classes in Northern Ireland can be traced back to the mid 1950s but it was only after the screening of the BBC television programme *On the Move*, in 1975, that a greater emphasis was placed on the development of provision to meet the basic learning needs of adults.

During the 1970s, the Adult Literacy and Basic Education Committee (ALBEC) was set up by the then Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI), to advise on adult literacy provision and this body remained in existence until comparatively recently. ALBEC was a cross-sectoral body which included members from the different sectors of literacy provision including further education, the training sector, and the voluntary and community sector. It also maintained links with bodies with similar interests in other parts of Ireland and the UK, and promoted quality standards in the delivery of Adult Basic Education (ABE). It acted as an advocate for literacy and basic education practice in Northern Ireland over an extended period of social and political turmoil during which Northern Ireland was governed directly from Westminster and where local politicians had little or no say in the development of Government policy. Its activities included organising conferences, training programmes and providing consultancy and advice to support the development of literacy and adult basic education. It also provided support for tutors, for example, through the preparation of tutor manuals and through publishing student writing. ALBEC represented the interests of a group of committed professionals with minimal financial support from DENI to develop ideas, and to respond to the expressed needs of tutors and learners. While ALBEC might be criticised as largely a talking shop, it did succeed in keeping the needs of literacy learners on the political agenda and it also organised occasional joint cross-border meetings and conferences at a time when there was little political will or financial support to engage in such activities.

Following the demise of ALBEC, a Basic Skills Unit was established in 1999 within the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) to act as an advocate and advisory body to promote and develop quality basic skills learning opportunities for adults. At the same time other Government initiatives such as the University for Industry (Ufi)/ Learndirect Essential Skills Pilot Project was established to assist adults to find new ways of improving their basic skills for employment. The Learndirect experiment aimed to meet Government strategic economic, learning and skills objectives through providing accessible, relevant and flexible learning using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as an integral part of learning (Mark and Donaghey, 2002, p. 9).

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) also provided Northern Ireland with its first ever comprehensive survey on levels of literacy. The results showed that some 24 per cent of those aged between 16 and 65 (around a quarter of

a million people) performed at the lowest level of prose literacy as defined by the internationally agreed measurement instrument of the IALS survey. Those adults most likely to perform at level one were in the lowest income brackets, in receipt of social security benefits, unemployed and with lower levels of educational attainment. Further detailed analysis of evidence indicated that the older age groups performed worse than 16-25 year olds, with over 40 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women at level 1 in the 56-65 age group. A total of 36 per cent of those identified at level 1 were unemployed (DEL, 2002, p. 20).

### **The development of adult literacy policy in Northern Ireland**

From the late 1990s, a series of policy reports on lifelong learning in Northern Ireland set out a rationale for the development of literacy policy. In 1999, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) report on *Lifelong Learning: a New Learning Culture for All* proposed a new framework for the development of lifelong learning for the twenty-first century. This paper was strongly influenced by the UK Government's Green Paper (1998) *The Learning Age: a Renaissance for a New Britain*, which emphasised the importance of "the continuous development of skills, knowledge and understanding essential for employability and fulfilment" (DEL, 1999, p. 3). The paper emphasised the particular contribution that lifelong learning can make to economic development, to healing the divisions of society, to supporting social cohesion, and to helping communities respond to social and economic change. It also acknowledged that adult learning was not sufficiently well established in Northern Ireland and outlined a set of interlocking proposals, aimed at creating a culture where continued lifelong learning would become the normal pattern. The paper went on to stress the importance of increasing general skills levels to improve international competitiveness, enabling individuals of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to enhance their employability in a rapidly changing economy. The paper set out key aims for the development of lifelong learning that includes increasing participation from previously under-represented groups, providing more coherent relationships between education and training and the skills of the regional economy, and providing greater ease of progression through the system of qualifications. The strategy also emphasises the importance of "the development of basic and key skills in the context of skills, knowledge and understanding, essential for employability and fulfilment" (DEL, 1999, p.1), thus underlining the importance of adult literacy as a set of technical skills which can assist economic development.

In 2002, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) launched the Essential Skills Strategy and Action Plan. The strategy document *Essential Skills for Living: a framework and consultation paper on adult literacy* (2002) was one of the first policy documents developed with local involvement in the decision making process. The development of this strategy also coincided with the setting up of a new short-lived power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland that brought educational policies under the scrutiny of local ministers for the first time in many years. The document notes the contribution that poor literacy and numeracy make to social exclusion and exclusion from the labour market and sets out a framework and actions to improve the essential skills of literacy and numeracy in Northern Ireland. The strategy sets out a broad vision for improving literacy and numeracy among adults. It notes the need to:

provide opportunities for adults to update their essential skills to assist them in improving their quality of life, personal development and their employment opportunities and by so doing to promote greater economic development, social inclusion and cohesion.

(DEL, 2002, p. 6)

The strategy defined essential skills as: “the ability to communicate by talking and listening; reading and writing; use numeracy, and the ability to handle information” (2002, p. 5). It also noted that ICT can also be regarded as an essential skill and as a medium to draw many into learning (2002, p.19). DEL (2002, p.19) noted that the benefits of improving literacy and numeracy as developing skills and abilities which help learners to develop the competence and confidence to express ideas and opinions and to make decisions and to solve problems, and so enhancing the quality of everyday life. The report also set out a framework for the development of a regional curriculum based on the core curriculum in England and for the accreditation of learners at five levels of entry. The improvement of tutor qualifications was set out as a priority and while not addressing the development of ICT skills specifically, the strategy did recognise the importance of ICT skills as a medium for drawing many adults into learning.

The importance of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) as essential skills was further emphasised by the publication of the *Skill Strategy for Northern Ireland* (2004) which reinforced the importance of essential skills and recommended they be extended to include computer literacy (2004, p.9).

In 2005, the DEL commissioned a review of the *Essential Skills for Living Strategy* which noted that the strategy was on track to achieve or possibly exceed its targets for participation, with participants reporting positive experiences of training. The report noted that the strategy was critical to the success of the economy reinforcing as it does the link between social exclusion and exclusion from the labour market and concluded that it needs to be continued as a priority area.

In Northern Ireland, Government funded provision has been focused on addressing the skills gap in the workforce and on progressing individuals into employment. Approaches to literacy which have a strong social, cultural or citizenship focus have tended to develop outside of the formally accredited learning provision, particularly within the voluntary and community sector. The projects can be traced back to the early 1990s, and are closely linked to the Peace Process in Ireland. This brought additional funding, mostly from the European Union which enabled projects with a wider social and community remit to develop. One of the problems of this type of provision has been its short lifespan.

