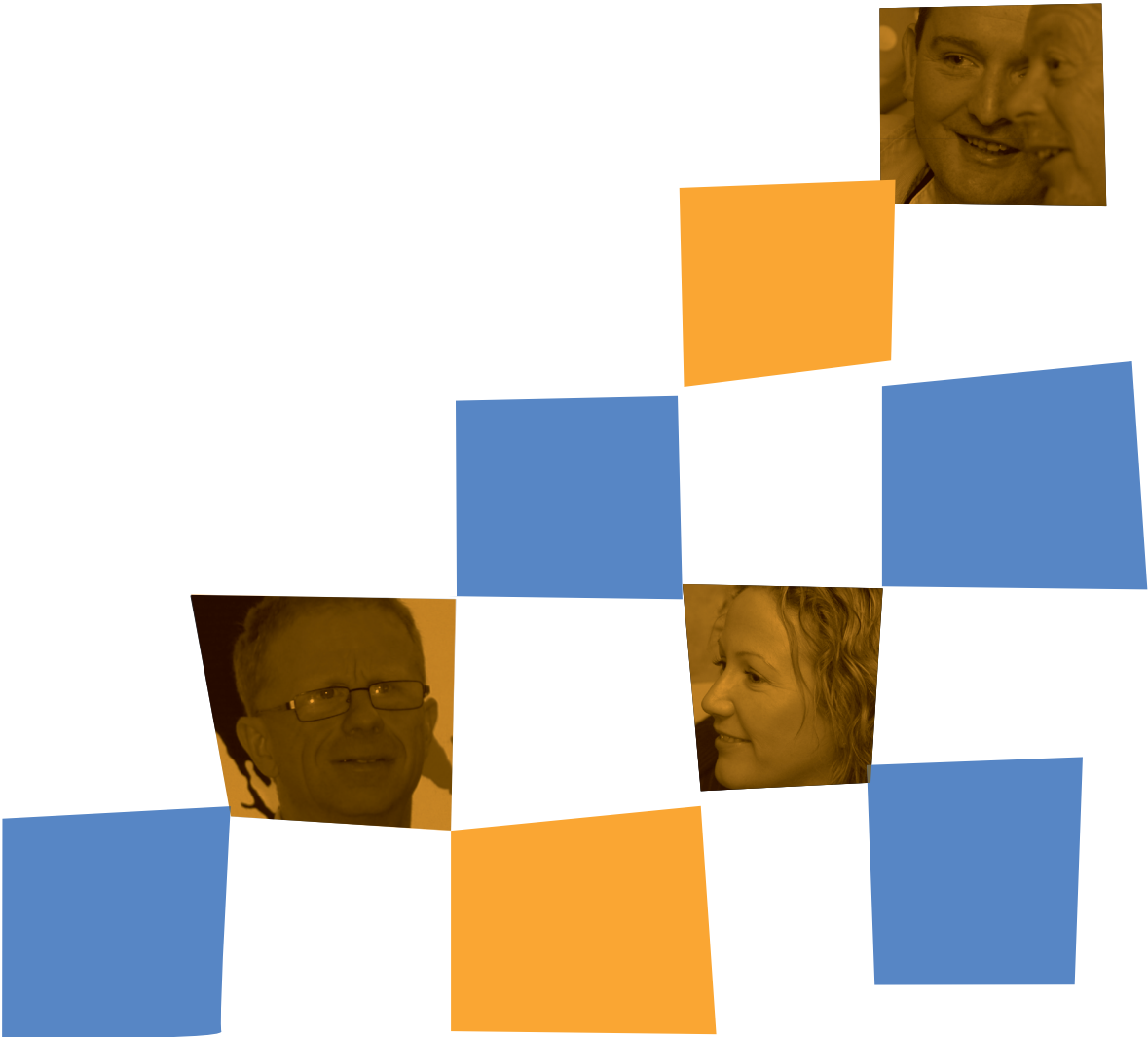


The Adult Learner 2008

The Irish Journal of
Adult and Community Education



THE ADULT LEARNER 2008

The Adult Learner

2008

AONTAS

2nd floor, 83-87 Main Street,
Ranelagh, Dublin 6

TELEPHONE: (01) 406 8220/1 FAX: (01) 406 8227

EMAIL: MAIL@AONTAS.COM WEB: WWW.AONTAS.COM

ISSN No. 978-0-906826-27-0

The views expressed in this journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of AONTAS or the Adult Education Officers' Association.

Normal rules of copyright apply.

©2008

Design by Language

Contents

- 7 Editorial Comment
- Section 1 – Refereed Articles***
- 13 Turning Theory on Ourselves: Some Resources and Constraints
for Adult Educators
DENIS O’SULLIVAN
- 33 A Secure Base for Adult Learning: Attachment Theory and
Adult Education
TED FLEMING
- 54 Neo-Liberalism, Irish Society and Adult Education
FERGAL FINNEGAN
- Section 2 – Practice Articles***
- 77 Exploring Equality through Creative Methods of Learning in
Adult Literacy: Findings from a Peace Funded Project
ROB MARK
- 84 Supporting Adult Learners from Outside Institutional Walls:
The Experience so far from the Downtown Centre
RHONA SHERRY AND PATRICIA-ANNE MOORE
- 97 Language Training for Adult Refugees:
The Integrate Ireland Experience
EMER GILMARTIN
- Section 3 – Book Reviews***
- 113 *Banker to the poor: The story of the Grameen Bank*
- 116 *Globalisation, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society Vol 2*
- 118 *Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion. Exploring lifelong learning contexts,
issues and approaches*
- 120 *Radical Learning for Liberation 2*

Editorial Comment

For many years as adult education practitioners we have busied ourselves with the setting up and delivery of programmes, courses and services paying little attention to the underpinning of this work with a theoretical base. Those of us who work in the field are all only too well aware of the life changing experience which involvement in adult education can bring to people's lives and in order to give creditability to our work it is essential that a practice which can be so powerful is grounded in a strong philosophical and theoretical base. This would strengthen and lend credibility to a field of experience which we have all struggled to build up for so long. The process of theorising our practice can only assist the teaching and learning dynamic which is at the core of all educational endeavour and lead to greater understandings, insights and outcomes in the educational environment.

In the current issue of *The Adult Learner* this dialogue is commenced. In the refereed section Dr. Denis O'Sullivan from University College, Cork seeks to explore from a theoretical perspective what may be taking place in the adult learning environment and what this means for the tutor. The critical challenge for the adult education tutor as O'Sullivan puts it is, "how to maintain a transformative role while respecting the integrity of our students as co-participants in the process" (p.14). He argues that this process has been made difficult by the dominance of the redemptive or compensatory discourse of provision into which Irish adult education provision has been locked for so many years. The article stems from his experience as an adult education tutor and is an attempt to frame and reframe the emergent dilemmas in the broader contextual framework of related theoretical perspectives of critical thinkers in the field. This article presents a series of complex ideas and concepts which may present challenges to the reader but nonetheless should prove stimulating for all those working in the field.

Using the work of psychologist John Bowlby, Dr. Ted Fleming explores how this work and the perspective which it puts forward can act as a means of helping us understand what may be arising for individuals and groups as they engage in the process of adult learning. Fleming suggests that the ideas advanced by Bowlby, “allow adult educators to find a new set of ideas and vocabulary with which to describe practices in the classroom”, help us to understand more thoroughly the “issues that make teaching and learning exciting, challenging and always more complex” than we as adult education practitioners might imagine (p.34). In so doing it too helps us to reframe our current understanding of adult learning in a theoretical context thereby providing critical insights into the learning process taking place in the adult learning classroom. The central argument of this article is that the dynamic of adult learning can be either enhanced or distorted by the underlying attachment style of the learners in the group. One can see how this makes for a very creative and complex environment not only for the learner but also for the tutor.

Taking a much broader perspective Finnegan analyses the changing role of education and Irish society in the light of the neo-liberalism characterised by historian David Harvey and educationalist Henry Giroux. In tracing the changing nature of Irish democracy he suggests that the essential fabric of life through, “which we make meaning, shape values and articulate identity is now saturated with the values of free market ideology” (p58). He also argues that this leads to the emergence of a lifelong learning discourse based on the needs of the market – with its co-option as a strategy directed towards the achievement of economic policies. In this scenario lifelong learning is conceptualised largely in the context of creating a flexible and competitive ‘knowledge’ economy. The perspectives advanced in the refereed section of the journal help us to interrogate our practice in terms of our role as tutor, the interactive dynamic of the classroom and the broader contextual policy framework which may be operating. Ultimately, the objective is to strive to develop a pedagogy which explores and engages, one which affirms the human potential and strengthens participation and democracy.

The three articles in the ‘practice section’ document a number of learning initiatives currently taking place and look at the contribution that can be made to enhancing adult learning provision in different learning sites be it in the basic or higher education arena or related to provision for newcomer nationals to Ireland. Rob Mark from Queens University, Belfast looks at the experience of the LEIS Project (Literacy and Equality in Irish Society) and cites an example of a cross-border project which used alternative non-text methodologies to help literacy and basic education learners to explore and understand how societal inequalities have impacted on their lives. It is anticipated that these skills can bring about real change in people’s lives. The setting up of the Downtown Centre in Limerick is the focus of a further article which looks at how a diverse and dispersed population in the mid-western region can be encouraged into higher education. This is a partnership initiative set up under the HEAs Strategic Innovation Fund to support access, retention and progression for adult learners. The Centre provides an educational guidance service, a Certificate in General Studies and a series of Return to Learning Workshops. The final article documents the provision of English language classes for refugees by Integrate Ireland Language and Training Ltd., a not for profit campus company of Trinity College, Dublin. The article outlines the programmes provided for newcomer learners, from those with literacy difficulties in their own language to other learners seeking to have their higher level qualifications recognised in Ireland. Issues of assessment, curriculum, accreditation and progression are addressed as is the role of IILT in the development of classroom materials. Since the completion of this article the closure of IILT has been announced and discussions are at the initial stages for the transfer of these responsibilities to the VEC sector.

Commentators are now of the view that the country is in recession and that we are entering the ‘post-Celtic tiger’ era and that we may be set for a return to the cutbacks of the 1980s. It is critically important that vital services to marginalised groups do not become easy targets in a cutback culture which may be imminent. The final section of the journal comprises of book reviews of writings of relevance to those in the field of adult education. It is hoped that this combination of the critical and the documentary will offer insights and understandings and help us to sustain the view of the adult educator as “one who initiates wonder, creates perplexity (and) makes the familiar strange” (p. 43).

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 those 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 members of the Editorial Board, thank you for your time and your energy.

EILEEN CURTIS

AEO Co. Kilkenny VEC

Editor

Editorial Board

Berni Brady, Aontas

Sandra Fisher, Dublin Institute of Technology

Ted Fleming, NUI Maynooth

Dolores Gilhooley, Waterford Institute of Technology

Rob Mark, Queen's University Belfast

Adel McKenna, Aontas

Stephen O'Brien, NUI Cork

SECTION ONE

REFEREED ARTICLES

Turning Theory on Ourselves: Some Resources and Constraints for Adult Educators

DENIS O'SULLIVAN

Abstract

This article argues that as adult educators we should not be outside the remit of our own theorising. It begins with an earlier effort to construct an ethical grammar to audit the probity of working to change others through adult education. This is situated in terms of contemporary debates about the possibility of truth and certainty in understanding and changing the world. Maintaining the vision of adult education as a transformative force in society while respecting the integrity of our students as co-participants in this process is identified as a pivotal challenge. Constraints on engaging with this challenge are analysed and further resources for turning theory on ourselves are suggested.

Introduction

Sometime around the mid-1980s, I began to ask questions about the nature of my engagement with adult learners. At that stage, I had been teaching sociology and social philosophy since 1970, initially on the University College, Galway and later the University College, Cork (UCC) extra-mural diploma programmes. I enjoyed it like no other kind of teaching, before or since, in a career that has encompassed primary, post-primary and university levels. The centres were dispersed throughout Connaught and Munster. Arriving at night in often remote locations to meet adults who had committed themselves to three-hour sessions, twice-weekly in settings not always most appropriate to or comfortable for adult learning, encouraged a gratifying sense of missionary zeal. Student response was predominantly positive and learners spoke of benefiting in diverse and often surprising ways. To me, the sessions appeared informal and collegial an environment in which ideas were processed and experiences were shared and analysed. So, what was the problem?

I found it difficult to articulate the nature of my discomfiture. Certain questions prodded me. A central theme of the UCC sociology course was *debunking*, helping students to question the taken-for-granted perceptions and beliefs by which they interpreted their world and lived their lives. Yet, I as the teacher, could remain above this and largely control the agenda for the process – the targets for debunking and the conceptual, thematic and ideological resources to be used. No one queried my authority to invade their private world of belief and practice in this fashion. In what I read about adult learning encounters at that time and heard at conferences, teachers in such settings were encouraged to see themselves as learners also. But it was I who mediated the new ideas and regulated and monitored class discourse. No one asked if and how I had changed. I sat no end-of-year examination. While, as sociologists, we prided ourselves on taking the side of the underdog and on giving credibility to the perspective of the disadvantaged, it was the sociologists themselves who often regulated the diagnosis of people's problems and directed the prescriptions for change.

Looking at the practices of other adult educators, I could identify specific change ideologies, including a fading Catholic social reconstructionism, the 'option for the poor', social and community activism, modernisation, liberalism, feminism, egalitarianism, etc., all sitting alongside the new terminology of facilitation, collaboration, leadership, participatory learning, etc. and confirmed with ritualistic piety in the reorganisation in semi-circle form of the desks in the local vocational school. Despite efforts on my part to acknowledge the adult status of my students, in the selection of content, collegiality at the interpersonal level, recognising and using their personal expertise, prior learning and experience and deploying my own life events as resources, an unease with the apparent relentless pervasiveness of the power disparity between them and me continued to prevail.

In grappling with these dilemmas, I tried to construct an ethical grammar to help me calibrate the probity of my role as a teacher of adults. As I saw it, the challenge was how to maintain a transformative role for adult education while respecting the integrity of our students as co-participants in this process. This resulted in the publication of *Commitment, Educative Action and Adults* (1993). There, I attempted to address a number of core issues that need to be confronted by those who, like myself, would seek to change other adults through education:

- How do people come to be committed to seeking to change others through educational programmes? Are teachers of adults themselves constrained within particular ideological positions and resistant to self-reflection and change? Do they ever change through interaction with their students?
- What is the visibility and epistemic status of the programme's objectives? How clear are students about the manner in which the programme seeks to change them, particularly in relation to the extent and nature of its invasiveness in terms of their beliefs and orientations?
- How is the legitimacy of the programme established? Does it rely on tradition, rationality or the personality/charisma of the providing body/teacher to justify its objectives and practices?
- What is the nature of the social engagement between the participants, including the teacher? For instance, do power disparities or relationships of dependency distort the students' control over the manner in which they experience change?
- How are dysfunctional responses on the part of participants interpreted and responded to? Are students who do not change in line with the programme's intentions considered to be resistant and fearful of change, in error and unredeemed (and therefore, perhaps, in even greater need of intervention than had been initially assumed)? Or, is there an effort to achieve a dialogue based on difference and recognition and with what level of success?

In this, I drew on a number of obvious resources that included, Hogan and Habermas on communicating a programme's intentions; Weber and Lukes on power and legitimacy; Hirst, Habermas and Phenix on the forms and functions of knowledge; Brim, Berger and Luckmann, Freire and Giroux on personal change; Mezirow, Goffman and Garfinkel on the social context of personal change; and Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard on language, discourse and power. I list these authors by way of commending their interdisciplinary range in pursuing such issues since they implicate all levels of the social order – individual, social, structural and cultural.

This exercise helps explain the title of this article. I was trying to turn theory on myself and my adult education practices and engagements, and hoping that others would share my concern that as adult educators we ourselves should not be outside the remit of our own theorising. This article seeks to further explore this contention by way of identifying constraints as well as supplying additional theoretical and conceptual resources for its elaboration.

In the event, a key limitation of *Commitment, Educative Action and Adults* was its failure to draw out the macro-theoretical implications of some of the sources I had employed. This would have helped me to more precisely name and frame the dilemmas and issues that I sought to address as those that characterise the intersection of modernity, with all its assumptions about reason, truth and progress, and post-modern, post-structuralist scepticism about naming, knowing, contesting and perfecting the world. In retrospect, I was seeking, contra Lorde's (1984) injunction, to critique a system while relying on its immanent resources.

Inglis's article 'Empowerment and Emancipation' (1997) is more successful in this regard and is surprisingly underused in Irish adult education discourse. In addressing the nature of power in debate and practice relating to empowerment and emancipation, he acknowledges that adult educators committed to emancipatory learning may have "become caught up in the contradictions of the postmodern era":

On the one hand, they are constrained by Foucauldian pessimism which binds their discourse and the search for truth into an endlessly evolving politics of power in which they implement discipline and order. On the other hand, adult educators can be enthused by Habermasian optimism, namely that power and its colonizing effects on the lifeworld can be overcome; that it is possible to reach a just, free and equal society through rational communication.

(Inglis, 1997, p.15)

Inglis does not attempt to resolve this contradiction and argues that we understand our lives between these two extremes. Emancipation, he feels, may well involve a continual juggling between the two. The central theme of his article is that the involvement in this process of those who were selected for emancipation from oppression must be facilitated by providing them with an accessible, theoretical framework which would enable them to see how power is implicated not only in their personal, social and political condition but also in their engagements with educational institutions, learning programmes and teachers. It is not clear to me from a reading of the article if Inglis would agree that naming a programme as emancipatory shouldn't entitle it to then be exempt from this scrutiny.

Naming the macro nature of this dilemma as seeking to 'juggle' modernity and postmodernity is a generative resource for reflexivity among adult educators.

But this interface needs to be conceptually populated and a language of analysis created if we are to be able to talk to one another or oneself about how we experience these tensions in our practice. Acknowledging its ontological depth (differentiated in terms of its 'parts' and their respective influence) is suggestive of the diverse domains or layers of the self and the social order implicated in our practice, all interacting but each with emergent qualities. I came to appreciate the value of this when, as a feature of the study of cultural politics, I began to theorise the concept of paradigm and found myself obliged to excavate the building blocks of meaning making in society and within ourselves in a more schematic fashion than I had previously attempted. I draw on this later in the context of extending the use of Habermas's public sphere as a model for adult education engagements.