### **Measuring adult literacy needs**

An examination of the development of adult literacy in Ireland shows that there have been few attempts to measure the extent of need. However, as McGill and Morgan (2001) note, “the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in Ireland, has provided Ireland with its first ever comprehensive study of literacy needs showing around one quarter of adults in each jurisdiction (24 per cent in Northern Ireland and 25 per cent in the Republic) as having problems with the simplest literacy task” (p.57). This they note as having “implications for the equality agenda” (p.54). The IALS has also led to considerable funding being given to adult literacy both North and South. While the advent of significant funding has been welcomed by many as a way of significantly increasing participation in adult literacy education, some have pointed to limitations in how the IALS survey was conducted. It was based on a particular conceptualisation of literacy which focuses on a functional approach and gaining basic measurable skills. This is sometimes referred to as a ‘deficit model’ which sees the purpose of literacy education as one of teaching the individual the literacy skills necessary to function in society. Critics of this approach claim that this devalues the validity of the very different, diverse literacies which people engage in, and which characterise most societies.

### **Different understandings and approaches to adult literacy**

A closer examination of the development of adult literacy in Ireland, North and South, shows that different understandings of adult literacy have led to different policies and practices.

In the Republic, two distinct approaches to understanding literacy can be delineated. On the one hand, the economic boom in Ireland has led to a general concern for a focus on the development of skills to meet the needs of the economy, which has encouraged an approach to literacy which focuses on the acquisition of skills for work. This approach is most noticeable in Government Reports such as the *White Paper on Adult Education* (DES, 2000) and the *National Development Plan* (1999). On the other hand, the concern of NALA, the national co-ordinating body for adult literacy and of many practitioners is based on a much wider understanding of adult literacy. The NALA guidelines on literacy which are underpinned by a broader understanding of adult literacy and which are based on a particular philosophy of adult literacy, sees it as going beyond a deficit model. With this model the tutor or teacher often has an underlying, but usually acknowledged assumption that the learner is in some way inadequate or unfortunate because they lack the knowledge and skills that must be provided by the teacher. NALA advocates what it calls a 'wealth' model where learners realise their own strengths and knowledge and where learners learn how to learn (2005, p. 9 -10). They are encouraged to explore opportunities for further learning from an understanding of their own life experience and the questions this raises. The model assumes people learn best where the subject matter is relevant and when learning is based on active participation. It postulates that when learners participate in decisions about the learning process they are encouraged to evaluate their own learning and they are more likely to develop independence, creativity and self-reliance. The wealth model is based on the ideas of well known theorists such as Carl Rodgers. It also draws on the ideas of Jack Mezirow on transformative learning which makes it possible for learners to develop new perspectives and to take action based on this new view of themselves, their families and the wider society. This kind of critical reflection is connected to Paulo Freire's view on education and social action (NALA 2005, p. 10-11). These ideas have contributed to the development of a learner-centred concept of adult education where the needs, concerns and experience of the learners are the focus of learning, rather than an externally structured and enforced curriculum based on, for example, the economy.

NALA (2005, p.11) notes that a more challenging concept, also at the centre of adult literacy work in Ireland, is the learner-directed approach. This means that rather than curriculum and approaches being formed by tutors who take into consideration the needs of learners, it is formed by the learners in discussion with their tutors. Tutors then facilitate the learning that the students wish to pursue and encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

In contrast, pronouncements on adult literacy and lifelong learning in Northern Ireland, contained in policy reports such as the *Essential Skills Strategy* (2002) and the *Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland* (2004), have been the key shapers of adult literacy and how it is understood. A core national non-governmental organisation with public funding similar to NALA does not exist and there is no obvious forum with a respected independent voice for adult literacy and which can influence co-ordination, training and policy development. While the recent history of the development of adult literacy shows that the Department for Employment and Learning has sought to establish an independent voice, for example through bodies such as ALBEC and the Basic Skills Unit, these quangos have generally not been effective.

In Northern Ireland, Government policy as outlined in the *Essential Skills for Living Strategy* (2002) sets out a framework and actions to improve the essential skills of literacy and numeracy with the national standards and the core curriculum in literacy and numeracy in England being adopted. An examination of policy statements shows that the Government's view of literacy is primarily influenced by the need to meet the skills requirement of a rapidly changing workforce. The need for social cohesion and equity as well as the emergence of an inclusive civil society is also recognised as important in the future vision set out in the *Essential Skills for Living Strategy* (2002, p.6) though how this may be achieved is not clearly articulated in the strategy.

Different policies in Ireland, North and South, have inevitably given rise to different practices. In Northern Ireland, tutors experience has been shaped by a skills focused curriculum that does not actively promote tutors or learner involvement in shaping the curriculum. There is an emphasis on the accreditation of learning organised mainly through Colleges of Further and Higher Education. Tutors are required to undergo formal, accredited, externally validated, training organised through Further and Higher Education Colleges and Queen's University, Belfast. In contrast, in the Republic of Ireland, literacy

learning takes place largely through informal learning groups in the community where the curriculum is agreed between tutor and students, the majority of tutors being volunteers. Initial tutor training is organised largely within local literacy schemes and accredited tutor training programmes for experienced paid practitioners are offered nationally largely through the Waterford Institute of Technology.

In general, the policy agenda is significantly different between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of the economy in the North and a greater emphasis on the equality and social cohesion agenda in the South.

### **The international dimension and adult literacy**

Given the many common concerns expressed in policies and strategies in adult literacy in both parts of Ireland, it would seem reasonable to ask to what extent there has been a sharing of ideas, common concerns, examples of good practices and exploitation of opportunities to work together in the two parts of Ireland? Given that close geographic proximity between Northern Ireland and the Republic and given they are both members of the European Union which seeks to encourage closer cooperation between members states and which provides financial measures for such cooperation, one might expect a closer level of cooperation between the two parts of Ireland. Despite incentives there is little evidence of direct involvement of Government Departments and Agencies in cross border co-operation on adult literacy. Instead co-operation is left to the good will of individuals and groups who have sometimes taken up opportunities to promote adult literacy activities and develop short-lived co-operation projects.

The Republic's White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (2000) devotes a whole section to co-operation with Northern Ireland. It notes areas for development including teacher, school and youth exchanges and mutual recognition of qualifications but there are no references to co-operation in the field of adult literacy education in the report. In contrast, the Northern Ireland policy documents on adult literacy make few references to cooperation or how this might be improved.

The emergence of a peace and reconciliation process in Ireland, which isn't tied to existing funding structures, has provided new opportunities to improve

practices and to promote cross border initiatives in adult literacy. One such example is the Literacy and Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) Project (2006, Lambe et al;) which has enabled stakeholders including learners in adult literacy to come together to explore issues relating to adult literacy and equality in Irish society with particular emphasis being placed on the post conflict situation. Another example of co-operation is the establishment of a working group of key adult literacy public sector stakeholders to examine policy development in the UK and in Ireland. Much more might be achieved through greater co-operation on the development of policies and practices in a wide range of fields including recognition of qualifications, development of curricula and quality management.

### **Conclusion**

In the past decade, the Island of Ireland has seen considerable change in the growth and development of literacy policies. There has been a particular focus on meeting the needs of the economy spurred on by a focus on developing skills which promote economic prosperity on both sides of the border. Such policies have undervalued the needs of every individual and the wider social benefits which learning can bring through social inclusion and active citizenship. The advent of a Peace Process in Northern Ireland and across the Island of Ireland provides a unique opportunity to focus not simply on economic goals, but on real social, cultural, political and environmental challenges which promote change. Adult literacy practice can make a unique contribution to engaging the most marginalised in a journey which can bring about a lasting peace in a new democratic and inclusive Ireland. To achieve this, policies which promote understanding and dialogue and which acknowledge the wider social benefits of learning must be encouraged. It remains to be seen if those charged with the job of developing policies to promote real change can take up the challenge to promote democratic learning through building learning partnerships which can make a real difference to learners' lives.

*Rob Mark is Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast where he has co-ordinated teacher education programmes in adult literacy and numeracy. He has also been involved with several special research and development initiatives in adult literacy.*

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# Measuring Client Progression in Adult Guidance

LUCY HEARNE

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## **Introduction**

Currently, in the field of guidance, relevant stakeholders including guidance practitioners, educators and policy makers, have identified progression for adults in education and employment as one of the key outcomes of educational guidance. Lifelong guidance is now inextricably linked with lifelong learning as a mechanism to enhance individual mobility in the workforce for future economic growth. However, the current policy requirement for measurable data through positivistic methods of analysis may not provide a true reflection of individual progression. The author argues that methodologies generating extensive qualitative data in the longitudinal tracking of clients in adult guidance provision are now required. This is the topic of current research by the author which aims to determine whether progression can be effectively measured within the framework of longitudinal tracking systems in adult guidance.

## **Adult Guidance Policy**

According to the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education “The primary purpose of educational guidance is to improve the match between learning opportunities and the needs and interests of learners and potential learners” (Brown, 2003, p.1). Within the context of lifelong learning it is now recognised that economic and social development will require a better-educated and adaptable population to meet the challenges ahead. Recently developed government policy in adult education in Ireland now confirms this requirement and views educational guidance as one of the “fundamental foundation blocks which must be in place in building a comprehensive system of Adult Education within an overall framework of lifelong learning” (DES, 2000, p.19).

The 2004 publication of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), *Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers*, states that:

Well planned and organised career guidance services are increasingly important. Countries in the OECD and the European Union are implementing lifelong learning strategies, as well as policies to encourage the development of their citizens' employability.

(OECD, 2004, p.6)

The OECD stresses that in order to implement these strategies and policies, it is envisaged that citizens will have to develop skills to manage their own education and employment over their lifespan, requiring them to re-evaluate their career and life goals. Therefore, continuous access to appropriate information, advice and guidance about education, training and employment will be a necessity in the future. However, it also confirms that there are gaps in the regularity and systematic evaluation of the quality of career guidance services in most countries, concluding that:

There is little regular and systematic evaluation of the quality of career guidance provision in most countries. Service standards for provision do not exist or are present in some sectors but not in others. Quality frameworks, where they exist, tend to be voluntary rather than mandatory, and to operate as guidelines. Users of career guidance services have a key role to play in the design and evaluation of services.

(OECD, 2004, p.8)

A more recent OECD Report (2005), *Improving Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems*, prioritises six EU policy goals where lifelong guidance can positively contribute. These are "efficient investment in education and training, labour market efficiency, lifelong learning, social inclusion, social equity and economic development" (Wannan and McCarthy, 2005, p.14). In order to improve policy, develop common European indicators and benchmark best practice, its expert group on lifelong guidance has developed a number of European reference tools. It recommends that in order to ensure quality of provision for citizens, guidance services need to have a culture of continuous improvement involving regular 'citizen' feedback.

Recognition of the need for research in longitudinal tracking is now evident in international literature which is giving rise to current debates on the outcomes and measurements of progression. Currently, in the United Kingdom, a long-term project which is evaluating the 'usefulness' of guidance for clients through longitudinal tracking provides an example of such research (Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes and Orton, 2004). Finally, Maguire and Killeen (2003, p.17) argue that the ongoing focus of attention when assessing the outcomes of career guidance has been in terms of the benefits and costs of that activity. This will require "greater discussion and agreement between policy makers, practitioners, and researchers over what will be deemed appropriate, desirable and measurable outcomes of career guidance" (Maguire and Killeen, 2003, p.17). They also confirm the need to generate more substantive research evidence through longitudinal studies which will be of both immediate and long-term benefit to policy makers (p.18).

### **Adult Guidance in Ireland**

In 2000, the Department of Education and Science recognised the need for education and career guidance for adults in its policy document *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. It defines guidance as "a range of activities designed to assist people to make choices about their lives and to make transitions consequent of these choices" (DES, 2000, p. 156). Such activities include; "information, assessment, advice, counselling, advocacy, networking, management and innovating systems change" (DES, 2000, p.156). The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) was established in 2000, and there are currently 36 services in operation providing guidance to adults progressing to education and employment. These services have been rolled out on a phased basis providing a comprehensive adult guidance service nationwide under the *National Development Plan*. The AEGI is specifically targeting adult learners who wish to re-engage with education through a number of initiatives including the adult literacy services, VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) programmes and adult and community based education.

In 2002, an international review of career guidance policies carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development concluded, "in moving closer to a lifelong approach to the provision of career information, guidance and counselling services, Ireland has many strengths" (OECD, 2002, p.20). However, it did identify specific weaknesses in linking policy making and practice through the absence of established systems to track client progression

and monitor long-term service use. As the AEGI has only been in operation since 2000, much of the current activity in relation to evaluation has been on an ad-hoc basis at local level, in the style of customer satisfaction surveys and feedback forms for service development and quality assurance. To date, there have been no national guidelines on the implementation of longitudinal tracking systems to monitor client progression and inform future best practice in the services. The Department of Education and Science employs a positivistic approach in its definition and measurement of progression requiring hard outcomes and performance indicators based solely on education and employment readiness. This approach is now proving to be limited, from both the perspective of the user and the guidance practitioner, as it does not provide a true reflection of the client's experience of progression. As Maguire and Killeen argue:

it is difficult to see how studies of the impact of career guidance activity can be meaningful if they do not allow for what might constitute life-changing effects of interventions, which may or may not be readily apparent in terms of easily observable or tangible outcomes, such as the take-up of learning opportunities, or entry into employment.