Redemption

A structural constraint to turning theory on ourselves as adult educators lies in the dominance of redemption as a constitutive force in Irish adult education. I have sought to outline this in some detail in the context of the construction of adult education as a field of knowledge and practice from the 1960s in *Cultural Politics and Irish Education since the 1950s. Policy Paradigms and Power* (2005). Relevant here is the understanding of adult education as something to be used to compensate, remediate or upgrade, that is to be seen in the manner in which, since the 1970s, the interventionism of special needs learning has come to dominate and provide some sense of a unifying rationale in an otherwise fragmented conceptualisation of adult learning. Fleming (1996, p.49) recognised this transition in his criticism of the absence of a philosophy of adult education in the 1995 Education White Paper:

Without this vision of what adult learning really involves, adult education becomes a sort of remedy for what was missed the first time on the educational merry-go-round. The implication of the White Paper is that anything that is not remedial is a luxury and non-essential. There has to be an acceptance that lifelong learning is not just a catch-up on lost or missed opportunities and not only justifiable as good for getting a job.

Linked to this is the fact that from the 1980s what theorisation of adult education has occurred has been substantially conducted by intellectuals representing specific social movements such as those of feminism, anti-poverty and social inclusion. Whereas earlier those who occupied the role of intellectual were con-

cerned to advance and expand adult education provision, since the 1980s they have been drawn from those within adult education who valorise particular kinds of adult learning over others as mechanisms for the advance of specific kinds of social change, and from those of other substantive and academic backgrounds who are attracted to it because of its ideological potential. There are few intellectuals who address adult education as an object of study in its own right, apart from its potential for advancing the objectives of social movements, or because of the scholarly issues that it raises.

Despite differences in their substantive objectives, Irish adult education programmes can be largely characterised by an ideological orientation to redemption. This is exemplified by the assumption on the part of providers/advocates that they know what adults need and how they ought to change so as to be repositioned according to some vision of their essentialised and rightful relationship to society. It is very explicit in literacy, second-chance and community education programmes but, on inspection, it is also true of continuing education and earlier varieties of adult education.

Two quotations, three decades apart, characterise this redemptive ideology:

A recurring observation in many of the submissions was ‘to get the people to appreciate the need for and value of adult education’. Unless the need is felt, the effort will not be made. We would accept as a priority, appreciation programmes in adult education itself, i.e. programmes designed to excite people to want what they need.

(Interim Murphy Report, 1970, p.13)

This question (what is needed for women to move beyond personal development) would have addressed the issue much better, if it had asked what is needed to politicise personal development education for women and prevent it becoming an exercise focused solely on personal symptoms, spirituality and individual healing? My immediate answer to this question... is that we need feminist/politicised facilitators who are able to incorporate social analysis, radical politics and feminism into course content which is also capable of meeting the felt and expressed needs of many women for a focus on their personal and domestic lives.

(Ryan, 1999, p.16)

These quotations serve to reveal some of the distinctive features of redemption in adult education discourse. There is a vanguardism (the assumption of knowledge, obligation and duty) in identifying targets for redemption and in specifying their needs. It is non-reflexive in relation to what constitutes redemption. The agency of its recipients is acknowledged only in conformity, and the refusal of redemption is explained in terms of misrecognition or structural resistance.

Table 1 outlines some of the forms which redemption has taken in Irish adult education discourse. The first two varieties of redemptive discourse have existed since the 1970s. Firstly, there is the objective of providing for personal improvement through role education. Its rationale is to develop more knowledgeable, happier, fulfilled individuals who would contribute to a better society by their greater efficiency, consideration and sensitivity in the enactment of their social roles, be they civic, social, occupational or personal. This reflects a broad satisfaction with the structure of society and seems to assume that whatever improvements are required are capable of being effected by better role performance by individuals, rather than by changes in role definitions or in the relationships between roles. Even with new work demands and arrangements, the assumption remains that the individual's self-fulfilment and society's needs are essentially complementary and compatible. Secondly, there is the aspiration to foster individual adjustment to social and technological change. The intention is to help people to cope with the phenomenon of change, particularly with periods of accelerated technological change and with temporary phases of unemployment by forming adjustable, mobile and trainable people. In this context change is seen to be inevitable and, once the individual makes the necessary adjustments, to be benign, and to represent progress. Contemporary versions, stress the need to establish or maintain competitive advantage in international trading and attractiveness to investment, and social cohesion and community integration and responsiveness. Active reflection is not expected and the main requirement from people is that they rise to the challenge of change and modify and adjust to reap the potential benefits for all.

**Table 1: Features of Redemption in Irish Adult Education Discourse
(from O’Sullivan, 2005, p.528)**

	<i>Role Education</i>	<i>Adaptability to Change</i>	<i>Empowerment</i>	<i>Emancipation</i>
<i>Varieties</i>	Enabling people to enact their social roles in a more functional manner	Coping with, and adapting to, social and technological change	Putting people in control of their lives	Designated social and political transformation
<i>Manifestations</i>	Parenting, citizenship, family, occupational learning, etc. Later: Time/ Stress management, and work/ home balance programmes	Upgrading and re-skilling for workers; training for new work practices; adaptation to social change Later: training for national competitiveness	Social and personal development programmes; some adult education programmes for social change; some applications of Freire’s and Mezirow’s theories	Anti-colonial, Catholic social reconstructionist, feminist and egalitarian programmes
<i>Vanguardism</i>	Functionally conservative Later: Liberal functionalist/ Human Resource Management	Regulated modernisers, guardians of tradition Later: technical/ competitive rationalities	Assumption of skill and knowledge in critical analysis	Ideologically initiated and possessors of truth
<i>Closure</i>	Limited regulation of learning; space for learner agency in accessing knowledge Later: more interventionist and regulative	More politically explicit, but eclectic Later: more systematised	Specific in the identification of the targets for empowerment	Totalising political ideologies

While these themes of role performance and adaptability are ongoing in adult education discourse, during the 1990s more socially critical perspectives were introduced resulting in two new forms of redemptive discourse – empowerment and emancipation. Empowerment seeks to put people in control of their lives by removing whatever is limiting them from becoming makers of their own future, individually and collectively. This can take the form of self and social analysis, changing one’s personal beliefs and interpretations which act against one’s true interests, thus removing whatever impediments there are to one’s capacity for personal and social change. Included are interpretations of Freire’s conscientisation and Mezirow’s perspective transformation which confine themselves to personal change or, where they aspire to collective change, fall short of seeking to advance specific political solutions. Emancipation is not necessarily radical in the conventional, socio-political sense. It differs from empowerment as a form of redemption in its dualist interpretation of social conditions and in the specificity and closure of its political solutions. The clearest example of emancipatory discourse in recent times is to be found in feminist texts. Earlier manifestations would have been O’Rahilly’s Catholic social reconstructionism and, further back, the de-Anglicisation efforts of the Gaelic League. All of these would qualify as emancipatory because of the incorrigibility of their social diagnosis and the inviolability of their prescriptions for change.

While these varieties of redemption differ in their political and ideological substance, they share a similar relationship, one characterised by vanguardism, limited reflexivity, and circumscribed student agency, within adult education between the provider and the participant. There is a consistent desire, of a kind that would be interpreted in the tradition of Nietzsche and Foucault as a ‘will to power’, to re-engage with adults who are beyond the influence of initial education for the purpose of changing them in ways that they have yet to recognise as beneficial. This subordination of the agency of the adult learner was not a problem for the form of adult education operating in the 1970s when expert knowledge and the innate goodness of education went unquestioned. It runs counter, however, to the expressed principles of some forms of redemption such as those which espouse more populist, participative and egalitarian approaches to learning, its content and authorities, and in the process valorises student autonomy, personal empowerment and self-direction.

This is discursively reconciled by means of the need/entitlement construct. In this, need refers to a personal deficiency, the absence of something which requires to be

put right to establish an equilibrium. Entitlement establishes one's right to have the need satisfied and the obligation of others to make this possible. Whereas need refers to a condition of the individual, entitlement invokes a moral community with responsibilities to one another. In more socially static forms of redemption, the individual's need (for learning, training, literacy, etc.) generates and justifies the entitlement. In more socially- transformative forms of redemption, the need is identified in the context of the moral entitlement to a different type of society in relation to impediments to its realisation in the personal psychology, consciousness and structural position of its proposed beneficiaries.

This orientation to redemption sets horizons on the pursuit of knowledge. This is not necessarily a matter of explicit censorship. Doxic-like (unquestionably obvious), it is more likely to operate from a conviction that core objectives and principles are valid, settled and established, and do not constitute a productive theme for discourse. To suggest otherwise, would be interpreted as a distraction, academicism or reactionary. There are substantive and procedural variations in the light of the variety of redemption involved, and the nature of its closure and vanguard. But the overall pattern is for discourse to follow along predictable textual lines. This takes the form of a 'theoretical glass ceiling' on discourse which excludes whatever might challenge or disrupt key verities. Accordingly, the vast edifice of social, cultural and political theory and, more specifically, adult education thought is only drawn on, if at all, in support of received, established and accepted positions.

Post-structuralism

Feminist discourse on Irish adult education is distinguished from other forms of redemptive adult education in the post-structuralist theoretical perspectives which it introduces on the self, society, the position of women, change, learning and pedagogy in Connolly and Ryan, (1999). Because of this, feminist adult education is theoretically best resourced to interrogate its own practice. This it does to a point. All varieties of redemptive adult education could benefit from the destabilising perspectives of post-structuralism but without the pessimism, indeed cynicism, that can be drawn from Foucault's (1973, p.343) "philosophical laugh". Those most in need are those incorporating the greatest vanguardism, political incorrigibility and circumscribed student agency. This isn't an all-or-nothing affair. Even the loosening up of the defining characteristics of redemption would be liberating, with the potential to re-signify the future as work in progress in which our students would participate, our relationship with them

as shared citizenship rather than as rescuers, and the role of the adult educator as an expert in resources for interpretation. Nor is it necessary that post-structuralism be accepted as a primary orientation. Without attaching themselves to any particular theoretical orthodoxy, O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2007) employ post-structuralist orientations on sliding meanings, intertextuality (comprising diverse understandings) and social action in *Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion*. The empirical sections of the study yield rich and diverse patterns and insights from the experiences of non-traditional adult learners, as well as providers across the community of further and higher education. But, what distinguishes and elevates the study is not the recording of these educational worlds, but rather their positioning within structures of thought and action relating to adults, inequality and education.

Concepts used in this study such as partnership, social inclusion, disadvantage and social capital have been much sloganised in public discourse and in the process, writers such as Bourdieu greatly sinned against in the trivialisation of his constructs. In *Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion* there is a recognition that these are contested concepts yielding different meanings and capable of being deployed for quite contradictory social and educational projects. The treatment of social capital in particular is exemplary in its delineation of the far-reaching differences between the Americans, Coleman and Putnam and Bourdieu, correctly highlighting the latter's more complex theory of social action exemplified in his concept of *habitus* which he uses to manoeuvre between the conflicting poles of voluntarism and structuralism. This doesn't make the challenge of confronting inequality through education during the adult years any easier. But it does acknowledge the hard truth, as Bourdieu himself once argued, that to ask for simple explanations of social life is to invite just that – simplifications. In the process, O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2007) prove the virtue of exposing practice to theory and demonstrate that moral purpose and transformative objectives in adult education do not have to mean colonisation of minds and bodies or activities that foreclose on means and ends.

Fleming has long been an advocate of the potential of Habermas's work for educational theory and practice, most recently in Murphy and Fleming (2006) and Fleming (2007). His efforts to faithfully draw on this extensive body of scholarship to articulate a philosophy of adult education demonstrates that redemption doesn't have to be incorrigible in all respects and has the potential to implicate adult education teachers in its specification of ethical communication:

Adult learning is participatory, critically reflexive, open to new ideas and changing frames of reference. It has a vision of learners engaged in dialogic participatory discourse, collectively seeking ways of changing themselves and society so that all systems, organisations and individuals respond to the needs of others.

(Fleming, 1996, p.52)

This isn't to escape redemption. But it doesn't pre-empt political ends or limit the agency of our students and it accommodates, indeed requires, an openness to change among adult educators, including (or so it seems to me) this very philosophy. If I had to give a short statement of my own philosophy of adult education it would differ little. Yet, I would still find myself with questions as I did twenty years ago except that now I have come to see the issues involved as amenable to and demanding a more complex conceptualisation. This would need to engage with, *inter alia*,

- A self that is less integrated and transparent to itself than one might imagine;
- The complexity and volatility of meaning-making given the intertextuality of modern life;
- A model of society and social action that achieves ontological depth;
- Both the restrictive and enabling power of language;
- Uncertainties surrounding the linkages between intention, thought, language, enunciation and reception in dialogue;
- Issues of subjectivity and psychology;
- Multiple circuits of power;
- The potential in the existence of multiple paradigms (interpretive frameworks) for miscommunication and consensual pastiche (superficial agreement).

Fleming's brief definition of his philosophy of adult education reflects the conditions for Habermas's ideal speech situation in the context of the public sphere as well as Mezirow's perspective transformation. It could well be my problem that I find little in Habermas to help me interrogate the issues identified above at the level of practice. He doesn't address these concerns. More to the point, he doesn't provide resources for their scrutiny. Mezirow, in contrast, has always connected with my classroom practice, though I continue to believe that his conceptualisation and systematisation of *perspective* and *transformation* demand greater development. Both Habermas and Mezirow remain strangely remote from recent and contemporary developments in the broad field of the social sci-

ences. In the final section I identify what I describe as a socio-cultural approach from within these developments and sketch its relevance to Habermas's concept of the public sphere. My approach can be anticipated from my use of *paradigm* in policy analysis in preference to *perspective* (along with such similar terms as Foucault's epistemes, Bourdieu's habitus/field, Lakatos's research programmes, Hesse's networks and Quine's webs of belief) and from the manner in which I schematise its components (O'Sullivan, 2005).

A 'Socio-Cultural' Public Sphere

From Habermas's vast repertoire I see most potential in his concept of the public sphere as a model for adult education engagement. A crucial attraction in this for turning theory on ourselves is that it implicates both teachers and students in its prescriptions and theorisation. But I would wish to accommodate some of its critics and expand and differentiate it in the light of shifts within the social sciences that include the various linguistic, discursive and cultural turns. Thus embellished and modified, the theorisation of the public sphere should be capable of supplying a more comprehensive and revealing conceptual literacy to connect with the problems identified above and to interrogate adult education practice in a more nuanced and ontologically-deep manner.

For Habermas (1989), the public sphere refers to a realm of social life in which private individuals come together to discuss public issues. In doing so, they set aside their private interests and identities and communicate as members of a public body. All can participate and contribute on equal terms and the yardstick of agreement is that of the power of reason.

There exists an extensive range of scholarship involving a theoretical engagement with, and practical application of, Habermas's specification and diagnosis of the public sphere and its changing nature and possibilities. Specific applications span a diverse and specialised range of 'publics' and 'counterpublics' (Fraser, 1995) encompassing class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, mass media, etc. While the concept of the public sphere is indeed widely employed across the social sciences, it needs to be acknowledged that it is often used to signify little more than the broadest of discourse about issues with an arguably public relevance. Leaving aside those who find the public sphere an unsatisfactory or unworkable construct, and seek to substitute it with a more generative or appropriate term, two patterns of scholarly response to the concept are relevant here. Firstly, there is the immanent critique of those who, while

continuing to work within the assumptions of the philosophical constructs and ideas involved, identify flaws or difficulties such as its inadequate consideration of constraints on public debate derived from material circumstance, power, inequality, ideology, false consciousness, etc. and its confusion of what might be possible in philosophical debate and the everyday practices of ordinary people (Roderick, 1986). Secondly, there is the development of the concept of the public sphere to incorporate other theoretical approaches and fields such as political science, feminism and sociology (Crossley and Roberts, 2004). While the socio-cultural approach would share the concerns of immanent critique, it identifies more with the aspirations and resources of the developmental school as it attempts to conceptually populate the space for cultural production within the public sphere in a more delineated fashion than appears to have been explicitly attempted to date.

To treat the public sphere as a socio-cultural phenomenon is to foreground the dynamic nature of the relationship between the social and the cultural in shaping the intersubjective engagement that is realised within communication seeking to address public issues. This encompasses the cultural resources available to articulate understandings and prescriptions relating to an issue, such as classifications, concepts, language, discursive forms and formal theories, together with the institutionalised practices relating to the production, circulation and modification of such meanings. A number of preliminary tensions in treating the public sphere as a socio-cultural field need to be stated: its constraining character as reflected in the contrast between the apparently limitless cultural resources of knowledge and method available to be 'googled' into existence and the often predictable flow of public debate; the tension between the humanly created, yet historically received, nature of cultural resources and institutionalised practices; and the often disguised possibilities for change through transgression and creative intervention. By way of short-circuiting a fuller consideration of the methodological/theoretical issues in dealing with the relationship between the social and the cultural, the approach recommended has been described as analytical dualism (Archer, 1996), the practice of treating the social and the cultural as separate for the purpose of analysis to facilitate a greater explanatory leverage on the dynamics of their interaction, rather than identifying and linking the difference between them as reciprocally constituted (conflationism) or treating each as the mere reflection of the other (epiphenomenalism).

The most explicit departure from Habermas in adopting a socio-cultural approach resides in its language and conceptualisation. Habermas's scholarly resources and practices reflect their philosophical/historical origins with the result that distinctions such as system/lifeworld are not comfortably grafted to delineations of the social order drawn from sociology and cultural studies in a manner that maintains their emergent qualities. This also follows from his theoretical/universalistic project which seeks to construct what Bourdieu refers to as 'theoretical theory' (Wacquant, 1995), a form of system building that establishes the universal conditions necessary for public discussion following rational critical conventions to claim legitimacy in the determination of norms which people are obliged to follow.

Likewise, there is a foreclosing on what have been described as discursive and cultural turns in sociology. These for their part adopt a scepticism towards such aspects of Habermas's enlightenment world view as a, relatively straightforward referential system that through the agency of a communicatively competent subject, connects given utterances to a world of objects, motive or norms (Gardiner, 2004), the perfectability of procedures for the sending and reception of signs, and a confidence in the capacity of critical theory to deliver its emancipatory potential rather than its coercive pitfalls. Nonetheless, the approach recommended here is normative and does not turn its back on a transformative function for adult education. It shares with Habermas the enlightenment aspiration to free people from 'tutelage', whatever its provenance, including that which is 'self-incurred' (Kant, 1784;1959) and is true to critical theory's orientation to betterment and change. Rather than articulate from above, the conditions necessary for the status of public sphere, as Habermas does, this analysis works from below to evaluate the dynamics of the public sphere in terms of what practices, resources and knowledge it provides in substantive contexts and projects, such as those involved in adult education, to enhance democratic deliberation. Unlike critical theory, however, the approach comes, to borrow from Giddens (1994, p.21) "without guarantees".