(Maguire and Killeen, 2003, p.5)

### **Current Research Topic: Measuring Progression in Adult Guidance**

The “dearth of analysis in the area of tracking the progression of adults in educational guidance provision in Ireland” was identified by a study carried out by the author during her work with the Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults, in the Waterford Institute of Technology (Hearne, 2005, p.23). Although this research employed a quantitative methodology in the form of a postal survey, service users did get the opportunity to give qualitative feedback on their experiences of accessing guidance, education and employment. However, the limitations of this approach highlighted the need for more in-depth research by means of qualitative methods. It was evident that clients had stories and experiences which they wished to share and these are the subject of this author's current research.

The research is ongoing and whilst there are a number of anticipated outcomes, the overall aim is to examine the concept of ‘progression’ for adult learners who have received guidance. The findings will then inform the development of a quality assurance framework for guidance and benchmark future best practice in Ireland. The research is underpinned by a theoretical approach to cli-

ent progression and standardised tracking systems in adult guidance contexts. The research design is underpinned by an interpretive approach addressing the research questions through the application of grounded theory. At this stage a number of case interviews with clients have been completed and data analysis is being undertaken. The research has thrown up some interesting questions about the concept of progression within the context of guidance methodologies and asks whether it can be effectively measured.

### *What is Progression?*

As education practitioners we will have our own assumptions and opinions of what progression means for a client that may be subjective and based on our own philosophies of learning and achievement, for example, behaviourist, humanist, constructivist. However, McGivney (2002, p. 11) states “progression is one of the many words referred to in education literature and policy making which has no universally accepted definition but is still used as a measurement of achievement by stakeholders in education and employment”. At present, it is a policy requirement that such outputs are measured in terms of ‘hard’ outcomes, and within tight timeframes, which include attainment of qualifications and securing employment. The ‘soft’ outcomes discussed by Dewson, Eccles, Tackey and Jackson (2000) would appear to be neglected in evaluation systems. They argue that outcomes such as analytical, organisational, personal and interpersonal skills gained from training, support or guidance interventions cannot be measured tangibly (Dewson, Eccles, Tackey and Jackson, 2000, p.4). Quite often the achievement of such outcomes by the client is gained through the overcoming of personal and institutional barriers that may never be equated sufficiently.

The *Opening a Door* (Hearne, 2005) report found that the main barrier to progression is still financial, and even though funding supports are available to the majority of full-time students in Higher Education, they may be inadequate (p.12). This would concur with Kathleen Lynch’s (1999) argument that inequalities continue to exist within our current education system for adult learners (p. 212). These are propounded by the lack of research of mature student progression within colleges where there are no systems to track students beyond their first year. As a result, there are difficulties about the recording and identifying of inequalities and the implementation of supports needed for adult learners to enable their progression.

### **Overview of Methodologies in Adult Guidance Research**

The author proposes that because of the limitations of quantitative analysis, methodologies that generate extensive qualitative data are now required in guidance research. In relation to adult guidance, attention is given to the client's story to help the client make sense of his/her experiences, decisions and actions. Gibson (2004, p.1) refers to the relevance of narrative theory in career counselling and the power it has to illuminate the importance of the past for the present:

It invites and assists the client to more clearly become the author of his or her identity and career. From the reflective position of author, the client can recognise and act on the responsibility to live a meaningful story.

(Gibson, 2004, p.9)

This understanding of the client's story is gained through in-depth interviewing and the same methods can be applied in qualitative methods, such as case studies, by the guidance practitioner/researcher.

Bimrose (2003, p.3) argues that "theories informing current guidance and counselling policy practice have been developed mainly by operating from scientific positivist paradigms of research using quantitative methods". Concerns about the limitations of this research method in guidance are now being expressed by researchers and practitioners. Quantitative research is a scientific approach that is typically led by clear ideas and the construction of a hypothesis that can be tested through gathering data and measuring it in an empirical way. To counter this, Bimrose proposes that:

knowledge and understanding built up from a particular approach to research needs to be complemented with knowledge and understanding derived from different ways of investigating social phenomenon.

(Brimrose, 2003 p.3)

In contrast, qualitative research is more concerned with the exploration of a particular phenomenon of interest in depth and in context, using the respondent's own words, feelings and experiences without making prior analytical assumptions. In social research there are a number of terms used including 'interpretive', 'naturalistic' and 'constructivist' to describe this approach. Constructivism claims that reality is socially constructed and that there is no one true objective

reality that can be known. Instead, there are multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge and it is the task of the researcher to help construct that reality with the research participants.

McMahon and Patton (2006, p.7) state that “constructivism has had an influence on some of the key elements of career counselling”. These include: the counselling relationship; the nature of the counselling process; the use of language; and the role of assessment. Brott (2004, p.1) contends that a constructivist approach to assessment in career counselling presents the opportunity for the practitioner to gain insights into clients’ stories, amplify clients’ self-awareness and enable clients to develop a future orientation through action steps. Likewise, it is argued here, that the same process can operate in the guidance research interview where clients’ expectations, experiences and outcomes are discussed and analysed and can lead to the development of new theory in the field. Within this context, the application of grounded theory in guidance research would appear to be appropriate and effective.

#### *Grounded Theory in Guidance Research*

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method, developed in the 1960s by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss, which uses systematic procedures to collect and analyse data to develop theory about a particular phenomenon. The researcher does not begin with a preconceived theory in mind unless it is the intention to elaborate and extend an existing theory. Instead, the theory emerges from the data and is more likely to resemble ‘reality’. Developments over time have seen Charmaz (2000) introduce a constructivist method in response to the systematic procedures of the earlier theorists arguing that grounded theorists needed to:

stress flexible strategies, emphasize the meaning participants ascribe to situations, acknowledge the roles of the researcher and the individuals being researched, and expand philosophically beyond a quantitative orientation to research.

(Creswell, 2005, p.397)

Within the context of educational research, grounded theory is viewed as a ‘process’ theory that explains an educational process of events, activities, actions, and interactions that occur over time (Creswell, 2005, p.396). The current research by the author is using grounded theory to analyse the ‘process’ of progression,

which is individual and subjective for each client, allowing for an emerging design and the development of new theory on the topic. It is envisaged that this new theory will contribute to a deeper understanding of progression and feed into the design and implementation of new systems of tracking and evaluation in adult guidance provision.

### **Conclusion: Can Progression be Effectively Measured?**

In conclusion, adult guidance is now seen as a valuable and integral element within the overall framework of lifelong learning for adults in Ireland. Through guidance intervention, adult learners are progressing at all levels in our education system. However, they are still experiencing personal and institutional barriers that are hindering their progress. It is becoming increasingly evident that, in order to capture these experiences, a more holistic approach is now required in the design of systems for tracking and evaluating the effectiveness of guidance. We are already seeing evidence of this in new theories of guidance practice where a more 'integrated' approach to education, work and life roles is advocated. The work of Hansen (2001) is an example of this.

The current research by the author proposes that while quantitative measurement may be valuable in assessing academic, employment and short-term outcomes, it does not capture the total story of the client over a longer time span. Qualitative methods, such as case studies, that will lead to the development of appropriate questions and understandings of the client's experiences for measuring progression are now required. Service users have a valuable contribution to make by ensuring that the design and future implementation of longitudinal tracking mechanisms are client-friendly and contribute to quality assurance standards. This is borne out by current international literature and emerging research in other countries in the field of guidance.

*Lucy Hearne is a Guidance Counsellor who worked for a number of years in one of the Irish Adult Educational Guidance Initiatives. She is currently pursuing a research MA in the School of Education at the Waterford Institute of Technology, for which she was awarded an Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences Scholarship in 2006.*

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# A Framework for Supporting Adults in Distance Learning

LINDA DOWLING AND ORNA RYAN

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, many ‘traditional’ Higher Education Institutes (HEI’s) have been seeking to increase the participation of ‘non-traditional’ learners. In the context of this paper, ‘traditional’ institutions are those which mainly offer programmes on a full-time day basis for school leavers and ‘non-traditional’ learners are mature learners, returning to education on a part-time distance learning basis. Distance learning can generally be differentiated from other methods of teaching and learning by virtue of the fact that geographical distance separates the learner and teacher with materials and/or various technologies used to deliver these programmes (Smith, 2004). The increase in the number of non-traditional learners calls for innovative and complementary academic and administrative support strategies designed to meet the unique needs of these learners. Typically, learner support services within ‘traditional’ institutions are provided by a diverse range of offices. It can be argued that the needs of adult learners can best be planned, designed and managed at the level of the programme.

This paper presents a case study of how the features of effective learner support have been implemented by University College Dublin (UCD) in the case of its distance learning business degree programme. The case study presented is of a programme established ten years ago and where the learner support system has evolved becoming increasingly sophisticated in its design over time.

## **The Centrality of the Learner in Designing Learner Support**

One way of conceptualising learner support and how systems might need to change to accommodate the needs of these learners is to acknowledge the learn-

er as the starting point (Tait, 2000). It follows, therefore, that course design, teaching methods, assessment and the overall learning environment must be considered with the learner and their learning in mind. Reasons for providing a range of learner support services of different types and at different stages of a programme include the need to assist with learner recruitment, the need to maximise learner retention, to provide for learners' demands for support, to help in overcoming learners' feelings of isolation and the need to nurture learners who may not have participated in formal education for some time (Mills, 2003; Rowntree, 1992; Simpson, 2002). One of the perceived disadvantages of studying at a distance is the geographical distance between the learners and the institution and the isolation that can be felt by learners as a result. Developing a sense of connectedness between the learners and the institution is a critical success factor for distance learning programmes (Dowling, 2006).

### **Designing and Managing Learner Support**

The development of appropriate learner support systems for those studying at a distance, starting with enrolment, through to induction and beyond has drawn widespread attention in recent years and represents a fundamental ingredient in the success, or otherwise, of distance learning (Kenworthy, 2003; Tait, 2000; Mills, 2003). Tait (1995) presents a framework for the planning and management of learner support which includes an examination of who learners are, what their needs are, how their needs can be met, how services will be managed, how much the services will cost and how the effectiveness of the support services will be evaluated. Furthermore, Rowntree (1992) suggests that distance learners may need support before, during and after their programme.

Overall, learner support can be categorised in two ways: (i) academic support and (ii) non-academic support (Mills, 2003; Rowntree, 1992; Simpson, 2002). Academic support includes, assisting learners with programme content and assessment, managing programme workload, assisting learners in developing appropriate learning competencies and helping learners become independent. Non-academic support includes, assistance with any personal difficulties learners may encounter, helping learners retain interest in their studies and providing assistance with their social integration into the institution and the programme (Simpson, 2002; Tait, 2000). It is recognised that responsibility for the provision of support tends to rest with disparate functional offices (Dirr, 1999). Stark and Warne (1999) suggest that due to the nature of distance learning, it is important that learners have one person they can contact, i.e. their 'anchor person'. How

some of these supports can be integrated into a model of learner support will now be discussed in the context of the Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) (distance learning) programme at UCD.

### **Learner Support on the Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS)**

The BBS is a distance learning programme delivered through a blend of home study and occasional weekend attendance on campus and was specially designed for part-time adult learners returning to education. The programme was introduced in 1996 and was the School of Business's first venture into distance learning. Special features of the programme's structure include an eighteen-week semester and Autumn repeat examinations, which were regarded as an essential safety-net for non-traditional learners whose studies may be interrupted by diverse life-events. In addition, because of the non-traditional nature of the learner body the provision of supports to help learners cope with the academic demands of third level education was a primary consideration in the programme's early design.

In all evaluations of the programme, the quality of the learner support has been identified as the most significant factor in learner satisfaction. Another indicator of the effectiveness of the programme's learner support is the relatively high learner retention rates for the programme – in 2005/06 a drop out rate of five per cent was experienced across the programme's 280 participants; retention rates have varied over each full cycle of the programme, have never fallen below 60 per cent. Particular features of the programme's learner support framework are examined below.

### **The BBS Learner Support Framework**

The five central features of the Learner Support Framework are:

#### *(i) Day-to-Day Learner Support*

A telephone/email/drop-in service with a same day query response policy is operated by personal tutors for dealing with all day-to-day academic and administrative queries. Counselling and advice is available on module content and assessment and this is further supported by the use of a managed learning environment (Blackboard).

#### *(ii) Feedback and Learner Progress*

Programme participants have tended to benefit from two types of written feed-

back on coursework, (i) individual feedback for each learner and (ii) general coursework feedback to a class outlining the main strengths and weaknesses of coursework submitted. The timely provision of feedback allows learners make any necessary adjustments to their coursework. Close monitoring of progress is also necessary as is careful attention to the setting of coursework deadlines and the proactive management of learner workload.