Another reworking of the public sphere that connects with the socio-cultural approach is the postmodern/feminist critique most notably associated with the work of Fraser (1992; 1995). This is because of its emphasis on diversity and its questioning of the modernist assumptions of Habermas. Running counter to the universalism of Habermas is the argument that social and historical forces are at play in determining participation in social and public life and the mechanisms and protocols employed to come to agreement in public debate. Fraser

sees the merit of the public sphere in situating, “discursive processes in their social institutional context... enabl(ing) us to study the ways in which culture is embedded in social structure and affected by social relations of domination... thus provid(ing) an alternative to the sort of free-floating, decontextualised discourse analysis that disassociates cultural studies from critical theory” (1995, p.288). But she questions some of its constitutive modernist liberal assumptions. These include the failure to acknowledge that social equality is a necessary condition for social democracy, the inadequacy of the public/private dualism and the gendered nature of what is worthy of public concern, deliberation and legal intervention. She diagnoses the existence of “subaltern counterpublics” to signal “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses”, having the effect of expanding “discursive space” and ideally forcing public argument about assumptions and themes that had previously been exempt from contestation (1995, p.291). Such substantive extensions of the democratic public sphere, have been further expanded and diversified in the work of Young (1990; 1996) and Cohen (1996).

In its application to adult education engagements, the socio-cultural approach seeks to de-gloss the cultural realm through its conceptual delineation while stressing the intertextuality of its production. It conceives of students and teachers as embedded within institutional and social settings with a less than integrated and transparent self than Habermas’ theories assume. In the context of polyvalent (multi-meaning) communication, it advocates an acceptance of other discursive forms besides those of measured, linear, articulate debate. Conceptualised in this manner, adult education engagements become a feature of a diversified public sphere with distinctive discursive practices, norms and constraints (Cohen, 1996). In this, teachers are distinguished from students as experts in resources for interpretation but they may also be found to adopt other such subjectivities as ‘free floating’ (Mannheim) or ‘organic’ (Gramsci) intellectual.

Conclusion

This article has argued that as adult educators we should not be outside the remit of our own theorising. It began by outlining an earlier effort to construct an ethical grammar to audit the probity of working to change others through adult education and sought to situate it in terms of contemporary debate about truth and certainty in understanding and changing the world. The context was identified as the challenge of maintaining a transformative role for adult education while respecting the integrity of our students as co-participants in this process.

A constraint on turning theory on ourselves in facing this challenge lies in the dominance of redemption in Irish adult education thought and practice, the aspiration to ‘put things right’, be it in terms of skill deficiencies, limited perspectives, inappropriate beliefs and feelings or a flawed social order. This is done in the interests of the student, but from the standpoint of the adult educator. In this, the function of the adult educator to variously expand, develop, re-skill, lead and enlighten is unquestioned. Students are construed as beneficiaries and not without justification. Yet, the effect can itself be limiting and restrictive.

The more encompassing the designs of adult education, the more they engage the totality of a person’s identity and worldview and disempower them from thinking and acting otherwise. Even a skill-based programme that doesn’t directly appear to be personally or ideologically invasive can often be restrictive in the social and political aspects of the learning that it leaves unexplored.

I identified some examples of writing on adult education that proclaim a transformative role without succumbing, in whole or in part, to a redemptive orientation. In such instances, one finds the future envisioned as a work in progress, in which students and teachers participate. In this, students are active creators of themselves and their world rather than recipients and beneficiaries of the visions of others. Adult education teachers become experts in resources for interpretation, a more humble role than the enlightenment and leadership of others. But, given a view of the self as incorporating multiple subjectivities (ways of being oneself in such a public sphere), there is also space for teachers to declare their own beliefs and to do so with passion and conviction. Adult educators can be “diverse persona” in the classroom if they free themselves up as sharers and proclaimers rather than incorporators, however well-intentioned.

To envision adult education engagements as a specific manifestation of a diversified public sphere is to establish them as a designated setting in which ideas and practices are brought into contact and in which students are helped to develop and employ cultural resources (language, concepts, accounts, explanations, theories etc.) for understanding how they and the world might best be understood and changed. There are other social arrangements for the discussion of public issues such as voluntary and community groups, mass media and political debate, but the educative role of adult education needs to be highlighted, as a contribution that will not be available elsewhere with such systematic coverage or earlier in the educational system in relation to such ideological issues because of the developmental vulnerability of younger students.

Operating according to this vision of adult education is not a straightforward task. There are challenges in communication, personal psychology, the level of resources that can be circulated, restraints from contemporary ideologies and practices, understanding of the self and social action that it is possible to achieve, and the inevitability of often hidden circuits of power, interest and defence. And there are no guarantees as to what people will want or what transformations might follow. Just like democracy.

I can only speak of my own dilemmas as an adult educator and my search for theoretical resources to engage with them. Far from resolving them, at most I find myself with accommodations, holding positions and bracketed issues, all of which are necessary if nihilism and disablement are to be avoided. Inevitably these are products of my own individual positioning and cultural biography. Yet, the issues involved go to the heart of educational and social life and include communication, meaning-making, culture, social action, individual and social change, human agency and social justice. As I have indicated, I have come to regard these as even more complex than I had imagined and, accordingly, demanding a more elaborate and interdisciplinary theorisation. Does anyone share these dilemmas? If so, how have they engaged with them? If not, has this article prompted them to question their practice? I have written in a spirit of on-going inquiry and would welcome responses to any aspect of it.

Denis O'Sullivan is Associate Professor of Education at University College, Cork. He has taught at all levels of Irish education. His most recent book is Cultural Politics and Irish Education since the 1950s. Policy Paradigms and Power.

References

- Archer, M.S. (1996). *Culture and agency* (revised edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, J.L. (1996). Democracy, difference and the right of privacy. In S. Benhabib (Ed.), *Democracy and difference*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Committee on Adult Education (1970). *National adult education survey* (Interim Murphy Report). Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Connolly, B. and Ryan, A.B. (Eds.), (1999). *Women and education in Ireland Vols 1 and 2*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Crossley, N. and Roberts, J.M. (2004). *After Habermas: New perspectives on the public sphere*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fleming, T. (1996). The future of adult education: learning towards a new democracy. In B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack and A. Ryan (Eds.), *Radical learning for liberation*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Fleming, T. (2007). The university and democracy: Habermas, adult learning and learning society. In T.A.F. Kelly (Ed.) *What price the university? A Special Issue of Maynooth Philosophical Papers*. Maynooth: NUIM.
- Foucault, M. (1973). *The order of things*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the public sphere. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere*. Mass: MIT Press.
- Fraser, N. (1995). Politics, culture and the public sphere. In L. Nicholson and S. Seidman (Eds.), *Social postmodernism: Beyond identity politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardiner, M.E. (2004). Wild publics and grotesque symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere. In N. Crossley and J.M. Roberts (Eds.), *After Habermas: New perspectives on the public sphere*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Giddens, A. (1994). *Beyond left and right*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). Structural transformation of the public sphere. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Inglis, T. (1997). Empowerment and emancipation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48, 3-17.
- Kant, I. (1784/1959). What is enlightenment? *The foundations of the metaphysics of morals*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. New York: The Crossing Press.
- Murphy, M. and Fleming, T. (2006). The application of the ideas of Habermas to adult learning. In P. Sutherland and J. Crowther (Eds.) *Lifelong learning. Concepts and contexts*. London: Routledge.
- O'Brien, S. and Ó Fathaigh, M. (2007). *Learning partnerships for social inclusion*. Cork: Oak Tree Press.

- O'Sullivan, D. (2005). *Cultural politics and Irish education since the 1950s. Policy paradigms and power*. Dublin: IPA.
- O'Sullivan, D. (1993). *Commitment, educative action and adults*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Roderick, R. (1986). *Habermas and the foundations of critical theory*. London: Macmillan.
- Ryan, A.B. (1999). Sources for a politicised practice of women's personal development education. In B. Connolly and A.B. Ryan (Eds.), *Women and education in Ireland, Volume 2*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Wacquant, L. (1989). Toward a reflexive sociology: A workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological theory*, 7, 26-63.
- Young, I.M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Young, I.M. (1996). Communication and the other: Beyond deliberative democracy. In S. Benhabib (Ed.), *Democracy and difference*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

A Secure Base for Adult Learning: Attachment Theory and Adult Education

TED FLEMING

Abstract

The attachment theory of John Bowlby has had an enduring impact on our understanding of child development. But these ideas are a neglected and forgotten discourse in adult education. In this paper concepts such as secure and insecure attachments, internal working models, and the strange situation along with the more contemporary concept of mind-mindedness are explored. The paper also explores the implications for how adults deal with new situations and new ideas; how adult learners and teachers are influenced by their own attachment styles and internal working models. These models are interpreted as strategies that adults employ for dealing with stress, anxiety, change and the challenges of teaching and learning. In addition, the implications of these concepts for understanding transformative learning are identified and changing internal working models is proposed as a form of transformative learning. This paper outlines Bowlby's main ideas, with a focus on recent research findings and, by extrapolation, reframes our current understanding of adult learning. The ideas presented here are not usually part of adult education debates but may provide useful insights for facilitators of adult learning and personal development.

Keywords: Attachment theory; Secure attachments; Internal working models; Secure base; Mind-mindedness; Transformation theory; Adult learning.

Introduction

Adult education has grown accustomed to a particular palette of debates including lifelong learning and more critical understandings of learning. These critical understandings involve a reinterpretation of the meaning of lifelong learning that, if they are to be of value, need to be combined, with “a critical

theory of society” (Murphy, 2001, p. 181). Neo-liberals and functionalists have colonised the lifelong learning debate with a fixation on technique, the economy and vocationalism (Welton, 1995). Even when the debate is more critical, as in Brookfield’s (2005) work on critical theory and Tennant’s (2006) psychology textbook, there is a missing dimension.

This paper claims that part of the missing dimension is filled by a critical investigation of John Bowlby’s attachment theory. It may be because these ideas have a biological base or a psychoanalytical dimension that they have been ignored. In addition, more critical perspectives focus on how culture and society are reproduced through interpersonal relations and, in particular, through parenting and childrearing practices. Bowlby offers a theory that attempts to integrate biology, a psychoanalytic analysis of early childhood experiences and some aspects of socio-cultural reproduction. This paper aims to address some aspects of the missing body of knowledge and illustrate how attachment theory is of profound and neglected importance for understanding adult learning and teaching.

These ideas allow adult educators find a new set of ideas and vocabulary with which to describe practices in the classroom and in the process understand more thoroughly the issues that make teaching and learning exciting, challenging and always more complex than we might imagine. This paper outlines Bowlby’s main ideas, with a focus on recent research findings and, by extrapolating from these ideas, reframes our current understandings of adult learning.

John Bowlby and Attachment Theory

John Bowlby’s (1907-1991) work as a child psychiatrist with children from poor backgrounds convinced him that family life was important for their emotional development and that the separation of a young child from mother was detrimental to the child’s development (Bowlby, 1951). Bowlby (1944), in trying to understand the causes of delinquency (a term widely used in 1944), the nature of the child’s ties to mother (1958), the meaning of separation anxiety (1960a) and the significance of grief and mourning for young children (1960b), outlined a theory in three volumes of *Attachment & Loss* (1969; 1973; 1980). Mary Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) researched the stress resulting from the separation of child and mother, known as ‘the strange situation.’

Bowlby saw social deprivation as detrimental to the child’s psychological development. This social concern runs through his work which found that;

early separations are recognised as inherently dangerous for children;...But his greatest influence is where we would wish it to be, on the social arrangements that are made for children...in hospitals, in nursery schools, in care and...at home.

(Gomez, 1997, p. 53)

However, this emphasis on poor family relationships is easily and incorrectly interpreted in terms of parental blame, often in relation to the mother. Feminists object that Bowlby is using biology to justify what is essentially a cultural product of our own 'patriarchal but father-absent' society (Holmes, 1993, p. 47). This division of labour fits modern society, leaving men free and women fettered. There is little doubt that Bowlby took a dim view of day-care and indeed of anything that kept a mother away from her infant. This lends fuel to the feminist critique. However, Bowlby was clear, even in early work that, "the role of a child's principal attachment-figure can be filled by others than the natural mother" and the view that only the natural mother could provide mothering he dismissed by saying, "no such views have been expressed by me" (1969, p. 303-304). Later research has concluded that it need not be the mother, it could be the father, who provides a secure bases for the child. If blame for the insecurity of the child is placed on the mother, this allows society to abdicate its responsibility for its role in shaping the child and also allows fathers to be absent.

Bowlby's attachment theory is based on a number of understandings. First, children in orphanages, who suffered from maternal deprivation, the absence of fathers and a family environment, were liable to negative cognitive and affective consequences. Second, in observing animal behaviour the developmental importance of 'imprinting' was established and this highlighted the importance of early contact between mother and infant in the animal world (Bowlby, 1969, pp. 184-190). The image of Konrad Lorenz (1952) being followed by a line of goslings who had 'imprinted' Lorenz as their surrogate parent comes to mind. These experiments show that early contact between mother and infant has important biological functions that contribute to the enhancement of psychological and social development. Both adults and children have inbuilt biological and evolutionary-based predispositions that contribute to the survival and development of the child (Bowlby, 1979, p. 37).

Attachment is an enduring tie with a person who provides security. Bowlby observed that the child's attachment figure provides a secure base from which

the infant can safely explore his/her environment and to which they can return if he/she experiences or perceives danger. The comforting actions of the carer provide security for the infant and interactions involving play, baby talk, making close eye contact and the excitement of these engagements are the initial ventures of the child into the world (Bowlby, 1969, p. 304).

Secure and Insecure Attachments

Children introject their experience of being cared for and as a result have a model of themselves as valued, have a greater sense of 'felt security' and more optimistic views of social relationships. Such children are **securely attached** (Bowlby, 1969, p. 339). The secure child is happy to explore his/her environment whether or not the carer is present. Though they might or might not cry when the carer leaves, they greet the returning carer positively and, even if upset, are easily comforted. This security is a result of the carer being sensitive and responsive to the needs of the child for security and sensitive/responsive to the child's signals. **Insecure attachments** have been categorised as avoidant, anxious and disorganised. These attachments are defensive strategies that are the child's attempt to maintain contact with inconsistent or rejecting carers.

The **anxious attached** child is preoccupied with the carer and reluctant to explore even in their presence. The carer of an anxious attached child (Bowlby, 1969, p. 338; 1973, p. 245) is more likely to be inconsistent in responses, insensitive to signals from the child, inept at engaging in physical contact and show little spontaneous affection. The **avoidant attached** child is usually unconcerned with either the presence or absence of the carer and does not express attachment needs so as to avoid the risk of being rejected. Avoidant attached children are more inclined to distance themselves cognitively from distress. The primary carer in this case may exhibit low levels of response to the distress of the child who is encouraged to get on with life and not make too many demands on the carer. In other instances, the carer may be uncomfortable with close contact or, even if the carer has positive feelings towards the child, these may be overshadowed by feelings of resentment or anger. Finally, the **disorganised attached** child (Main and Solomon, 1986) is associated with consistently inadequate care, a parent who is seriously depressed or who even subjects the child to maltreatment. In this case the child experiences the carer as frightening and as a result may be unable to maintain a consistent strategy for engaging in attachment behaviours.

Strange Situation

According to Ainsworth (1978), when the carer leaves the room or a stranger approaches, the child may experience separation anxiety. She used the **strange situation** as an analytical tool to assess attachment style and the quality of early attachments. Ainsworth's research provided empirical support for Bowlby's theory (1969; 1973). A secure child is likely to be upset when the carer leaves but will seek comfort from her when she returns. Insecure avoidant children on the other hand hardly notice the presence of their carer, show few overt signs of distress when they leave and mostly ignore the carer when they do return. The anxious child is often inconsolable when the carer leaves, and is not easily pacified on their return.

Internal Working Models

Attachment operates by each child developing an internal representation of their experience of relationships, an **internal working model** of social relating. Like an architect's model, it represents the individual's perception of the world of relationships and guides social interactions (Bowlby, 1969, p. 80; 1973, p. 237). A securely attached child will have internal working models that see the world as a safe place and themselves as responsive, caring and reliable. An insecurely attached child is more likely to be cautious towards others and see themselves as less worthy of attention and love (Holmes, 1993, p. 79).

Although internal working models can be revised in the light of experience, they are not always, or indeed easily, accessible to conscious examination and change, because they are laid down unconsciously in early life (Bowlby, 1973, p. 367). Parents' relationships with their children are influenced by their own internal working models and, in this way, working models are transmitted across generations (Bowlby, 1969, p. 348).

Mind-mindedness

Recent research has developed the important concept of **mind-mindedness** to describe the ability of a parent to understand and respond not only to the infant's feelings but also to their thinking (Meins et al., 2002). Carers' "proclivity to comment appropriately on their infants' mental states and processes" is related in research to secure attachments (Meins et al., 2001, p. 637). Mind-mindedness is an indicator of a relationship that is more likely to produce secure attachments. Mind-mindedness reframes Bowlby's concept of maternal sensitivity and involves the carer being "willing to change her focus of attention in response to cues from

the infant” (Meins et al., 2001, p. 638). Later, I will suggest that mind-mindedness may be important in creating a secure base for adult learning.

It is important to state that it is too easy to use attachment theory to unfairly blame the mother who in many cases is the primary care-giver and no amount of changing the language in a politically correct manner will disguise the reality that it is often the mother who is the main attachment figure and what she does and how she reproduces attachment styles is a crucial factor in how a child develops. But it is also the case that the resources that some mothers bring to parenting compromise the attachments they would like to forge. In current thinking, as outlined in this article, the omni-presence of the mother is not the important factor but the availability to the child, from extended family or elsewhere, of someone who could, with consistency, attend to their perceptions of fear, experiences of loss and anxiety as they commence their exploration of the world. Though some quotations from Bowlby identify the mother as the primary attachment figure, all recent research points to the central role of the primary carer, whether man or woman, parent or not who performs the role of providing a secure base for the child.