### *(iii) Study Skills Development*

Three formal accredited study skills modules are provided at the early stages of the programme. These modules include: planning and organising study; learning from lectures; reading techniques; note-taking techniques; memory techniques; referencing guidelines; preparing for examinations; reflective learning; understanding learning; levels of learning; sourcing and evaluating literature; developing academic writing skills; how to learn creatively and developing critical thinking skills. The modules have been designed and are delivered and assessed by the personal tutors. A critical decision was made to ensure that the modules were not delivered in isolation from other modules on the programme and that the type of assessment adopted was designed to allow learners develop the skills needed to satisfactorily complete the assessment for other modules. Furthermore, the timing of the delivery of study skills is important to ensure that provision is made for progressive skills development at key stages of the programme.

These accredited learning skills modules have allowed learners to quickly develop the main learning competencies needed, develop confidence in their own study skills and understand what is expected from them during the course of their studies.

### *(iv) Induction and Learner Integration*

Initial induction is scheduled over a weekend prior to the official programme commencement date. The purpose of this weekend is to ease the learners transition into formal education. The weekend sessions include: what to expect from the programme; issues surrounding returning to education as a mature learner; an introduction to note-taking; reading and memory techniques; essay writing; the establishment of peer support networks with fellow learners; meetings with past programme participants and the sharing of experiences.

### *(v) Personal Tutors*

An early decision of the programme management was that the programme office would be staffed by personal tutors qualified to masters level in business so that they could provide day-to-day academic advice to learners. The personal tutor acts as the administrative manager of the programme and is responsible for the provision of academic support outside of the class weekends on campus. This academic support is provided in consultation with and in line with the needs of the academic teaching staff.

This personal tutor system allows for the academic and administrative needs of learners to be served through one unifying medium which is managed at a programme-level and also serves as the central interface between the learner and the institution. The personal tutor acts as an intermediary between the learner and the institution and in helping to shape University policy on the provision of support for adult learners studying at a distance.

### **Reflections**

The framework of learner support that has evolved displays innovative and progressive features when benchmarked against the needs and interests of adult learners. It is also a case that provides clear illustration of many of the factors that are influential in determining the success or effectiveness of student learning when applied to the adult learner studying at a distance. But, perhaps, the case is most valuable for the way in which it highlights the importance of delegating a central and orchestrating role to the local programme office, for academic as well as administrative duties, and in policy formulation. The single greatest achievement of the programme has been in providing an effective 'voice' for the non-traditional learner body within a school predominantly geared to full-time day learners. While the framework of learner support outlined in this case study requires a significant financial and time investment on the part of institutions, the subsequent high learner retention rates that can be achieved makes this a very worthwhile investment.

### **Conclusion**

This paper set out to present a case study of how the features of effective learner support were implemented in the case of UCD's distance learning business studies programmes. The paper proposed a framework of support founded upon the 'centrality of the learner', which advances the debate beyond the traditional dichotomy in learner support between academic and non-academic responsi-

bilities. It also suggests that the relationship between the learner and the course/departmental context may be more complex than originally envisaged and that the need for an intermediary between the learner and the institution can be of significant benefit in ensuring that the needs of both are managed, and indeed reconciled, where necessary. Furthermore, the paper suggests that all learner support activities, both academic and non-academic, are best designed and managed at the level of the programme where there is a greater understanding of the unique needs of the particular group of learners.

While the UCD model put forward in this paper has been developed for a distance learning programme, there are many aspects of the model which are equally appropriate and transferable to more traditional programmes. However, this case throws light on the dynamics that can facilitate, or impede, appropriate institutional responses to the needs of non-traditional learners and how institutions can translate student need into learner success. Regardless of the model adopted, it is suggested that success is more likely if the learner and their needs are viewed as the starting point and if the range of supports provided are managed in a coherent fashion by one programme-level function.

*Linda Dowling is Associate Director and Orna Ryan is a Learning Support Officer/Personal Tutor at the Centre for Distance Learning in the UCD School of Business.*

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# **SECTION THREE**

BOOK REVIEWS

# Learning democratically using study circles

STURLA BJERKAKER AND JUDITH SUMMERS

*(Leicester, UK: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, £12.95, pp. 123, 2006) ISBN 10: 1 86201 284 9 ISBN 13: 978 1 86201 284 4, www.niace.org.uk*

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This book is potentially an excellent resource for those working in adult learning as tutors or organisers particularly in the voluntary or community sector or for those who are interested in becoming adult tutors. The book may also be of interest to a wider range of educators working across a range of sectors who want to use new learning methods to engage adults as active participants in the democratic learning process.

Study circles are a well established and understood vehicle for promoting non-formal learning and are widely known and used in Scandinavian and other Nordic countries. They have been used to promote non-formal learning for all age groups and in very many different learning contexts stretching from Women's Institutes to Third Age learning. They have also been used to explore a wide range of interests which might include, for example, health and spiritual learning.

Study circles are groups which manage their own learning, embody democratic practice, and employ procedures that develop participants' capacity to become confident as both learners and citizens, better able to act and take charge of their own destinies. The book shows how study circles offer an alternative to a narrow skills-based approach to learning and argues that their potential should be recognised by both practitioners and policy-makers. It contains a wide-ranging set of case studies of how study circles are already developing in adult education, voluntary organisations, self-help groups, faith communities and community development, with examples from Africa, Norway and Slovenia. There is also a section on how to organise a study circle.

The book is a practical guide to creating and managing study circles, exploring their contemporary resonance and will appeal to those involved in adult learning as advisers, organisers, tutors, study circle leaders and voluntary activists, and to the learners themselves. The book is written in a clear and simple style and I feel could have been enhanced with non-text material and illustrations or the inclusion of an

accompanying video or CD to help teachers understand the lived benefits of this method of learning. The book might also have concentrated on how to solve problems and issues which inevitably arise when introducing new ways of working.

The benefits of study circles are perhaps not widely known in either the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland. I would certainly recommend this book to those interested in trying out new approaches to promoting democratic learning. The book would also be of interest to those involved in the training of adult educators at all levels.

**ROB MARK**

Senior Lecturer

School of Education

Queen's University, Belfast

# Teaching Defiance: Stories and Strategies for Activist Educators

MICHAEL NEWMAN

*(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, £14.51, pp. 305, 2006) ISBN-13: 978-0-7879-8556-1*

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Apathy is widespread in Celtic Tiger Ireland. How else can one explain why so many sit in cars for hours each day with protesting, trying to get to work on roads that do not carry the traffic. Or how can we explain why so many do not rise up in protest that a former Minister for Finance accepted a 'digout' from 'friends' when he needed extra cash. You can think of the abuse of older people in care homes or any other appalling situation where people are not treated with care or justice. The level of apathy is troubling.

Michael Newman proposes that the task of adult education is to awaken people to the potential of justifiable outrage against demagoguery, brainwashing, manipulations and injustices. This book will disturb, particularly if one believes that adult education does not have a role to play in provoking and supporting people to take political action against injustices.