Attachment and Adult Learning

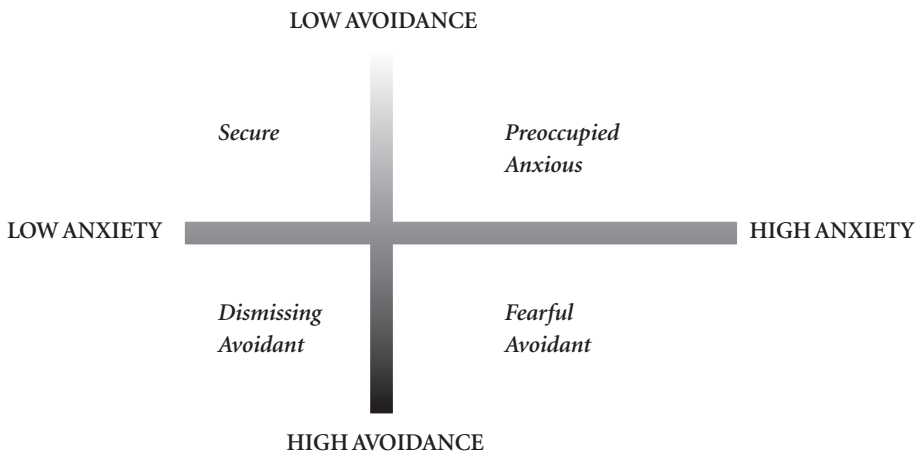
Based on attachment theory and on recent research, important implications for understanding adult learning and teaching can be extrapolated. These involve two areas. Firstly, there are the learning insights and implications of the concepts outlined – attachment style, the strange situation, internal working models, the secure base and mind-mindedness. Secondly, these concepts have implications for our understanding of adult learning and here I specifically engage with Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning.

Attachment Styles and Adult Learning

One’s attachment style plays an important role in how one reacts to the interpersonal engagements that are involved in all classroom and other encounters between students and teachers. Forming a circle of participants is one of the predictable and most frequently used configurations when adult learners meet. This encourages participation, allows all members see each other and makes concrete the democratic ideals that inform so much of our field of practice. But the student’s attachment style will strongly influence how each responds to this structure. Securely attached students are more likely to welcome the circle arrangement. But students with insecure attachment styles may have increased

levels of anxiety to such an extent that they may struggle to overcome that anxiety or opt out as a strategy for avoiding the stress of such situations.

Figure 1: Adult attachment format (adapted from Shaver & Frawley, 2004)



Adult educators have many experiences with students who have well-established strategies for engaging or not engaging with programmes and learning opportunities. The work of Daloz on mentoring is positive about the possibilities offered by mentoring and he is also aware that some may not be easily supported. For example, the aptly titled article ‘Gladys who refused to grow’ (Daloz, 1988) shows that every learner may not be in a position to avail of the mentor’s support. In any classroom of adults or in a mentoring situation it is useful to understand that one’s attachment style enhances or hinders, frees or constrains one to learn and engage with the opportunities provided.

Hazan (1990, p. 2) and others (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Frawley, Weller & Brennan, 2000) in recent research have classified adult attachment along two axes, one of high/low anxiety and the other of high/low avoidance (See Figure 1). Low avoidance and low anxiety indicate a secure attachment and the other three possibilities are dismissing avoidant, fearful avoidant and preoccupied anxious attachments. Goleman’s popular work on *Social Intelligence* acknowledges the importance of a secure base for human relationships and devotes a chapter to attachment theory (2006, pp. 162-172). In researching the connection between attachment and adult relationships Goleman (2006, p. 194) found that the secure adult is confident of a

partner's love and regularly turns to the partner for support, especially when upset. Secure adults have internalised 'rules' and strategies that allow them to be aware of when they are distressed and when to actively seek comfort from others. They are also able to engage with emotions, neither fearing them nor avoiding them and, moreover, not preoccupied with them (Goleman, 2006, p. 194). Students with secure attachments will be better able to cope with and embrace new experiences, new ideas and even the learning supports offered. Secure attachment style is a positive indicator of success at reaching one's learning goals. Insecure adults who are anxious tend to be preoccupied with the anxiety brought on by new experiences. They are more likely to be overwhelmed with feelings of loss, they are more likely to be disoriented and unable to avail of support from colleagues or teachers. Anxious attached students are likely to worry and tend to be unable to turn off the worry (Goleman, 2006, p. 196).

A note of warning is appropriate here. The claim is not being made that these extrapolations from Bowlby completely explain all barriers and resistance to learning. Other emotional, cognitive and social issues may also contribute as structural constraints continue to block engagement with learning. One's prior education experiences, especially schooling, as well as social class and gender contribute to a more rounded understanding of the barriers to learning.

In an adult education setting it is reasonable to extrapolate from these findings that secure individuals are optimistic about coping with stress, likely to relate better to others, have greater capacity for concentration and cooperation and are more confident and resilient. They can express emotions openly and appropriately, acknowledge and control the physiological signs of anger (Belsky, 2002). Secure individuals appraise stressful situations as less threatening than do those who are less secure (Belsky, 2002, p. 167). They are optimistic about their ability to cope and are more likely to seek support as a strategy for regulating their feelings. They are more open to compromise in resolving conflict and openly discuss problems. Secure adults integrate cognitive and emotional responses and are not dominated by one or the other. They may be in fact the kind of adult student that takes to learning relatively easily and enrolls without great anxiety.

The anxious or preoccupied adult is less confident of a partner's love and support and when they do turn to their partner for support they tend to be dissatisfied with the response. People who grow up in an unsupportive environment may not be confident that a caregiver is ever truly available and dependable. The

anxious attached adult finds emotions bubbling up irrepressibly and experiences a need to discuss these preoccupations (Goleman, 2006, p. 194). In the classroom an adult may appear to be preoccupied with the emotional aspect of their experiences and unable to move to more task oriented activities. Anxious individuals focus on their own distress and adopt coping strategies that exacerbate distress rather than reduce it. The anxiety experienced by some adults on returning to education may be increased due to their anxious attachment style. Interventions or activities of the tutor may be seen as useful, particularly if they address the anxiety induced by this strange situation. The role of the tutor is clearly one of building a secure and safe space in which the anxiety is addressed and a secure base created.

Avoidant individuals distance themselves cognitively and in their behavior from the source of stress (Belsky, 2002, p. 167). An avoidant adult has strategies aimed at minimizing the experience of stress and projects those weaknesses onto others (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004, p. 33-34). Those with an avoidant style overly rely on cognitive factors, may ignore or deny emotional reactions such as anxiety or fear and may not be able to turn on the worrying brain signals (Feeney & Noller, 1996, p. 105). This is in contrast to those with anxious attachments who focus on the emotional dimensions of experience rather than the cognitive.

In relationships, the avoidant dismissive adult may lack confidence in their partner, but instead of worrying they avoid others and rely on themselves. When upset they are more likely to stay alone (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). They are uncomfortable with intimacy, lack confidence and maintain psychological distance from significant others. They may find intense emotions unpleasant and avoid emotional situations, expressions of emotion or locations where emotional aspects of work or relationships are expressed or explored. In adult education such students may become isolated and unable to join the emotionally supportive study groups that sometimes form on courses. Avoidant students may be more difficult to recruit to classes and as a result neither look for support nor accept it as easily as the securely attached.

Whether students are secure or insecure, this will impact on their feelings, attitudes, and behaviour and how they react to the learning situation. This adds an additional dimension to our understanding of the adult learner. Avoidant adults are less likely to seek support, are less satisfied with the support available and mistrust those who offer support. An awareness by the tutor or organis-

er that supports which reach out to potentially isolated students may provide some of the structure required to assist the student experience security.

Adults with high anxiety and high avoidance may be least able to engage in new situations and may have strategies that lead to a perception that their style is disorganised attachment. The disorganised adult has a strong desire to approach others for support, a fear of being hurt or rejected, and avoids potentially supportive adults. They are likely not to have any strategy for maintaining proximity to someone who may offer care and support and, in more extreme cases, serious problems with intimacy are likely (Main and Hesse, 1990). Issues of motivation will be influenced by this attachment style. It is more likely that this attachment style will be encountered among 'the hardest to reach' learning communities, for example prisoners. Tutors with experience in these situations have methodologies for working with students or young adults whose attachment styles are disorganised. Tutors who work with young people from chaotic family/community backgrounds are our best guides about how to cope in the classroom with students whose attachments are disorganised. These groups provide a particular challenge for educators as a tutor's ability to provide a secure base is also dependent on the attachment style of the tutor or the insights required to create and sustain a secure environment. Further research needs to be done by adult educators to explore the implications of these ideas for our understanding and practice of teaching and learning.

A secure attachment facilitates optimal motivation for achieving one's goals because it enables individuals to view achievement in positive terms and to fully focus on effective ways of reaching goals (Eliot and Reis, 2003, p. 328). In contrast, anxious attachments undermine motivation and achievement because it leads to viewing tasks less positively. Insecure attachments produce a defensive focus on avoiding negative outcomes. In sum, the result of research in this area by Eliot and Reis (2003) supports the general view that secure attachments in adulthood assist in achieving one's goals and insecure attachments interfere with exploration and in achieving one's goals by evoking avoidance or anxiety. A secure attachment may allow students to focus directly on the challenges of the task, and immerse themselves in the activity, free from concerns about the broader implications of success or failure. But anxious attachments are likely to heighten fear about the implications of failure for the individual involved, leading them to focus primarily on avoiding failure (Eliot and Reis, 2003, p. 328). This adds a new dimension to our understanding of adult motivation to learn.

There is little research on this issue in adult education and this may be a fruitful area for further elaborating our understanding of adult learning motivation.

The strange situation is not only a reality that brings to the fore one's attachment style, it is also a necessary precondition for learning. A teacher of adults has traditionally been described as one who initiates wonder (Aristotle), creates perplexity (Dewey) or makes the familiar strange in the words of Maxine Greene (1973). Adult education provides 'strange situations' for students when a student joins a course or programme for the first time or when they explore new ideas and new knowledge. A number of such experiences in adult education bring to the fore one's attachment style. This is understandable as much of the discourse in our discipline centres around the anxiety of 'going back to school' and the low self-confidence a student often feels on joining a new learning group for the first time. In addition, these ideas of Bowlby also prompt us to see that all new ideas, new points of view, new learning can have the same impact, even if the student has successfully navigated their way into the classroom. The ability of a student to cope with new knowledge is hugely influenced by their strategies for coping with the strange situations provided by new knowledge. New knowledge is a strange situation that triggers attachment behaviours. Our ability to 'go it alone' or be a self-directed learner may also be influenced by our attachment style as a preference for a particular way of learning is likely to be consistent with one's attachment style.

Adult education precipitates 'strange situations' or experiences that perplex, disorient, or make the learner curious. What happens is most interesting, if we accept the insights of Bowlby. These situations induce a sense of loss, a realisation that meanings that were previously taken for granted become open for discussion, debate, examination, scrutiny and change. Students are likely to think, feel, act and make meanings in ways that are consistent with their attachment style and internal working models. The work of Bowlby places this in a firm theoretical context, helps us understand the psychological dynamics of a classroom and suggests possible solutions and strategies for assisting those who find themselves disoriented in a strange situation. The ability to provide a secure base, so crucial for working with insecure adults, is foundational for working with all students.

The anxious attached are more likely to react to disorientation with high levels of anxiety that preoccupies their attention and is a further barrier to learning.

The avoidant attached are probably more difficult to encourage into a learning situation as their style is to hide or not present, not because of anxiety, but because they avoid issues that threaten their security. Those who are both anxious and avoidant will be more difficult to work with as their reaction to doubt or dilemmas is to be both preoccupied with anxiety and with avoiding engagement. These insights may be hugely significant in thinking through strategies for engaging with 'hard to reach' learners. Many attempts to contact adult learners from any sector of society automatically appeal to the securely attached. To attract others, adult educators are required to address the issues that lie behind either avoidant or anxious adult learners. Internal working models affect our cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to others in family, work and indeed in all communications. They affect how data is evaluated, experienced, accepted, rejected or ignored in all communications. They influence the thoughts we have, what we remember, what we consider important and how we interpret and make sense of events. Internal working models also influence emotional response patterns (Alexander, 1992). These insights from attachment theory research lead us to understand how students bring internal frames of reference with them that may help or hinder learning and the theory suggests ways of overcoming these constraints.

Hazan's (1990, p. 1) research shows that adults find a safe haven in their relationships to which they retreat from the difficulties of life and a secure base from which to explore the world. People construct intimate relationships that reflect their attachment style and internal working models. According to Bowlby (1979, p. 135):

There is a strong causal relationship between an individual's experiences with his parents and his later capacity to make affectional bonds, and that certain common variations in that capacity, manifesting themselves in marital problems and trouble with children as well as in neurotic symptoms and personality disorders, can be attributed to certain common variations in the ways that parents perform their roles.

The effects of attachment patterns on relationships, work performance and even on transition to college are important according to Hazan (1990, p. 3). As there is no discussion of these ideas in adult education we miss the opportunity to ask whether and to what extent relationships between teacher and student (including among students and among staff) reflect each participant's attach-

ment style and internal working models. This allows us extrapolate from the research findings in other disciplines and identify the creation of a secure base as a prerequisite for supporting adult learners whose attachments may be less secure than they might want them to be.

Bowlby (1988, p. 138) described the role of the therapist as providing the patient with a secure base from which the past may be explored. Their role is to assist the patient in exploring ways that clients engage in relations with significant others. They explore ways in which the patient-therapist relationship itself is likely to be influenced by the expectations of how an attachment figure feels and behaves towards one another that are in turn an expression of one's own internal working models. In addition, Bowlby encouraged therapists to assist the patient explore how the current situation was an expression of how one's own experiences in childhood may be continuing to impact on current relationships. Though the suggestion is not being made that adult educators are therapists or indeed that educators provide therapy, there is a tradition in our discipline that pays attention to the counselling and therapeutic process, as in Carl Rogers, as a site for insights about change, learning and facilitating learning. Of course key to the use of therapy is the way Rogers, for example, explicitly sets out to create a relationship with the client and in the context of that relationship moments are produced that are insightful, developmental and that we could describe as learning. The adult educator too is neither a mere conduit for information (though that is important) nor a therapist, but there is a way of looking at teaching as having an emotional dimension (Salzberger-Wittenberg, et al., 1983).

By implication, in the training of adult educators, as with therapists, it would be worth developing the ability of the tutor to construct a safe place for exploration. The tutor would benefit from being aware of his or her own attachment style and of their own internal working models. An aware adult educator could, with great profit, be informed by such insights. In the 'strange situations' that are part of most adult learning situations, in order for learning to happen, a secure place must be created. It is a characteristic of a good educator that they can create such a space. In this way "one may cease to be a slave to old and unconscious stereotypes and to feel, think and to act in new ways" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 139).

Teaching and Learning: Secure Base and Mind-mindedness

The teacher's internal working models and strategies for coping with change and strangeness impact on how well the tutor copes with the challenge of adult students and their ability to cope with their questioning, challenges of the debates and interactions of the adult classroom.

Our earlier outlining of how success, achievement of one's goals and work are influenced by these understandings now leads to the possibility, new to adult education, that how one performs, as teacher or student, is heavily influenced by attachment style and internal working models. The secure student or teacher may be best situated to take advantage of learning opportunities. However, not all are fortunate to arrive in class with secure attachment styles and it is likely that a significant number of students (and teachers?) may be insecure, we just do not know. This poses important questions about how to work with students taking into account that some will have strategies in place for avoiding and denying stress or be quite preoccupied with the inevitable stress of the situation. In addition, the adult educator will have their own secure or insecure attachments and strategies for dealing with success, failure and the inevitable stress of the learning situation. The aim of the good teacher in this understanding becomes that of providing a secure base in which security is provided and an environment created so that, at least tentatively, the learner may have an experience of working through the strangeness of the situation and hopefully develop internal working models that are consistent with secure attachment styles.

Paying attention to the student as having a mind and feelings is not new to adult education. It is in fact a precondition for all interactions. However, the insights from attachment theory give a solid and additional grounding for attending to the student in this way, as one with a mind and feelings. Mind-mindedness is developmental. As Maxine Greene says, while emphasising the role of the teacher in supporting learning, "I want teachers to become a friend of someone else's mind" (Rothman, 2007). Mind-mindedness is a useful way of supporting adults in the process of learning and supporting the move toward secure attachments.

A fundamental tenet of attachment theory is that the attachment style developed in the child-parent relationship influences future relationships (Bowlby, 1973). Bowlby saw that "whatever representational models of attachment figures and of self an individual builds up during childhood and adolescence tend to persist relatively unchanged into and throughout life" (1979, p. 141-142). But they are open to change (Waters, et al., 2000).

In this exploration of the implications of attachment theory it is important to emphasise the relative nature of all knowledge and be aware that there are objections to attachment theory. Rutter (1997) provided a series of structured critical reviews of attachment theory. One of his main criticisms of attachment theory concerns the idea that infant experiences determine adult behaviour. Research confirms that there is considerable scope for later change in attachment style but research also points to a strong link between child and adult attachment. The word 'determine' is not best but it is the consistent insight of psychoanalysis and adult learning theory that early experiences make a unique contribution to adulthood. It is also the consistent insight of counselling and of adult education that change, though constrained by previous adaptations, is always possible (Goldberg, 2000, p. 247). Attachment styles remain open to revision throughout life and there is no disagreement among the theorists on this, in fact the idea that they would not change might be seen as a challenge to Bowlby's theory (Waters et al., 2000, p. 688). Attachment is a lifelong learning project. In addition these insights are not presented here to contradict other insights from psychology but to add layers to our understanding of adult development. It is the position of this author that attachment theory is useful as it contributes to our understanding of how social structures (child rearing, etc.) are reproduced across the generations through psychological processes.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning

Adult learning involves change. Learning of all kinds, even of the most modest kind, involves change of behaviour or of our understanding or indeed of our values and perceptions. Mezirow's work alerts us to one of the most significant kinds of change that he describes as transformative. The theory of transformative learning states that the most significant adult learning involves becoming aware of the ways in which unquestioned assumptions, that act as taken-for-granted beliefs, constrain and distort the ways in which we make sense of the world. Frequently, these assumptions originate in childhood experiences. These unquestioned assumptions and frames of reference have two dimensions. One involves habits of expectation (meaning perspectives) that serve as filters or codes to shape, constrain or on occasion distort our meaning making. The other involves our points of view (meaning scheme) or individual beliefs, judgements, attitudes, etc (Mezirow, 2007, p. 11). Attachment styles and internal working models are good examples of psychological filters or codes that continue to influence ways of feeling and acting in adulthood. These internal working models are an example of the frames of reference described by Mezirow (2007, p.

11). A transformed frame of reference is “more inclusive, differentiating, more open to alternative perspectives and more integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 2007, p. 11).

The presentation of attachment theory in this paper leads to asking what is it that gets transformed in transformative learning? Attachment styles and internal working models get transformed and the understanding of transformation theory can be expanded and enhanced in a number of ways. According to Mezirow, the process of transforming a frame of reference commences with a disorienting dilemma and concludes with a reintegration into community with a new set of assumptions. This is suggestive of a process of altering or transforming one's attachment style and internal working models. Mezirow's disorienting dilemma is reminiscent of the strange situation. They have in common an experience that what was taken for granted does not hold anymore. In the case of the child, it is the departing attachment figure or the arrival of a perceived danger, possibly another person. In the case of the adult it might be the apprehension felt by the arrival at new learning situations or exploring new ideas. The strange situation has the added importance for transformation theory that it allows us identify the experience of disorientation as a sense that things do not fit anymore, previously taken for granted meanings do not hold and the profound sense of loss implied in that experience may precipitate or bring to the fore our own attachment style. If the student is secure, they are more likely to react with less anxiety and a decreased possibility of avoiding issues and situations.

By inference, we can further enhance our understanding of transformative learning by proposing that if one has transformed one's frames of reference it is suggested that a better frame of reference, using Mezirow's language, involves the move in one's attachment style towards a style that is more secure or less anxious and less avoidant. This also gives a useful way of framing the by now familiar comment that involvement in adult education enhanced one's self-confidence. It ought to also enhance one's attachment style making one more secure to engage with new situations, new learnings and relationships.

In transformative learning theory a key role is given to meaning as the organisation of experience. One's attachment style and more importantly one's internal working models are, as previously suggested, psychological dimensions of meaning schemes. In transformation theory it is these meaning schemes or frames of reference that get transformed (Mezirow, 2007). The internal working

models are exactly what Mezirow means by psychological filters or codes “that shape and delimit and often distort our experience” (Mezirow, 2007, p. 11). It is implied in these explorations that we can associate the process of transformation with the development of new internal working models. It is also consistent with attachment theory to see the creation of perplexity as a prompt for transformative learning. In addition, we come to understand how a changed internal working model may be an improvement on a previous one. We know it is better if it meets Mezirow’s criteria that it be more inclusive, more discriminating and more open to future change. This may also be a good set of criteria for judging a ‘better’ internal working model. It is at least a real possibility that development and growth are best supported by more secure attachment styles.

As one’s attachment style informs one’s way of relating to others it is suggested here that a significant kind of adult learning involves the developmental task of moving toward more secure attachments. Human development is being redefined here as the transformation of attachment styles and internal working models. Bowlby (1973, p. 368; 1988, p. 126) did envisage attachment as a lifelong learning project.

Conclusion

This study of Bowlby’s attachment theory allows us understand more thoroughly how society and culture in constructing child rearing practices have a profound impact not only on the child but on the entire learning life of that individual. Attachment theory provides us with a lifelong learning project that brings together deep psychological patterns as well as the reproduction of society. These ideas allow us take on board, in a way reminiscent of Erich Fromm’s work, how the individual and society are inextricably connected. It also allows us add a new chapter to widely respected psychology textbooks such as Tennant (2006). Marris (1991, pp. 79-80) understands this:

The experience of attachment is the first crucial link between sociological and psychological understanding: the experience of attachment, which so profoundly influences the growth of personality, is itself the product of a culture, and a determinant of how that culture will be reproduced in the next generation – not only the culture of attachment itself but all our ideas of order, authority, and control.

Knowing that Bowlby does not do justice to the social and cultural factors that impact on development. At the core of a critical adult learning theory is the necessity to imagine and theorise how the cultures and societies in which we live, interact with and influence the ways in which people relate to each other. This would allow us understand more thoroughly how adult learning may be enhanced or distorted by secure or insecure attachment styles and internal working models. Finally, the move toward more secure ways of relating and exploring the world is a lifelong learning project of the most significant personal and political importance.

Because attending to the mind of the student is of such importance I am reminded of Claudia in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1990, p. 15) and how she hates Shirley Temple dolls. These were a representation of the world of things to be possessed and the child emphasises the importance of attachment rather than the possession of things. It is a reminder of how white dolls were given as presents to black children. She destroyed these dolls:

But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas. Had any adult with the power to fulfil my desires taken me seriously and asked me what I wanted, they would have known that I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. I wanted to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been 'Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?' I could have spoken up, 'I wanted to sit on a low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone.' The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of peach, perhaps, afterwards.

Mind-mindedness for adults too is what is being proposed.

Ted Fleming is a Senior Lecturer and Director of the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education at NUI Maynooth.

References

- Ainsworth, M.D.S., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E. & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Alexander, P.C. (1992). Application of attachment theory to the study of sexual abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60(2), 185-195.
- Belsky, J. (2002). Developmental origins of attachment styles. *Attachment and Human Development*, 4(2), 166-170.
- Bowlby, J. (1944). Forty-four juvenile thieves: Their characters and home lives. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 25, 19-52.
- Bowlby, J., (1951). *Maternal health and mental health*, Monograph Series No. 2. Geneva: World Health Organisation.
- Bowlby, J. (1958). The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 39, 350-373.
- Bowlby, J. (1960a). Separation anxiety. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 41, 89-113.
- Bowlby, J. (1960b). Grief and mourning in infancy and early childhood. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 15, 9-52.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss Vol 1: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss Vol 2: Separation, anxiety and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1979). *The making and breaking of affectional bonds*. London: Tavistock.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss Vol 3: Loss, sadness and depression*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory*. London: Routledge.
- Brookfield, S. (2005). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Daloz, L. (1988). The story of Gladys who refused to grow: A morality tale for mentors. *Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research*, 11(4), 4-7.
- Eliot, A.J. and Reis, H.T. (2003). Attachment and exploration in adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(2), 317-331.
- Feeney, J. & Noller, P. (1996). *Adult attachment*. London: Sage.
- Frawley, R.C., Waller, N.G. & Brennan, K.G. (2000). An item response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 350-365.
- Goldberg, S. (2000). *Attachment and development*. London: Arnold.
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. New York: Random House.
- Gomez, L. (1997). *An introduction to object relations*. London: Free Association Press.

- Greene, M. (1973). *Teacher as Stranger: Educational philosophy for the modern age*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Hazan, C. (1990). Patterns of adult love. *Human Ecology*, 3(1), 1-3.
- Hazan, C. & Shaver, P.R. (1990). Love and work: An attachment-theoretical perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(2), 270-280.
- Hazan, C. & Shaver, P.R. (1994). Attachment as an organisational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry*, 5(1), 1-22.
- Holmes, J. (1993). *John Bowlby and attachment theory*. London: Routledge.
- Lorenz, K. (1952). *King Solomon's ring*. New York: Crowell.
- Main, M. & Hess, E. (1990). Parents' unresolved traumatic experiences are related to infant disorganised attachment status: Is frightened and/or frightening behaviour the linking mechanism? In M.T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti & E.M. Cummins (Eds.), *Attachment in the preschool years*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Main, M. & Solomon, J. (1986). Discovery of a new, insecure-disorganised/disoriented attachment pattern. In T. B. Brazelton & M. Youngman (Eds.), *Affective development in infancy*. Norwood: Ablex.
- Meins, E., Ferynhough, C., Wainwright, R., Gupta, M.D., Fradley, E. & Tuckey, M. (2001). Rethinking maternal sensitivity: Mothers' comments on infants' mental processes predict security of attachment at 12 months. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 42(5), 637-648.
- Meins, E., Ferynhough, C., Wainwright, R., Gupta, M.D., Fradley, E. & Tuckey, M. (2002). Mind-mindedness and attachment security as predictors of theory of mind Understanding. *Child Development*, 73(6), 1715-1726.
- Marris, P. (1991). The social construction of uncertainty. In C. M. Parkes, J. Stevenson-Hinde & P. Marris *Attachment across the lifecycle*. London: Routledge.
- Mezirow, J. (2007). Adult education and empowerment for individual and community development. In B. Connolly, T. Fleming, A. Ryan & D. McCormack (Eds.), *Radical learning for liberation 2*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Morrison, T. (1990). *The bluest eye*. London: Picador.
- Murphy, M. (2001). Adult education, lifelong learning and the end of political economy. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 32(2), 166-181.
- Rothman, D. (2007). Becoming friend of someone else's mind. *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. Retrieved April 18, 2008, from <http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/story.php?sid=48323&storySection=Opinion>
- Rutter, M. (1997). Clinical implications of attachment concepts: Retrospect and prospect. In A. Schore *Affect regulation and the origin of self: The neurobiology of emotional development*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum.

- Salzberger-Wittenberg, I., Henry, G. & Osborne, E. (1996). *the Emotional Experience of Learning and Teaching*. London: Routledge.
- Shaver, P.R. & Fraley, R.C. (2004). Self-report measures of adult attachment. Retrieved 23 April 2008, from <http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~rcfraley/measures/measures.html>
- Shaver, P.R. & Mikulincer, M. (2004). Attachment theory and research: Resurrection of the psychodynamic approach to personality. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 39, 22-45.
- Tennant, M. (2006). *Psychology and adult learning* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Waters, E., Merrick, S., Treboux, D., Crowell, J. & Albersheim, L. (2000). Attachment security in infancy and early adulthood: A twenty-year longitudinal study. *Child development*, 71(3), 684-689.
- Welton, M. (Ed.), (1995). *In defense of the lifeworld: Critical perspectives on adult learning*. New York: SUNY.

Neo-Liberalism, Irish Society and Adult Education

FERGAL FINNEGAN

Abstract

This article offers an overview of recent international scholarship on neo-liberalism in particular the work of the geographer and historian David Harvey and the recent books of the educationalist Henry Giroux. It begins with a brief historical account of neo-liberalism and outlines the main characteristics of the free market era. Irish society and education is analysed in light of this work arguing that this offers a useful model for understanding the rise in inequality, the changing nature of democracy and the shift in social values that we have witnessed in Ireland over the past decade. The article finishes with a brief exploration of the impact of free market ideas on contemporary adult education and the relevance this has for the ongoing debate over different versions of lifelong learning.

Introduction

Economics is the method but the object is to change the soul (Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Harvey, 2006, p.17).

What is neo-liberalism? A programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic (Pierre Bourdieu, 1998b, p.1).

Thirty five years ago the idea that the needs of the market should determine social policy and statecraft was a proposition which was seriously entertained by only a few thinkers at the margins of Chicago and London academia. Today the same idea is so powerful it is simply 'common sense' - making the diffusion and consolidation of the neo-liberal project one of the most remarkable stories of recent history (Anderson, 2000). This free market revolution has reshaped the global economic and political system and arguably even changed the models by

which we judge social progress (Bourdieu, 1998a; Harvey, 2005; Anderson, 2000). There is an extensive body of international research on neo-liberalism and unsurprisingly a number of prominent educational thinkers have begun to analyse the challenges that this new historical conjuncture poses for educators (Apple, 2006; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Giroux, 2004; McLaren, 2005). However, in Ireland although there is a large swathe of popular and academic literature exploring various aspects of change during the 'Celtic Tiger' (Nolan, Connell & Whelan, 2000; O'Toole, 2003; MacSharry & White, 2000; O'Riain, 2000; 2004; Smith, 2005; Sweeney, 1998) relatively few commentators have chosen to frame the transformation of Ireland as part of a more general story of the triumph of neo-liberalism. Kirby (2002a; 2002b; 2004; 2005) has offered the most nuanced account of an 'Irish neo-liberalism' but even when this is supplemented by relevant work by other writers (Allen, 2000; 2007; Coulter & Coleman, 2003; O'Cleary, 2007; O'Hearn, 1998) this topic requires considerable further study and elaboration. Most pertinently for educators there has been very little research on the impact, or the potential effect, of neo-liberalism on Irish education in general (Allen, 2007; Lynch, 2006) or more specifically on adult education (Connolly, 2007; Fleming, 1998; 2004). As a small contribution to this field of inquiry this article will briefly offer a brief history of neo-liberalism and outline its main characteristics drawing on a range of scholarship including the work of the geographer and historian David Harvey and the educational thinker Henry Giroux. This scholarship will then be synthesised with the available research on Irish neo-liberalism cited above alongside a number of recent empirical studies in order to explore the specific cultural and political logic of Irish neo-liberalism and what this has meant, and might mean, for adult education.

Neo-liberalism: a brief overview of the new hegemony

Between the seventies and early eighties the world economic system was beset with a variety of economic and political crises. Besides having to contend with a wave of militant social struggles politicians and policy makers were confronted by falling profit levels, interest rates problems and stagflation (Brenner, 1998; Harvey, 2000). Under these various pressures the dominant post-war paradigm of economic management – Keynesian and welfare state economics – eventually disintegrated (Brenner, 1998). In response to these crises the governments in Chile, the US and the UK conducted a series of free market experiments in social and economic engineering (Harvey, 2005). This laid the basis for what became known as the Washington consensus in which neo-liberal ideas began to be promoted by the main international economic regulatory institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. As a

consequence of this neo-liberalism became the dominant political ideology of capitalist globalisation. This paradigm shift has been behind the systematic deregulation of trade and finance, the adoption of new forms of fiscal and monetary policy and the implementation of a massive programme of marketisation and privatisation across the world (Brenner, 1998; Harvey, 2005).

Harvey (2000; 2005; 2006) argues that this historical shift needs to be understood both as the result of the intensification of longstanding tendencies within capitalism and as something that is qualitatively new. Its novelty lies in the way neo-liberalism has emerged as both an expression of, and a response to, a series of technological and political changes that have occurred during the past thirty five years. Technological innovations, especially in terms of information and transport technologies, have facilitated “the geographical dispersal and fragmentation of production systems, divisions of labor, and specialization of tasks” and led to a “profound geographical reorganization of capitalism” (Harvey, 2000, p.63 & p. 57). A fusion of ideology and technology shaped a new era marked above all by its flexibility and the compression of space and time allowing the expansion of the market into hitherto non-commodified areas of social life (Harvey, 1989; 2000; 2005; 2006). This expansion of the market has far surpassed the expectations of even the most prescient and most pessimistic critics of commodification. We have arrived at a point in which the relentless commodification of space, time and knowledge has even resulted in the ability of the market to patent and profit from the very stuff of life through innovations in the field of genetic engineering and intellectual property legislation.

Clearly the reach and ambition of the neo-liberal project is such is that it is subject to varying temporal and spatial histories of national and regional development (Harvey, 2005; 2006) and has also encountered considerable resistance (Notes from Nowhere, 2003). A satisfactory account of the intersection of global and local trends worldwide within the dynamics of hegemony and resistance is obviously well beyond the scope of the present paper. Nonetheless, without too much simplification it is possible to discern amongst all the varying applications of free market ideas six main characteristics of the neo-liberal project as it has evolved over the past three decades.

- (1) The market has become the dominant paradigm of the age and is now seen as a useful and natural template for practically any sphere of human activity including areas of society which have been traditionally treated

as distinct from the market. Marketisation policies have, amongst other things, resulted in a series of binding multilateral agreements and complex trading rules that commit states to the commodification of social goods of all sorts including healthcare, natural resources and education. The World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Global Agreement on the Trade in Services (GATS) is of particular importance to this process and sets down the rules for a global trade in services including, since 2000, educational services. While the WTO (2005) argues that the market will ensure greater efficiency and broader access critics contend that GATS transforms social goods into service commodities (Barlow, 1999). The process of marketisation on a macroeconomic level has been complemented and strengthened by the growth of corporate power and the increased influence of sponsorship and advertising in society. These trends, it is argued, have had profoundly negative implications for the elements of civil society which seek to create spaces and discourses that are independent of the market.

- (2) The neo-liberal project has also reconfigured the relationship between the state and the market. In many countries this has led to the state abandoning or downgrading its social and redistributive functions while advancing the commodification of social life and the colonisation of civil society (Harvey, 2005; Giroux, 2004). In practical terms this 'hollowing out' of the state has led to a steady erosion of social democratic guarantees in the global north (Bourdieu, 1998a; 1998b; Harvey, 2005) and even more violent changes in the global south where the massive restructuring of national economies through policy initiatives such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) has profoundly changed the way these societies function.
- (3) Giroux (2004) and Harvey (2005; 2006) argue that this change in the relationship between market and state is part of a more general attempt to roll back the freedoms and rights won in previous eras and marks a restoration of power to the very wealthy. As a direct consequence of this one of the most marked characteristics of the neo-liberal era is that it has transformed the way resources and wealth are distributed worldwide and has deepened and intensified social inequality (Harvey, 2005).

- (4) There is considerable debate over the causes, extent and exact nature of the shifts in global capitalism that have contributed to this state of affairs and different writers have focused on a variety of issues such as the increased influence of transnational corporations; the diminished power of the nation state and the role of the US as the only world superpower (Arrighi, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998b; Harvey, 2005; Hardt & Negri, 2004; Wallerstein, 2003). However, all these critics concur that transformations within global capitalism have affected the quality and capacity of global democracy in the sense that most of the important centres of power, wealth and influence within global society remain largely unaccountable to any form of meaningful popular control.

- (5) The politics of neo-liberalism needs to be understood as a powerful and complex form of cultural hegemony rather than simply as economic policy- that is a set of strategies, ideas and models that have been used to secure consent for the increasingly uneven distribution of power and wealth across the globe (Bourdieu, 1998a; 1998b; Giroux, 2004; Harvey, 2005; 2006). According to these writers neo-liberalism is not simply what happens in an International Monetary Fund (IMF) think tank, or a chancellor's speech, it is a world view that promotes a certain conception of human beings as self interested, calculating and individualistic. It is based on a fantasy, what Bourdieu termed "a pure mathematical fiction" (1998b, p.1) in which human behaviour and the varied needs, desires and dreams of people can be explained solely in terms of the calculus of economic self-interest.

Giroux (2004; 2005) argues that this market model and the values of individualism and greed are being diffused through popular culture most notably by large media corporations. In examining a wide range of cultural products such as films (2002; 2003), various adverts (2001; 2004), cultural phenomena such as child beauty pageants (2001), news and infotainment(2004; 2005), video games (2005), extreme sports and reality TV shows (2003; 2004; 2005) Giroux returns again and again to the idea that our subjective understanding of the world is being relentlessly schooled through popular culture to operate through categories and ideas that are conducive to neo-liberal capitalism. Giroux concludes that the very fabric of social communication and the cultural spaces through which we make meaning, shape values and articulate identity, is now saturated with the values of free market ideology. Clearly this ascribes a regulatory power

to neo-liberalism that goes well beyond the commonly understood notions of this doctrine simply as a set of monetarist and free market policies. In this formulation the market paradigm has acquired the power to create what it claims to describe- an atomized, individualistic and acquisitive society.

- (6) Related to these geopolitical trends are substantive changes in how people conceive of personal identity and collective solidarity in relation to political agency (Bauman, 2000; Giroux, 2003; Sennett, 1998; 2006). As a consequence, according to these writers, democracy is at a crossroads, not only in terms of devising global institutions of governance and overcoming inequality, but also in terms of our ability to create enduring and meaningful personal and collective narratives in a world in which the tempo, values and reference points of social life have been drastically altered.