His polemic argues that activist educators should teach people to make up their own minds and teach people to be defiant.

This discursive book is interesting in two ways. Firstly, the thread of the argument is that activist educators and learners examine and understand rebelliousness, that we teach and learn how to choose defiance, and that we examine and understand the different forms of defiance from which we can choose. Secondly, it clearly outlines methodologies for teaching defiance and in this the book is hugely successful.

Newman has honed his position in the world of the trade union movement and there are many useful examples of union meetings and attempts to organise against obvious injustices.

On the matter of the book's argument Newman relies heavily on the radical allies of adult educators, Gramsci, Freire, Habermas and Mezirow. In less convention-

al mode he relies on Gandhi, Camus, Sartre and A J Ayer, to build his argument. Though his presentation of such ideas is always insightful and relevant the reader is left thinking that these ideas are being put to the service of a form of social action that may not have been intended by all the original authors.

In outlining teaching methodologies this book shines, especially the understanding and use of story. Teachers will find the use of poems, stores, plays and other literature to prompt critical reflection and rebelliousness really interesting. The teaching methods explored in Chapter 13 include role-play, literature, mind mapping, critical incident analysis and other modes of critical self-reflection. The illustration of how Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* can prompt insightful actions is impressive. Telling stories, he says, is a magical way of teaching. I agree. The use of story is provocative and compelling and Newman does the educator a service in redeeming this narrative pathway to critical reflection.

This is a reminder for Irish adult educators that we have a rich vein of literature, including poetry, drama and fiction that is as yet under utilised as a source of material for prompting critical learning. I am thinking of the novels of Edna O'Brien and John McGahern, the plays of Thomas McDonagh and many others. In Ireland we would benefit from exploiting these works instead of relying (as Newman rightfully does) on Vonnegut, Hopkins and Sonnets from English poets, etc. Story telling as a method is appropriate for Irish learners and needs further elaboration as our own authors speak to the Irish mentality in a unique way.

It is a strength of this book that Newman believes that adult educators do have something to say about injustices, corruption, Iraq, the environment and violence. We might ask how can the movie *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* be used as a prompt for discussions about violence? Ways in which our creative arts can be used to support the search for understandings needs further work in Ireland.

Newman gives importance to the smell of the street, the clash and clatter of radical protest, focuses on identifying the enemy and is excited in the face of a threat from that enemy. He teaches in order to identify the enemy, learn about him/her and develop strategies for dealing with them.

The focus is constantly on the trade union movement as a location for teaching for defiance and the author has been successful in prompting defiance among workers and in organisations. But there is no analysis of what has happened to the trade

union movement as an oppositional force in many places in the world. The construction of oppositional activities in Newman's way may not be the most productive role for unions in the context of globalisation. This question escapes scrutiny by Newman. To relentlessly search for and see enemies may lead to an oppositional and confrontational approach to social action.

This book is a welcome shot at the sometimes over genteel and passive world of adult education that is for person enrichment or self-development without having the slightest chance of changing the world of politics and economics and even of communities.

There is much in this book that is not new at all. What is new is the constant push to teach for a specific kind of rebelliousness that challenges us to think in new ways about what happens in classrooms.

At times the book presents itself as critical and insightful. However, the unquestioned assumption of his own position is the "the enemy" is out there and this sovereign power (Foucault) is what must be defied. But Foucault also alerts us to disciplinary power, the power sedimented in the discipline of adult education, in its assumptions and its everyday practices. By ignoring that adult education in some way could be part of the problem or even in some cases something to be defied Newman leaves us with an inadequate understanding of power.

Finally, it is worth noting that in so far as teaching for defiance may be an antidote to apathy there are our own Irish attempts to awaken people to injustices. I note in particular the autobiographical work of Michael D. Higgins (*Causes and Concern, 2006*) and the intellectually challenging work of Denis O'Sullivan's *Cultural Politics and Irish Education, 2006*) both of which challenge and provoke in ways that seek to resist apathy.

**DR. TED FLEMING**

Senior Lecturer

National University of Ireland Maynooth

# From the inside out: Emerging perspectives in adult and further education in Ireland

EDITED BY NOEL COLLERAN

*(Ireland: Tipperary (NR) Vocational Education Committee, pp. 286,2006)*  
ISBN 0-95527170-0-3

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From the Inside out: Emerging perspectives in adult and further education in Ireland provides the reader, adult or student with a unique and exciting array of practitioner focused inquiries. The thirty contributors to this book detail their differences in terms of backgrounds, locations, functional duties, diverse learning experiences, research approach and experience. In this book the commonality among the authors is their 'real life' experience and active engagement in the broad Irish adult and further education sector. Between the covers of this densely packed tome of 286 pages, they give 'voice' to and make visible a rich stream of emergent inquiry. What was most striking to me was the honesty of the work. The authors position themselves in their particular context, describe their rationale, the research approach utilised for their study, and contain their claims within the evidence of their research findings. As such this is good research practice within the domain of social and applied research. The research process usually consists of; saying what you are going to do, why you are doing it, how you are going to do it and reporting the evidence based on the research findings. While this process may sound simplistic, it is not.

Outside of academic theory as imprinted in social research books, journals and electronic repositories there exists a very real world, where the researchers must operate. This real world setting is charged with human activity such as, agency, politics, cultural norms and mores, class stratification, bureaucracy, power structures and so forth. The authors detail in different and creative ways how they negotiated access to carry out their individual research projects within the dynamic environment of social life. They set out their research design, protocol for carrying out their inquiry and reportage of the findings in accordance with their current ontological position. What became explicit for me in reading through this book was the individual author's curiosity, wanting to engage in social inquiry in order to develop understanding and / or construct meaning. However, the authors do not

seek to rely on common sense alone in their inquiry instead they apply a multitude of rigorous, complex and systematic social research methods. Many of the methods detailed have been customised by the individual researchers to facilitate their unique research problem. As a researcher I find this extremely interesting as it demonstrates a maturing confidence in the utilisation of research methods, innovation and creativity which can lead to the development of new research methods.