Part of this is undoubtedly due to the fact that one of the most compelling and most constantly revised lesson of neo-liberal hegemony, is that, as Mrs Thatcher's rather pithily put it, "there is no alternative" to the present social system (Harvey, 2005). The apparent lack of alternatives serves to stifle dissent and narrows the social imagination and undermines non market forms of public participation (Giroux, 2004; O'Halloran, 2004). This reductive version of citizenship is a key part of 'learning to be neo-liberal' – a process in which society learns to accept inequality; conceptions of the public good are replaced by a narrowly defined notion of private interest; and any social dialogue on the question of possible alternatives is completely rejected. Viewed through a neo-liberal ideological lens, which sees any outcome of the market as just, proper and natural, poverty and social problems become the mark of personal failure rather than systemic failures.

In summary, many aspects of neo-liberal policy are of obvious and immediate concern for educators. For instance, research on the effect of marketisation policies on third level education suggests that these initiatives have already changed the orientation of research, the structures of colleges and universities and are perhaps even changing the way we understand education (Ginsburg, Espinoza, Popa & Terano, 2003; Lynch, 2006; Robertson, 2003). However, arguably such policies are only one, albeit the most obvious element, of a broader paradigm shift which is of enormous relevance to education even if all the immediate effects of this sea change are not yet clear. If one accepts the expansion of the market and the intensification of instrumental rationality has impacted on the

relationship between market, state and civil society, and this has been accompanied by an exhaustion of hope and a progressive narrowing of the emancipatory potential of the social imagination, then the ramifications of the neo-liberal revolution are almost incalculable. Changes in social and economic policy, combined with the increasing power of corporations, and the aggressive promotion of market values marks a new cultural moment in how we make meaning in society and sense out of own lives. In Giroux's terms we are enmeshed in a series of public pedagogies "in which the production, dissemination and circulation of ideas emerges from the educational force of the larger culture" (2004, p. 106). This requires a whole new map of how education happens within society in which formal education is only a single node within a network of learning spaces and in which neo-liberal public pedagogies operating across culture impose a form of lifelong learning based on the needs of the market.

The state we are in: rhetoric and policy in a 'market state'

It was noted at the beginning of this article that analyses of recent Irish history have largely underestimated or ignored the role of neo-liberal ideology in Irish society (Coulter, 2003; Kirby, 2002). The broader, vaguer and more politically neutral term globalisation is used far more often. Ireland, we are told, has finally caught up with modernity through globalisation and the benefits are clear -the end of mass unemployment and forced emigration, the rise of income and wealth and a new cultural confidence. However, as Smith (2005) has noted, this globalisation is often conceived as a poorly defined, but distinctly inevitable, process in a manner that risks conflating a variety of historical and economic processes and avoids exploring the deeper reasons for social change. While it would be foolish to ignore the fact that the boom has yielded considerable material benefits to a substantial number of Irish people explaining change through the simplistic equation of globalisation with modernisation fails entirely to offer adequate terms of reference for exploring contemporary Irish society. This model of 'globalisation without adjectives' offers no notion of growth and social development except in the most reductively economic sense and consequently tells us nothing about the impact on equality, changing social values or the state of Irish democracy.

This failure to theorise the local impact of global trends within a broad notion of human development may well be linked to the fact that the Irish state is not readily identified, nor seeks to be identified, as promoting the neo-liberal agenda (Murphy, 2006). Despite the fact that the state has enthusiastically promoted the

language and model of the market in the public sphere (O'Donovan & Casey, 1995) and has attempted to commodify services such as water and waste disposal (Allen, 2007) Irish politics continues to be dominated by a pragmatic populism in which the rhetoric of welfare and social justice is combined with free market thinking. This is manifested in the commitment to interventions such as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in which the putative aim is to mobilise “all sections of Irish society in building a fair society” (NAPS, 1998, p. i) within a much vaunted social partnership model (Sweeney, 1998). This consensual rhetoric is echoed at an EU level and the Irish political elite are at pains to portray the European project as also being informed by the values of social solidarity (Ahern, 2004; Mansergh, 2003). For instance the policies of ‘social inclusion’ and ‘active citizenship’, which seem directly at odds with a reddened tooth and claw conception of a neo-liberal society, have this exact provenance.

Despite the rhetoric the case for employing neo-liberalism as a paradigm for understanding change in contemporary Ireland, both in the narrow sense as economic policy and in the broad sense as a form of political hegemony, appears to be quite strong. First of all, Ireland has been transformed by over a decade of deregulation, privatisation and marketisation (OECD, 2001; Murphy, 2006; Sweeney, 2004) Moreover, these policy initiatives have been buttressed by the emergence of a public discourse that is strongly supportive of neo-liberal ideas (Allen, 2007). That is to say “discourse in the strong sense of that versatile term; a historically formed set of topics and procedures that both drives and regulates the utterance of the individuals who inhabit it, and assigns them definite positions in the field of meaning it delimits” (Mulhern, 2000, p. xiv). Some of the main features of this neo-liberal discourse include an insistent emphasis in public life and policy on ‘prudent’ social spending and a constant affirmation of the necessity to maintain competitiveness and flexibility within the global market (Allen, 2007; O’Riain, 2004). As a consequence of this, more often than not, the ‘business’ of public life is portrayed in the media and by politicians as providing the economic and regulatory conditions that favour capital and maximize profitability. This is rarely questioned and the extent to which it is now taken as a self evident starting point for social and economic policy has led to one of the most highly regarded commentators on the Irish political economy to speak of a destructive “competitiveness obsession” and “a blind faith in the market” within the body politic (O’Riain, 2004, pp. 20 & 24).

One of the most striking results of this neo-liberal legislative and discursive turn has been the promotion of economic policies, particularly in terms of the

taxation, that offer extremely favourable conditions to transnational corporations that establish manufacturing bases in the Irish republic (Allen, 2000; 2007). According to O’Hearn (1998) a large proportion of the intense level of foreign direct investment by transnational corporations in the 1990s was as a direct consequence of these policies. Leaving aside for a moment the rather pertinent question of who exactly benefited from this economic growth, what such policies and rhetoric demonstrate is that Ireland is open for business on the terms set by neo-liberalism. Some indication of the extent to which Ireland has accepted free market nostrums and has restructured its economic regulatory and legislative frameworks accordingly, can be found in the free market Index of Economic Freedom, compiled jointly by the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Heritage Foundation* (2006) which found Ireland’s was the world’s third ‘freest economy’ (see also Kearney, 2006).

So how have the initiatives that have emerged from the policy shift affected the way wealth, power and social goods are distributed in contemporary Ireland? It appears that after more than a decade of phenomenal economic growth Ireland is still riven with inequality (CORI, 2007). In fact many studies indicate that social inequalities have worsened during the boom times (Allen, 2000; Kirby, 2002; 2005). This is corroborated by data published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). According to the UNDP despite a massive increase in per capita GDP and a consistent movement upwards through the development rankings Ireland remains one of the most unequal of the developed countries and has the second lowest ranking in the Human Poverty Index which measures comparative poverty (UNDP, 2006). To put this state of affairs in perspective – this means that despite average annual GDP growth rates between 7-12 % over the past twelve years (Kirby, 2005) massive increases in real income and consumer spending (NESC, 2003; Smith, 2005) Ireland remains a deeply unequal society. What is more this income inequality data almost certainly underestimates the full extent of social polarisation due to the underreporting of income by the very wealthy and the difficulty of assessing the concentration of wealth in other forms such as assets, capital and shares (O’Reardon, 2001) .

Of course the emphasis on personal and private wealth creation and the consequent social polarisation has implications beyond the poorest doing badly and affects welfare provision across society. The UN report cited above also documents a lower level of social spending on health and education than most similarly developed countries and although there have been substantial increases

in expenditure in welfare it has not been extensive enough to address structural inequalities (Turner & Haynes, 2006). This argument is lent even further credibility by a recent European Union statistical survey that measured the level of social protection offered by the various European states (Eurostat, 2007). It was found that Ireland scored poorly in comparison to most of the long-standing members of the European Union. Furthermore, O'Hearn (1998) and Allen (2000) argue that a careful examination of how the vast wealth created during the 'Celtic Tiger' was divided up shows a diminution in the social wage, as measured through wages, pensions and social welfare and a concomitant increase in the levels of private profit.

Of course this is not solely about macroeconomic policy. There has also been a perceived shift in social values (CORI, 2007) but it remains difficult to assess exactly what this means and how fundamentally notions of competitive individualism have changed Irish life. Certainly there is a constant stress, in the media and advertising, on the personal use of wealth and consumption leavened with new age banalities about self-help all of which depict the individual as the only possible site of development and happiness. To what extent this has corroded the notion of public welfare is open to question but it would not be too far fetched to assume that such cultural forms within a broader public pedagogy of neo-liberalism is having an effect on the way we imagine our society and is encouraging individualistic and acquisitive tendencies within our society

Finally, there is the question of how much actual control we have over important economic and social processes. For instance, Gill (1998), Allen (2007), and Storey (2004) have all highlighted the democratic deficit that has developed in EU policy as important social decisions are reduced to questions of technocratic governance within a pre-determined neo-liberal policy framework. Storey (2004) asserts that a considerable portion of EU policy is now underpinned by neo-liberal theory- an opinion that is made credible by the fact that the EU has signed up to and has actively sought to enforce a series of treaties committed to the liberalisation of trade and services both outside and within the EU area. Indeed, attempts over the past decade to commodify water and waste services in Ireland came about as a direct consequence of these treaties. A further aspect of this, and one which remains under-researched, but is touched on by both Gill (1998) and Allen (2007), is how decision making processes in the EU are formally or informally influenced by groups through business consultancy and corporate lobbying by groups such as the European Round Table

of Industrialists who have helped shape the Lisbon strategy and other business orientated policies within the European Union (ERT, No date).

A similar nexus of political power and lobbying by private groups within a neo-liberal paradigm that prioritises the needs of the market has been observable in national politics as well. In fact, it scarcely has to be pointed out, after over a decade of tribunals, that there is an abundance of such activity in Irish life. One notable example is the Corrib gas controversy in which a conglomerate of multinational companies were sold national resources at very advantageous terms and are set to benefit from tax restructuring and royalty conditions that are, by international standards, practically without precedence (Connolly & Lynch, 2005). Just as egregiously, the state has continued to support the refuelling of US military and CIA planes in Ireland in contravention of both public opinion and the constitutionally guaranteed principle of neutrality, justifying this anti-democratic policy by claiming it will ensure continued US investment in Ireland (Allen, 2007).

Analysing these trends has led Kirby (2002; 2005) to conclude that Ireland is now a 'market state'. While Kirby acknowledges the complex and specific historical trajectory of Irish society he nevertheless argues that the state is now firmly wedded to a neo-liberal model of development. For Kirby (and Giroux, Bourdieu and Harvey) the central issue is whether the broad thrust of policy and statecraft intensifies instrumental rationality, copper fastens unequal social relations and guarantees that the locus of power remains outside popular democratic control. This theory helps to clarify the clear disjunction between policy rhetoric and the actual workings of power in Ireland. In a market state the priorities and needs of business and competition are so deeply embedded within state discourse and structure that, however egalitarian the rhetoric or even the motivation is behind a given initiative, the overall orientation towards the market puts powerful limits on what is possible to achieve (Kirby, 2002) and within which the concept of equality tends to get reduced to a notion of equality of access in a future 'perfected' market.

An examination of equality, democracy and, somewhat less conclusively, social values suggests the Irish state and Irish society have been reconfigured as part of a global neo-liberal revolution and that free market ideas are now the determining and dominant ideas in society. For historical reasons Irish and European neo-liberalism has employed a corporatist, consensual rhetoric that links the market to notions of meritocracy and modernisation. It could be argued that

“the winning formula to seal the victory of the market is not to attack, but to preserve, the placebo of a compassionate public authority, extolling the compatibility of competition and solidarity” (Anderson, 2000, p.11). While the contradictions between the welfare and market elements of policy offers some space for defending social gains against unbridled neo-liberalism the Irish state is on a neo-liberal trajectory and the full implications of this paradigm shift will only become clear in the future as the boom finishes and society has to cope with the effects of a downturn.

Neo-liberal hegemony and Irish adult education: civil society, the market state and lifelong learning

Marketisation policies have affected a number of major Irish universities and colleges in terms of the structure and content of third level education (Allen, 2007; Flynn, 2006, Lynch, 2006). Moreover there is now an identifiable discourse within higher education that fuses neo-liberal ideology and educational policy. This links a set of ideas, many of which are ostensibly commonsensical, about flexibility, excellence, competition and the faltering and inefficient state but are deployed in a way that suggests that education best functions according to market imperatives (Walsh, 2007). While the commodification of compulsory schooling is less advanced the process has certainly begun and several critics have described how corporations are increasing their influence through, amongst other measures, sponsorship deals and schemes that tie consumer spending with a particular business with ‘gifts’ to schools (Allen, 2007). An initiative of even greater potential significance in terms of the neo-liberalisation of Irish schools is the launching of a Department of Education pilot project in 1998 running schools as Public Private Partnerships (Allen, 2007).

So what might these broad trends mean for adult education? Much of Irish adult education caters for people who have been failed in various ways by the formal education system (Lynch, 1991) and the impetus behind much of the work in this field- whether in community development projects, literacy schemes, or women’s education initiatives- has stemmed from the desire to find educational practices that are commensurable with social needs that have been ignored or deemed unimportant (Connolly, 1996; Connolly & Ryan, 1999). So if the ‘sector’ has largely emerged from the failure of mainstream education and the desire to develop and articulate knowledges that are often marginal in relation to dominant values then it is clear that Irish adult education occupies exactly the sort of spaces within civil society that one would imagine is difficult to commodify.

However, in the neo-liberal conjuncture in which civil society is being aggressively colonised this does not provide any guarantee of independence from the market. Perhaps all the more so as Irish adult education has been formed within relatively weak discursive and institutional traditions (O'Sullivan, 2005) that arguably offer a relatively permeable space in which emergent tendencies can be disproportionately influential.

Besides this, it is obvious that adult education is in a slow, but major, process of change in which the state has begun to recognise the work done within the field and to legislate and strategise for adult educational provision. As part of this process the government published a White Paper (DES, 2000) on adult education and has established a junior ministerial post to oversee policy in the area. The state and the EU are now the major institutional influences on adult education in Ireland. These changes have brought numerous benefits such as increased funding, new accreditation systems, a growth in relevant research and a higher profile for the work. All this has advanced the, still incomplete, process of professionalisation of adult education. However, if elite decision making in Ireland is being determined within a neo-liberal paradigm and policy is implemented and overseen by a market state then there is a strong likelihood that work within the sector may be co-opted.

Arguably this has already had an impact on the orientation of policy. Contemporary education policy in Europe has been strongly influenced by conceptions of 'lifelong learning' (CEC, 2001) and it is one of the central ideas informing the key piece of legislation dealing with adult education in Ireland, the aforementioned White Paper (2000). It is, in certain respects, a potentially radical idea that acknowledges the value of learning outside of formal institutions (Connolly, 2007) and has emerged and re-emerged in educational thinking in a variety of forms since the 1970s (Borg & Mayo, 2005). However, currently many policy recommendations linked with lifelong learning have emerged within a specific matrix of priorities shaped by the market state and a neo-liberal EU (Borg & Mayo, 2005; Magaelhaes & Storr, 2003; Tett, 2002) in which "education [is viewed] as a key strategy towards the achievement of economic policies" (Alexiadou, 2005, p. 102) and in which lifelong learning is conceptualised largely in terms of maintaining a flexible and competitive economy in the modern 'knowledge society'.

It is perhaps telling that the European Council meeting in Lisbon in 2000 which confirmed the EU's commitment to the lifelong learning agenda emerged as part

of discussions on how to improve the economic competitiveness of European countries and included a commitment to the neo-liberal commodification of services. It is also worth noting that the exact same sentiments and priorities that animated the Lisbon strategy meeting—focusing on the unstoppable competitive force of globalisation and the importance of a ‘flexible’ workforce—are precisely the same concerns set out much earlier in the influential European Round Table of Industrialists report *Education for Europeans* (ERT, 1994). Certainly the ERT (No date) claims some of the credit for the current orientation of policy. This paradigm of a ceaseless and uncontrollable globalisation that requires an ever more flexible workforce is massively influential and also informs the views of Irish politicians and policy makers (Dempsey, 2004). A similar set of concerns are also discernible in the White Paper (DES, 2000) on adult education albeit in a more diluted form and are placed rather uncomfortably beside more radical and progressive notions of education.

If one accepts the thrust of this brief overview of lifelong learning policy formation then obviously educationalists need to be deeply sceptical of policy rhetoric and ensure that policies are interrogated at a very profound level in terms of the expectations, assumptions and paradigms that they employ. An example of this approach is offered by Tett (2002) who has examined the Scottish experience of lifelong learning policies that were rhetorically committed to ‘social inclusion’ and ‘active citizenship’ but has found that these initiatives are often underpinned by neo-liberal and individualistic ideas. Tett argues, as Giroux has done in broader terms, that within the neo-liberal paradigm cause and effect are separated out and systemic problems are interpreted as biographical choices. The message embodied within these policies was that if the individual applies himself or herself to education they can equip themselves with the tools to keep ahead of the whirlwind of change in a flexible global economy.

An interrogation of such policies is especially important if adult education is increasingly being left with the burden to balance, “increasingly liberalised market-driven economies with the requirements of a socially just society” (Alexiadou, 2005, p. 102). Meeting the demands for global competitiveness while playing a role in overcoming the structural problems of poverty and inequality as well as creating an active citizenry are now part of the remit of adult education (DES, 2000: see also speech of Minister DeValera in NALA, 2006). It is questionable whether these tasks are complementary and it is also worth bearing in mind when adult education is offered as a panacea for a wide range of

social ills that, according to several studies of schools and colleges, education has found to have a limited effect on class mobility and improving equality (Smyth & Hannan, 2000; Whelan & Layte, 2004). Nonetheless, one recent study (Hardiman, McCashin & Payne, 2006) has found that many Irish citizens feel that education would make a significant difference to their social success suggesting that education remains a powerful part of the myth of meritocracy in contemporary Ireland. Given how important the meritocratic ideal has been in forming consensus around market hegemony, the way social policy and adult education intersect to sustain and promote myths of modernisation and meritocracy deserves greater attention but in the absence of such research, for both theoretical and empirical reasons, market solutions to market problems sugared with a dose of liberal rhetoric, need to be subjected to sustained critical scrutiny. All the more so if such policies are instituted with a cultural field increasingly dominated by diverse forms of market orientated public pedagogies.