The authors do not seem to be risk adverse. They eagerly take on the challenge of applying theory to practice, or rather the more action orientated concept of 'praxis' theory and practice in action. Further from the discourse contained in the text I get a sense of real issues, concerns and claims that are at the forefront of the minds of practitioners in the fields of adult and further education. As such this is 'insider knowledge', based on experience and practice rather than what Apple (2006) terms 'official knowledge', meaning knowledge which is produced and disseminated by the Government / authorities of the state. It is important to have this micro level research, as it acts as a counterbalance to the predominant hegemonic rhetoric of macro policy level research whether at national or European level and carried out by powerful policy shapers like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Trade Organisation (WTO) or World Bank (WB). Whereas the dominant macro research industry displays objectivity, detachment, dispassionate engagement with the subject matter of their researcher, this book engages in subjective inquiry and proudly wears passion, concern and closeness on its sleeve. Of course research undertaken at both macro and micro levels are important and legitimate and provide different types of data which enable social analysis. However, my point here is to stress the need for more localised micro research. This type of research should be valued more and its visibility raised. As such Evidence Based Practice may be a useful approach for capturing and making available such research.

At the launch of the Irish Research Association for Adult and Community Education, (26/10/06) the keynote speaker John Field provided a clear portrait of adult education research in the UK from the perspective of its challenges and potential. He made one striking point that resonated with me, 'bearing witness' is in decline. This concept of 'bearing witness' by utilising social research methods to describe, detail and explore real life events in real time is extremely valuable for human understanding and the furthering of social knowledge. The researchers in this book are bearing witness to real life events. Their findings are not of the clean cut variety which predominants in the research industry. They are untidy

and in some cases contradictory. They are summative and open to interpretation. However, there is an inherent depth to the research projects contained in this book with a clear empathy between the researchers and the researched. Dialogue and engagement are evident. There is a need for this type of research to be carried out and made visible in books, journals and electronic repositories. The Irish Research Association for Adult and Community Education may be the appropriate forum for research dissemination and a channel through which the value of this type of in-depth case study research can be raised in the national consciousness. Appendix A provides an extremely valuable listing from NUI Maynooth of MA and PhD Thesis Titles relating to adult and further education. These add to the rich reservoir of research material within this domain.

I would encourage readers to access this book from their library, education provider, community centre or book shop. In addition, I would encourage the authors to continue their social research activities. I'll finish on an optimistic note and suggest a potential source of funding for future research into adult and further education. A recent extract from a press release by Ján Figel, the European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Multilingualism states that *“For the first time, a single programme will cover learning opportunities from childhood to old age. The Lifelong Learning Programme will cover the period 2007-2013, and is the successor to the current Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and eLearning programmes. It has a budget of €7 bn to support projects and activities that foster interchange, co-operation and mobility between education and training systems within the EU, so that they become a world quality reference”*.

**AIDAN KENNY**

Project Manager

Skills Research Initiative

Dublin Institute of Technology

# Connecting Communities: Practical Guide to using Development Education in Community Settings

HELENA MC NEILL

(Dublin: Lourdes Youth and Community Services Ltd., €10, pp. 184, 2005)  
ISBN 0-9552202-0-3

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The introduction to this guide begins by stating that: For over ten years,

Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS) has been using social analysis from a development education perspective as an education tool.

(McNeill, 2005, p.9)

This experience and knowledge is very apparent throughout the guide. This publication is a result of this centre, LYCS, wanting to share its knowledge on using development education as a radical tool for change. The introduction sets out a clear rationale for the importance of development education and simply explains the links between development education and community development. It clearly outlines the education approach taken by LYCS which is underpinned by the principles of: *participation, problem-posing, use of different tools of analysis, recognition of different forms of oppression and a belief in action for change*. Adult educators will recognise these principles as the core elements of adult education for change.

The methodologies employed are grounded in participative group work ensuring that this guide is truly a tool for *understanding our world as a first step towards changing it*. These include brainstorming, role-play, reading followed by discussion and use of small group work. The guide is divided into ten issue-based workshops each focussing on a particular issue from both a local and global perspective. Each workshop comprises:

- an introduction/explanation of the purpose/aim;
- objectives;
- lists of materials required and activities involved;
- a taking action section and ideas for further action;

- photocopyable handouts and sheets for facilitators.

Most contain cartoons that reflect the issue and add humour.

Each workshop finishes with ideas for further action and suggestions on action to be taken. For example in workshop five, *Hard Labour*, a group could explore the double burden of women's work or read testimonies of people working in sweatshops. I think this particular workshop could be ideal for exploring the issues and perceptions of migrant workers in Ireland today.

The guide finishes with a list of addresses and websites that could be of assistance to a group or facilitator. LYCS has devised two FETAC modules in Development Education at levels 4 and 5 which bring this learning into the accredited arena.

This is an excellent facilitator's practical handbook on development education. While it is easy to follow and very grounded in the community many of the issues that the sessions look at need to be managed carefully by a skilled group worker/facilitator. It is clearly laid out with easy to follow instructions for each workshop and comes across as a well co-ordinated ten-week course on development education. The handouts are easy to read and very practical. This is very important as learners coming to these sessions may have different levels of literacy.

It is a splendid guide by a leading light, LYCS, in community development and development education. This guide can be used to run once-off workshops or a full ten-week series. It can be used for introducing development education to groups and communities and as a source for managers and facilitators who want ideas for group work or education sessions. It is well grounded in adult and community education principles and methodologies. It also shows a thorough understanding of the processes that underpin what Paulo Freire called education for freedom leading to a collective creation of "really useful knowledge" within communities who engage with this publication. This is the kind of guide that I would not hesitate in recommending to groups and the Community Education Facilitators (CEFs). It is sensible, practical and authoritative.

**MAUREEN KAVANAGH**

National Co-ordinator of the Community Education Facilitators'  
Training and Support Programme  
AONTAS



For over twenty years The Adult Learner has chronicled developments in the field of adult and community education in Ireland. From its fledgling birth under the auspices of the then Adult Education Organiser's Association in 1985, it has provided a vehicle for adult learners and adult education practitioners to describe, document and reflect on their experiences and practices. Its primary purpose all those years ago was to highlight "innovative developments in the area of adult and community education" and "to comment on and debate the more important issues arising". A glance through previous editions of the journal shows not only how much things have changed but also how some issues have stubbornly remained with us.

During the early 1990s, AONTAS began its support of The Adult Learner. The late 1990s saw the production of a Green Paper on Adult Education and its subsequent transformation into a White Paper set the Learning for Life agenda that continues to shape the development of the sector today. The Adult Learner continued to document practice and progress and in 2000 began to take a thematic approach to its presentation. Over the years it explored in more detail concepts and practices in specific areas like community education, partnership, difference and citizenship. These topics in themselves illustrate the evolution that was taking place in Irish society and how the adult and community education sector was responding to these new challenges.

This edition of The Adult Learner strives to acknowledge those changes and to reflect the demands of this time in adult and community education by providing a forum for critical analysis in the field.



AONTAS  
2nd floor, 83-87 Main Street,  
Ranelagh, Dublin 6  
telephone: (01) 406 8220/1  
fax: (01) 406 8227  
web: [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)