Conclusion

This article has offered a historical synopsis of neo-liberalism in order to trace how a set of political and educational themes might be usefully related to each other. It argues that in the rush and tumult of an economic boom signs have been taken for wonders and that Ireland has not been transformed by the 'magic of globalisation' but rather through the politics of neo-liberalism. This shift presents an enormous challenge to educationalists and students that are interested in broader forms of education and that materials, curricula and policy positions which do not explicitly acknowledge the force of the neo-liberal paradigm are, whatever the intentions behind them, likely to work according to the needs and logic of the market. Given this the possibility that adult education can argue for, and help foster, a strong civil society separate from the market in a neo-liberal era depends largely on maintaining a broad and non-instrumental conception of education orientated to social equality and justice (Fleming, 2004). In terms of current debates over Irish adult education this above all requires advocating and formulating a version of 'lifelong learning' that is orientated towards emancipation and renewing adult education's commitment to critical citizenship (Fleming, 1996; Keogh, 2004; Harris, 2005). The specific politics of a project that links social movements and adult education in the promotion of engaged citizenship is something that needs considerable elaboration (Keogh, 2004). Ultimately, the objective of such an approach is to develop a pedagogy that explores and engages in forms of popular education inspired by a vision of human potential that goes beyond the reductive and economic abstractions

of neo-liberal thought and capable of strengthening participatory democracy in Irish society against the deadly fatalism of free market ideology.

Fergal Finnegan works as a researcher in NUI Maynooth and as an adult educator in Dublin.

References

- Ahern, B. (2004, November 29). Neither neo-liberal nor socialist, but a balanced Constitution for Europe. *The Irish Times*.
- Alexiadou, N. (2005). Social exclusion and educational opportunity: The case of British education policies within a European context. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 3 (1), 101-125.
- Allen, K. (2000). *The Celtic tiger: The myth of social partnership*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Allen, K. (2007). *The corporate takeover of Ireland*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Anderson, P. (2000). Renewals. *New Left Review*. (1), 15-25.
- Apple, M.W. (2006). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*. New York: Routledge.
- Arrighi, G. (2005). Hegemony Unravelling 1. *New Left Review*, 32, 23-80.
- Kearney, A.T. (2006). The Foreign Policy Globalization Index 2006 Retrieved April, 25, 2007 from http://www.atkearney.com/shared_res/pdf/Globalization-Index_FP_Nov-Dec-06_S.pdf
- Barlow, M. (1999). *A GATS Primer*. The Council of Canadians: Canada. Retrieved April 4, 2006 from http://canadians.inline.net/display_document.htm?COC_token=024HO24&id=19&isdoc=1&catid=77RK
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Borg, C. & Mayo, P. (2005). The EU Memorandum on lifelong learning. Old wine in new bottles? *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 3(2), 203-225.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998a) (Trans. Nice, R.). *Acts of resistance: Against the new myths of our time*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bourdieu, P. (1998b December). *The essence of neo-liberalism*. Le Monde Diplomatique, Paris. Retrieved October 20, 2006 from <http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>
- Brenner, R. (1998). The economics of global turbulence: A special report on the world economy, 1950-98. *New Left Review – Special Issue*, 1(229), 1-264.

- Burbules, N.C. & Torres, A. (2000). *Globalization and education policy: Critical perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- CEC (2001). *Communication from the Commission. Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality*. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved May 2, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lll/life/communication/com_en.pdf
- Connolly, B. (1996). Community development and adult education; Prospects for change. In B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack & A. Ryan, (Eds.), *Radical learning for liberation*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Connolly, B. (2007). Beyond the third way: New challenges for critical adult and community education. In B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack, D. & A. Ryan, (Eds.), *Radical learning for liberation 2*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Connolly, B. & Ryan, A.B. (1999). *Women and Education in Ireland*, Vol 2. Maynooth: MACE.
- Connolly, F. & Lynch, R. (2005). The great Corrib gas controversy. Dublin: Centre for Public Inquiry.
- CORI Justice (2007). Socio-economic review 2007: Addressing inequality: *Policies to ensure economic development, social equity and sustainability*. Dublin: CORI Justice.
- Coulter, C. (2003). The end of Irish history? An introduction to the book. In C. Coulter & S. Coleman, (Eds.), *The end of Irish history? Critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger*. (pp.1-34) Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Dempsey, N. (2004). *Address by Noel Dempsey, T.D., Minister for Education & Science at the Meeting of Directors General for Higher Education and Heads of Rectors' Conference in Dublin Castle*. Retrieved February 2, 2007 from http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/document_file.asp?id=8421
- Department of Education and Science. (2000). *Learning for life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- ERT (1994). *Education for Europeans: Towards a learning society*. Brussels: ERT.
- ERT (No date). Overview of ERT Working Group on Education 1987-1999. Retrieved March 3, 2007 from http://www.ert.be/working_group.aspx?wg=15
- Eurostat (2006). *Europe in figures: The Eurostat Yearbook 2006-2007*. Luxembourg: European Communities. Retrieved May 1, 2007 from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-CD-06-001/EN/KS-CD-06-001-EN.PDF
- Fleming, T. (1996). The future of adult education: Learning towards a new democracy. In B. Connolly, T. Fleming, D. McCormack & A. Ryan, (Eds.), *Radical Learning for Liberation*. Maynooth: MACE.
- Fleming, T. (1998). Learning for a global civil society. *The Adult Learner* 1998. Dublin: Aontas.
- Fleming, T. (2004). The state of adult education. *The Adult Learner* 2004. Dublin: Aontas.
- Flynn, S. (2006, February 23). University system seen as another market commodity. *The Irish Times*.

- Gill, S. (1998). European governance and new constitutionalism: Economic and Monetary Union and alternatives to disciplinary neo-liberalism in Europe. *New Political Economy*, 3(1), 5 -25.
- Ginsburg, M., Espinoza, O., Popa, S. & Terano, M. (2003). Privatisation, domestic marketisation and international commercialisation of higher education: vulnerabilities for Chile and Romania within the framework of WTO/GATS. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1 (3), 259-266.
- Giroux, H.A. (2001). *Stealing Innocence: Corporate culture's war on children*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giroux, H.A. (2003). *Public spaces, private lives: Democracy beyond 9/11*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Giroux, H.A. (2004). *The terror of neo-liberalism*. Boulder, CO:Paradigm Publishers.
- Giroux, H.A. (2005a). *Against the new authoritarianism: Politics after Abu Ghraib*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring Press.
- Hardiman, N., McCashin, T. & Payne, D. (2006). *Irish social and political attitudes*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Hardt, M. & Negri, A. (2004). *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. New York: Penguin.
- Harris, C. (2005). *Democratic citizenship education in Ireland*. In *The Adult Learner*. (pp. 47-53) Dublin: Aontas.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of post-modernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (2000). *Spaces of hope*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neo-liberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2006). *Spaces of global capitalism: Towards a theory of uneven geographical development*. London: Verso.
- Keogh, H. (2003). Learning for citizenship in Ireland: The role of adult education. In C. Medel-Añonuevo, & G. Mitchell, (Eds.), *Citizenship, democracy and lifelong learning*. Hamburg: UNESCO.
- Kirby, P. (2002). *The Celtic tiger in distress: Growth with inequality in Ireland*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kirby, P. (2005). The Irish State and the Celtic Tiger: A 'flexible developmental state' or a competition state. In G. Harrison (Ed.), *Global encounters: International political economy, development and globalization*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Layte, R. & Whelan, C.T. (2004). *Education and meritocracy: Comparative Analyses of Intergenerational "Inheritance"*. Dublin: ESRI. Retrieved March 3, 2006 [http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20070213101144/JACB2004 Whelan Education.doc](http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20070213101144/JACB2004%20Whelan%20Education.doc)

- Lynch, K. (2006). Neo-liberalism and marketisation. *European Educational Research Journal*, 5(10), 1-27.
- MacSharry, R & White, P. (2000). *The making of the Celtic tiger: The inside story of Ireland's boom economy*. Cork: Mercier Press.
- McLaren, P. (2005). *Capitalists and conquerors*. New York: Longman.
- Magalhaes, A. M. & Stoer, S. (2003). Performance, citizenship, and the knowledge society: A new mandate for European education policy. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1(1), 41-66.
- Mansergh, M. (2003, December 13). For First Time in Generations, Europe is largely at peace. *The Irish Times*.
- Mulhern, F. (2000). *Culture/Metaculture*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Murphy, G. (2006). Assessing the Relationship between Neo-liberalism and Political Corruption: The Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrat Coalition, 1997-2006. *Irish Political Studies*, 21(3), 297-317.
- NALA (2006). *Political participation and literacy*. Text of a presentation and discussion held at NCI on September 2006, pp 1-38. Retrieved March 15, 2007 from http://www.nala.ie/download/pdf/political_participation_and_literacy06.pdf
- NAPS (1998). *National Anti-Poverty Strategy*. Stationery Office: Dublin.
- NESC (2003). *An investment in quality, services, inclusion and enterprise*. Dublin: NESC.
- Nolan, B., O'Connell, P.J. & Whelan, C.T. (Eds.), (2000). *Bust to boom? The Irish experience of growth and inequality*. Dublin: ESRI; IPA.
- Notes from Nowhere. (2003). *We are everywhere: The irresistible rise of global anticapitalism*. London: Verso.
- O'Cleary, J. (2007). *Outrageous fortune: Capital and culture in modern Ireland*. Dublin: Field Day Publications.
- O'Donovan, O. & Casey, D. (1995). Converting Patients into Consumers: Consumerism and the Charter of Rights for Hospital Patients. *The Irish Journal of Sociology*, 5, 43-66.
- O'Halloran, A. (2004). The privatisation of citizenship: Exploring frameworks for membership of the Irish polity. *Administration*, 52(1), 19-34.
- O'Hearn, D. (1998). *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish economy and the Asian model*. London: Pluto Press.
- O'Reardon, C. (2001). Inequality in the new Irish economy. In S. Cantillon, C. Corrigan, P. Kirby, J. O'Flynn, (Eds.), *Rich and poor: Perspectives on tackling inequality* Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- O'Riain, S. (2000). The Flexible Developmental State: Globalization, Information Technology and the "Celtic Tiger". *Politics and Society*, 28(2) 157-193.
- O'Riain, S. (2004). Falling over the competitive edge. In M. Peillon, & M.P. Corcoran, (Eds.), *Place and non-place: The reconfiguration of Ireland*. Dublin: IPA.

- O'Sullivan, D. (2005). *Cultural politics and Irish education since the 1950s: Policy paradigms and power*. Dublin: IPA.
- O'Toole, F. (2003). *After the ball*. Dublin: New Island.
- OECD (2001). *Regulatory reform in Ireland: government capacity to assure high quality regulation*. Paris: OECD. Retrieved May 11, 2007 from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/30/38/2510916.pdf>
- Robertson, S.L. (2003). WTO/GATS and the global education services industry. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1 (3), 259-266.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. New York: W.W.Norton
- Sennett, R (2006). *The culture of the new capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Smith, J. (2005). *Showcasing globalisation: The political economy of the Irish Republic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Smyth, E. & Hannan, D.F. (2000). Education and inequality. In B.Nolan, P.J. O'Connell, & C.T. Whelan, (Eds.), *Bust to boom? The Irish experience of growth and inequality*. Dublin: ESRI; IPA.
- Storey, A. (2004). *The European Project: Dismantling Social Democracy, Globalising Neo-liberalism*. Paper for presentation at the conference 'Is Ireland a Democracy?', Sociology Department, National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2nd/3rd April 2004. Retrieved March 23, 2007 from <http://www.feasta.org/documents/democracy/storey.htm>
- Sweeney, P. (1999). *The Celtic tiger: Ireland's continuing economic miracle* Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- Sweeney, P. (2004). *Selling out?: Privatisation in Ireland*. Dublin: New Island.
- Tett, L. (2002). *Community education, lifelong learning and social inclusion*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.
- Turner, T. & Haynes, A. (2006). Welfare provision in boom times: Strengthening social equity in Ireland? *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 15(2), 86-100.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2006). *Human development report*. New York: UNDP.
- Wall Street Journal and the Heritage Foundation* (2007). The Economic Freedom Index. Retrieved on May 4, 2007 from <http://www.heritage.org/research/features/index/countries.cfm>
- Wallerstein, I. (2003). *The decline of American power*. New York: New Press.
- Walsh, E. (2007, January 16). Shall we pay the presidents? *The Irish Times*.
- WTO Secretariat (2003). *GATS — Fact and fiction*. Retrieved March 1 2006 from http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/gats_factfiction_e.htm

SECTION TWO

PRACTICE ARTICLES

Exploring Equality through Creative Methods of Learning in Adult Literacy: Findings from a Peace Funded Project

ROB MARK

Introduction

The Literacy and Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) Project is an example of a project which used alternative non-text methodologies to help literacy and basic education learners explore and understand how inequalities in society have impacted on their lives.

The project focused on inequalities, shifting the emphasis in literacy and basic skills practice away from using printed material to encouraging learners and tutors to explore together the experience of using non-text based methods of learning. The particular focus for inspiring this new type of learning was the post-conflict situation in the North of Ireland and the need to understand how including equality issues in literacy learning might contribute to peace building and reconciliation. The project had three key strands – Literacy, Equality, and Creativity and the partnership brought together different types of expertise to research, design and develop a package of innovative text-free teaching methods that could be used to explore equality issues in adult literacy education.

The LEIS Project was a European Union project funded largely under the Peace and Reconciliation Programme for Northern Ireland and Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland. The key partners were the Equality Studies Centre, University College, Dublin (UCD) and the School of Education at Queen's University, Belfast (QUB). The project was also supported by other non-funded partners including the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in Dublin and the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) in Belfast.

The project explored five different text-free methods and these methods were piloted with adult literacy tutors and tutor-trainers in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Republic. The Project developed a Resource Guide for Adult Learners and this Guide, together with the full text of the project evaluation report can be found on the web page www.leis.ac.uk

What ideas influenced LEIS?

The project held as one of its core principles the belief that adult literacy and basic education is an equality issue, and that low levels of literacy is a manifestation or symptom of inequality. This project set out to develop clearer links between the theoretical concept of equality and the practical approaches to teaching literacy. The linkages were created through the development of creative and non-text methodologies which literacy tutors could use in their practice. The methods selected were – Visual Arts, Drama, Storytelling, Image Theatre, and Making Music (Lamb, Mark, Murphy and Sorake, 2006).

A set of innovative methodologies were developed that could create spaces for the exploration of equality issues for tutors to use within adult literacy education. These methodologies were intended to empower both tutors and learners to engage with key equality issues of relevance to the lives of literacy learners. In view of the cross-border, peace and reconciliation focus of the project, it was intended that inequalities stemming from the experience of conflict within Northern Ireland and the border counties, would be included in this engagement.

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 definition that suits everybody. As society evolves, the multiple literacies required in order to make sense of our environment are constantly growing and changing. Some literacy definitions focus on a standard set of measurable generic skills while others tend to be more rooted in the context of people's lives. Definitions are also reflected in the services provided, with a very different kind of adult literacy education coming from a definition that focuses exclusively on technical skills, to the kind of education following on from a more holistic definition of literacy.

Clearly, there is a range of different approaches in relation to how literacy can be understood and defined. The LEIS project found that there were many different interpretations of literacy amongst individuals, between communities and in

policies and practices that they examined on both sides of the border. The project held that while it was not necessary to have one agreed understanding of literacy, it was important for literacy tutors to have made their own exploration of the various approaches to understanding literacy, and to reflect on these in order to link theories of literacy and equality with creative methods of learning.

Understanding equality

As in the case of literacy, equality is a complex concept to define and it is challenging to understand how inequality works in practice. Yet for literacy tutors, it is especially important to have an understanding of how inequality in the structures of our society can impact on an individual's life chances. Literacy tutors work with some of the most marginalised groups in society. Unless tutors have some understanding of how society operates to discriminate against and marginalise some individuals, while privileging others, they will not be in a position to facilitate their students in exploring the equality issues in their own lives, a central tenet of this project.

The project used a theoretical framework developed by the Equality Studies Centre at UCD to facilitate a better understanding of inequality (Baker, Lynch and Cantillon, 2004). This theoretical model is underpinned by the belief that there are clear patterns that structure the level of inequality experienced by individuals and groups. This framework identifies five interrelated dimensions of equality and tutors identified changes in all these areas.

- **Respect and recognition** – tutors reported that they had learned to recognise the differences that were important for each student as well as the commonalities of experience that brought people together.
- **Love, care and solidarity** – tutors recognised the important emotional dimension of their work and found that the methodologies enabled them to explore painful issues in creative ways.
- **Resources** – tutors recognised the resource issues that impacted on students such as limited availability of classes at the times and locations that students wanted, and the problems caused by inappropriate accreditation systems but were generally not in positions that enabled them to make changes that would lead to more equality.
- **Power relations** – tutors reported that they had developed a greater understanding of how they could recognise the strengths and expertise of themselves and the students through dialogue. They found that the meth-

odologies had changed the balance of power between tutor and student and student and student because there was less emphasis on the skills of reading and writing and more on the ability to express your views in other ways.

Creative non- text methods, equality and peace building

The methodologies in the project were developed using the framework outlined above. In keeping with the empowerment and inclusive focus of the framework, the approach used involved an inclusive, participatory approach in which tutors and learners were invited to engage as equal partners with the project development team at all stages in the project.

The project saw adult literacy tutors as having a valuable role to play in supporting the process of peace and reconciliation. The project enabled tutors to freely enter into joint programmes to discuss cross-community and inter-community issues in safe spaces through the use of creative methodologies in courses and workshops. The tutor group was itself cross-community (religious, political, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, etc.) and this was an important aspect of the improvement of relationships as people were able to share their diverse backgrounds and opinions.

The project directly promoted peace and reconciliation through the research, development and design of the resource guide and CD as this enabled tutors to develop more equal practice and also enabled students to participate in the debate about what equality means and how it can be enacted. Learners were given space to question previously held assumptions in the area of politics, economics, religion, and culture, consequently empowering them to challenge and question the deep structural inequalities existing in society. The process of peace-building was also enhanced at the individual level through facilitating literacy learners and tutors to explore the inequalities that impact on their lives and the possibilities that exist for change.

Using creative methods in understanding conflict

In the initial phase, staff worked with learners and tutors to explore issues of equality that related to the experience of conflict and identity, and how these experiences can inform the practice of adult literacy education.

The approach to literacy that LEIS took was about changing the arrangements of learning as well as people's perceptions of it because it challenged individu-

ally-based, deficit views of learners and instead focused on people's ability to do what they wanted in their lives. In the words of one tutor 'it opened my eyes and mind to what is possible through using other methods'. In addition, the work of the project was based on the premise that literacy is far more than a set of basic skills, but rather, is a set of social practices. Literacy practices integrate the routines, skills, and understanding that are organised within specific contexts and also the feelings and values that people have about these activities. The use of innovative, non-text based methods was designed to take account of the emotional context for learning for many literacy students who have often experienced failure at school and may have low self-esteem.

Evidence from pilot courses showed that the use of creative non-text methods with both teachers and students had both educational and social benefits. Tutors reported that their understanding of literacy and how it might be acquired had been challenged as a result of their involvement. In addition, they demonstrated that the use of such methods can provide a more inclusive way of learning which is not based on text – based privileged forms of knowing, being and doing.

Tutors used the methodologies in different ways. One tutor working in a rural further education college had used collage as a way of encouraging her students to use pictures to represent their views about their education at school. She felt that this methodology enabled students to think quite deeply about the issues that had affected them without being inhibited by the need to write down their thoughts. Another example is of a tutor in a community development project who used storytelling as a way of having people in this disadvantaged community describe the history of their place through their own family histories. These stories showed the positive networks and understanding of the area and contributed to a reclaiming of the history of the place.

Another tutor, who teaches job skills to a group of young men, as part of an access to employment course, took along a sculpture she had made to discuss it with this group. She found that it was a good stimulus to discussion as she was sharing her feelings and thoughts with the group in a very open way. Having a concrete object made it easier to bring up more complex issues to do with equality that were generally hard to do in other types of discussion. It was a good stimulus to get the group thinking, rather than asking the group to write their thoughts down, which wouldn't have worked at all and would have limited their thinking to what they knew how to write.

The methods also enabled tutors to develop new skills and created greater levels of co-operation and understanding between literacy tutors in both parts of Ireland.

One tutor noted:

‘I found working with tutors from the south made me look at my own practices more openly because what I had taken for granted about accrediting learners was different for them. It was a bit uncomfortable to have the things I see as common sense challenged but it did improve my practices.’

Some of the tutors also expressed their criticism of the use of creative methodologies. Some felt the activities might require a high level of preparation or be perceived as ‘childish’ by learners, while others questioned the value of activities having so much fun. For some tutors and learners, education may be perceived as a serious activity where it is not always easy to equate learning as synonymous with a high level of enjoyment. While tutors were very enthusiastic about the use of creative methods for exploring equality issues, they also indicated that ongoing advice and support might be needed to enable tutors to introduce creative methodologies into their practices. They indicated that such advice and support would help build tutors’ confidence in their abilities to use the methodologies. They also spoke of the need for a clear rationale to validate the learning in the eyes of managers and funding bodies. These comments showed that while tutors were enthusiastic about the new methodologies, they were also aware of the limitations many of which were practical, but which could nevertheless be important in determining success.

Conclusion

By focusing on equality and creativity, the LEIS project has shown how these concepts can be used to develop new skills and understanding for adult literacy and basic education learners using non-text methodologies. This, in turn, can empower learners to examine and understand inequalities affecting their own lives and the lives of others, and the underlying causes of these inequalities. It might, for example, include the social, economic, cultural or environmental domains.

However, an understanding of such issues will not on its own provide a panacea for overcoming inequalities. Such changes often require commitment from others including those responsible for the allocation of resources and those with

political influence to bring about change. This lies largely outside the control of the individual. However, at the very least, an understanding of equality might be said to provide learners with new skills and knowledge which can bring about real changes in their lives.

Rob Mark is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast and is currently Co-ordinator of Lifelong Learning.

References

- Baker, J., Lynch, K., & Cantillon, S. (2004). *Equality from Theory to Action*. Dublin: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lamb, T., Mark, R., Murphy, P. & Soroke, B. (Eds.), (2006). *Literacy, Equality & Creativity. Resource Guide for Adult Educators*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.
- www.leis.ac.uk

Supporting Adult Learners from Outside Institutional Walls: The Experience so far of the Downtown Centre

RHONA SHERRY AND PATRICIA-ANNE MOORE

Introduction

This article describes the experience of the Downtown Centre in establishing an accessible and recognisable centre in Limerick city, which represents regional higher education partners, and which provides services and programmes to support adult learners in progressing to higher education. The article reflects on the achievements of the Centre during its first year of operation and on the challenges and opportunities which have been highlighted for the future. It raises questions about how a diverse and dispersed adult learner population can, and should, best be supported and how far higher education should go in reaching out to this growing cohort of learners.

The Downtown Centre opened its doors to the adult learner population of Limerick and surrounding regions in September 2007. It is less than one year old. However, it has already reached out to over 160 learners, or future learners, during its first eight months of operation. The Centre functions as an access, guidance, and support centre for adults who are seeking to progress to higher education, particularly those who have not had an opportunity to do so in the past. It is a partnership initiative of four higher education institutions in the mid-west region: the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology Tralee, and is funded under the Higher Education Authority's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). The SIF was established to support innovation in higher education institutions and one of its key objectives is to, "support access, retention and progression both at individual institutional level and through inter-institutional, sectoral and inter-sectoral collaboration" (HEA, 2006, Section 3.1).

While it has received funding for three years, the Centre's staff consider it a vital part of their work to review, evaluate and reflect upon the progress of the Centre, from a very early stage of its development. Writing this article presents us with the ideal opportunity to do just that – to sit back and reflect in a critical manner on the successes and challenges we have faced to date and on how, for the future, we can best support both the adult learner population of the mid-West region and our institutional colleagues in increasing access to higher education.

Background to the Downtown Centre

One of the reasons for the establishment of the Downtown Centre in the heart of Limerick City was to bring higher education closer to a wider diversity of people within the region, by providing a more accessible conduit to higher education and by creating a more 'visible' presence amongst the local population for higher education in general.

The remit of the Downtown Centre is to provide a range of services which will encourage and support adult learners in accessing higher education programmes. One of its core services is an educational guidance service for adults (aged over 18) which offers clients an opportunity to identify and discuss their higher education aspirations and to choose appropriate pathways to achieve their goals. The Downtown Centre also offers a full-time access programme, which is fully accredited within the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland Framework, and which offers transparent progression options to partner institutions. It is anticipated that by offering such services the Downtown Centre will contribute to the development of a focused, integrated and regional response mechanism to access third level education and also to increase awareness of access and learning opportunities amongst adult learners. The strategic plans of each of the Downtown Centre's partner institutions endorse the need to increase enrolments of students who have traditionally been under-represented in higher education. The Downtown Centre's mission seeks to assist each of its partners in achieving these goals as indicated by its mission statement:

The Downtown Centre will work to improve access to higher education in the mid-west region by providing services and programmes which will create new pathways into undergraduate programmes for mature and other non-traditional learners. Its focus is on empowering individuals to make informed choices with respect to higher education. It aims to be a visible, dynamic and welcoming presence for potential learners in the heart of Limerick City.

The general focus of many access initiatives is to bring learners ‘up to speed’ with the skills and knowledge required to perform effectively on a higher education programme and also to develop the confidence to progress into what are often very traditional academic environments. Whilst some changes have begun to be made in higher education to accommodate the diverse learning styles, needs and experiences of an adult learner population, more are outstanding. To illustrate, there is a hugely important role for access initiatives to play in continuing to raise awareness of this increasing diversity in the student body, and to advocate the need for higher education to adapt its methodologies, structures, and supports in order to embrace a valuable and burgeoning adult learner population.

Context for the development of the Downtown Centre

The development of the Downtown Centre adheres to both national and EU policy objectives. The Bologna Process aims to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 and emphasises the importance of developing life-long learning strategies as part of this process, while the EU has highlighted the need to “guarantee universal and continuing access to learning...for sustained participation in the knowledge society” (European Commission, 2000, p4). At national level the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (National Access Office) is working to achieve equity of access in the higher education system by developing a national framework of policies and initiatives, creating new routes of access and progression to higher education and has set out key targets in relation to access to higher education for non-traditional learners (National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2007). The Downtown Centre’s aim is to work in collaboration with relevant departments in each of its partner institutions to assist the institutions to meet their targets in relation to increasing numbers of under-represented learner groups, and by providing services and programmes which will support and encourage such learners to progress to higher education.

‘Guidance’ covers the spectrum of educational, vocational, personal and social support and lifelong guidance is a priority area for development at European level. The OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies (2002) highlighted the integral role which guidance plays in national education and labour portfolios, while the EU Commission’s Report on Lifelong Guidance (2005, p.41) endorses the right of individuals:

of any age and at any point in their lives to avail (lifelong) of guidance to identify their capacities, competencies and interests, to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life path in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competence are learned and/or used (life wide).

At national level, the National Guidance Forum (2007, p.33) highlighted the need recently to:

address the present gap in access to services by employed adults, and more particularly by adults not in the labour force... There was widespread agreement that the focus of guidance for adults needs to be widened, to include adults who are employed as well as unemployed, adults with financial difficulties and those who are earning a good income, students who are engaged in higher education and adults who have retired.

There appears to be a need, therefore, for more access to professional guidance services for adults, particularly in relation to learning opportunities. The Downtown Centre's Guidance Service is a specialised service in that its focus is specifically in relation to educational guidance for entry to higher education programmes and it offers referral to other guidance services as appropriate.

The Downtown Centre in practice

The Downtown Centre is managed and run by three full-time staff members – a project manager, an educational guidance co-ordinator and an administrator. For the time being, the Centre is located on the second floor of the Limerick Diocesan Pastoral Centre, within the courtyard of St Michael's Church, in close proximity to the main shopping thoroughfare in Limerick city. It is not necessarily highly visible, with certain restrictions being placed on signposting to the Centre and neither is it a purpose built 'mini-campus' with all the supports and facilities one might associate with a higher education institution. However, the vision for the future, when it has become more established on the education landscape of the city, is to locate the Centre more centrally and visibly within the city, with space and support for a greater range of facilities for clients and students. A very positive aspect of its current location is that it has use of fully accessible classrooms within the Pastoral Centre for all classes and workshops which it offers.

The desire to be in a purpose-built location, however, is not the primary focus of the Downtown Centre during its early years of operation. What is more important is to reach out to potential learners and to let them know that there is an accessible and welcoming centre available in the city which represents local higher education institutions and which will do its utmost to support learners in accessing higher education. This it hopes to achieve through the provision of a professional guidance service and by running programmes and workshops aimed at increasing participants' awareness of educational opportunities and developing confidence in pursuing their individual learning paths. The Downtown Centre staff have been liaising closely with a wide range of community groups and other education providers in the city, and further afield. It has received tremendous support for its work so far. Colleagues in its partner institutions, both from academic and administrative departments, have also been hugely supportive of the initiative. The first year of the Downtown Centre has focused on offering three core services: a Certificate in General Studies; an Educational Guidance Service; and a series of Return to Learning workshops. Each of these three core services will be described briefly below.

Certificate in General Studies

The Downtown Centre's Certificate in General Studies, accredited by FETAC at Level 5, is a full-time access programme and is jointly delivered by the partner institutions. Its primary focus is to prepare students for entry to the first year of an undergraduate programme and offers guaranteed places on a range of programmes in its partner institutions. These progression opportunities are determined by the specialist elective chosen by the student, as the programme offers humanities, science and mathematics as electives, as well as delivering core modules in the areas of community studies, information technology and communications. It also offers a work placement module which facilitates students to gain a small amount of work experience in a company operating within the area in which they hope to pursue their future studies. Previous research has shown that access programmes can play a very important role in building student confidence prior to entry to higher education (Coveney-O'Beirne, 2006; Walker, Mathew and Black, 2004).

While access programmes are already offered by partner institutions to specific cohorts, for example mature students or school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the Certificate in General Studies has opened entry to higher education to a wider range of potential learners by requiring

only that participants be over the age of 18 and have the motivation and capability of undertaking a Level 5 programme. Its priority target clients are those aged between 18 and 22 who, for one reason or another, have not had the opportunity, or do not have the necessary qualifications, to seek a place on a higher education programme, and who would otherwise have to wait until they reach the age of 23 to be eligible to apply as a mature student. Mature students are also a key target group of the programme as it offers an alternative to existing access programmes for mature students, both in terms of its structure, delivery times and its elective choices. All of the current cohort of students on the course have applied for a place on an undergraduate programme for September 2008 and it is anticipated that the majority will be successful in progressing.

As mentioned previously, part of the rationale for establishing the Downtown Centre was to bring higher education closer to people within the region. Amongst the barriers to accessing higher education, particularly for adult learners, is often a feeling of 'lack of entitlement' due to previously negative experiences of education (Bamber & Tett, 2000). By basing the Certificate in General Studies in the Downtown Centre, it gives students an opportunity to commence their preparation for higher education in a smaller and more supportive environment, whilst still being taught by higher education lecturers. The elective modules, however, are actually delivered on campus in the partner institutions, with the result that students also gain first-hand experience of life on different campuses. This delivery in different locations has proven generally to be a positive experience for the participants as revealed in a preliminary evaluation of the Certificate (McMahon & Whisker, 2008). The evaluation also revealed a generally high level of satisfaction with the student support offered by the Downtown Centre, both from academic and administrative staff.

Educational Guidance Service

The Educational Guidance Service in the Downtown Centre is aimed at adults, aged over 18, who want to enter, re-enter or continue with education at third-level. The main activities undertaken by the Educational Guidance Coordinator during the first eight months of operation have been:

- Giving information, advice and guidance about pathways into higher education to clients, either through appointments or drop in; and recording some details about these client meetings;
- Following up with information by email or snail mail;

- Occasionally advocating a pathway into partner institutions;
- Visiting external community based organisations to make contact and increase visibility;
- Giving talks to groups in a community setting who may have particular challenges in accessing higher education, for example groups of people with disability, young mothers in community settings and women's groups, in order to make them aware of the service;
- Liaising with other agencies in the region which provide adult guidance services such as the Local Employment Service, the Adult Educational Guidance Service in Limerick, Co. Limerick and Clare, in order to develop an appropriate referral system;
- Contributing to the development of a map of differentiated guidance provision for end users in Limerick City with other members of the Limerick Adult Guidance Partnership.

Very soon after its establishment, the Downtown Centre Guidance Service was invited to join the Limerick Adult Guidance Partnership, a voluntary partnership of local organisations which provide adult guidance services to specific client cohorts in the region. A sub-group of this partnership is currently working on a road-map of guidance provision for the city in order to differentiate each service for potential clients. This has proven a useful way for the Downtown Centre Guidance Service to examine its priority target groups and seek to add value to the existing guidance provision in the city.

An early evaluation of the Downtown Centre Guidance Service was undertaken in April/May 2008 and its preliminary results are very encouraging. A response rate of 29 per cent (16 responses), from 10 women and 6 men, showed that amongst their priority reasons for attending the guidance service were: to get assistance on clarifying their learning aims; to identify their main interests; to obtain guidance on learning options; and to obtain information on access courses and application procedures to higher education. Respondents expressed confidence in the confidentiality, impartiality and relevance of the service and felt that the service was structured to meet their needs. All respondents indicated a willingness to use the service again if the need arose and all would recommend the service to another person. The majority of respondents recorded a high level of satisfaction with their experience of guidance in the Downtown Centre.

Return to Learning Workshops

The Downtown Centre believes that it has a role to play in the provision of non-formal supports to future learners. As a result, 11 evening workshops were planned as an introduction for learners to the kinds of skills which are deemed necessary for third-level participation. The workshops are aimed at anyone aged over 18 who is starting in higher education this year, or at people who may be thinking of applying in the future. Offered free of charge, the workshops are designed to be interactive and fun and to raise participants' awareness of, and confidence in, their own skills. The workshops were advertised through partner institutions, press advertising and by email to community contacts. To date, they have attracted considerable interest, with attendance growing steadily each week. The workshops demonstrate that there is an appetite for what might be described as the development of skills for learning in higher education.

Where are we Now? reflection on the Downtown Centre's services

Certificate in General Studies

The Downtown Centre faces a number of challenges in its development. Beyond the issue of resources, is the crucial issue of providing services which are flexible enough to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners. The Certificate in General Studies is a conventionally structured full-time programme which attempts to give learners a wider experience of third-level by offering delivery across a range of campuses. The recent evaluation of the Certificate has shown that the learners are very satisfied with elements of the programme such as course instruction and student support, noting in particular that they feel most at ease in the Downtown Centre. The provision of both personal and academic support to students in their transition to higher education is a crucial one, particularly for those learners who may not have engaged with the formal education system for some time.

The learners, however, would prefer more tailored learning pathways through the programme, in order to be able to focus primarily on the discipline of their choice, and also a more flexible delivery timetable. The challenge for educational providers is therefore to design programmes which deliver the necessary learning supports to develop learners' skills in preparation for higher education, whilst at the same time developing and maintaining their interest in the core discipline areas. Resources, accreditation, quality assurance and credit system procedures all impact upon the feasibility of designing flexible programmes. This becomes more difficult, but not impossible, when a programme is jointly

designed and delivered by a number of different institutions. In fact, it sets the challenge for providers to be flexible and innovative in their thinking, not only with regard to timing of delivery but also with regard to content and to how, and in what format, support is provided to learners.

The policy of widening access to higher education is unquestionably necessary in this day and age. However, while having less strict entry criteria than other access programmes is a very positive feature of the Certificate in General Studies, this also brings with it some 'moral' challenges. Not least of these is the strategy of positively discriminating in favour of candidates, particularly those aged between 18 and 22 years, who have not been in a position, due to life or other circumstances, to apply to higher education to date, whilst potentially denying opportunities to those who simply have been unlucky through conventional application procedures first time around. Whilst this dilemma did not arise for the initial delivery of the programme due to adequate places being available for all candidates, with a visibly growing awareness of the programme it is a dilemma which will potentially need to be addressed in an objective manner in the future.

Return to Learning Workshops

The 'Return to Learning' workshops delivered by the Downtown Centre have proven very popular and show a huge demand amongst both potential and current learners for support activities on their learning pathways. The 'drop-in' nature of the workshops has allowed learners to attend workshops on the topics in which they are most interested without the obligation of having to sign up to the full series. The experience to date has been that approximately a 50 per cent attendance rate has been achieved compared to the original sign-up for each workshop. Nonetheless, the evaluations of the workshops delivered to date have been overwhelmingly positive with a demand expressed for more in-depth insights into topics and for a greater range of topics.

The challenge for the Downtown Centre in the future, when resources become more limited, will be the need to ensure attendance of a 'critical mass' of learners in order to justify the continued provision of such workshops. However, the necessity to demonstrate 'return on investment' becomes very difficult in the delivery of non-accredited and once-off support activities for members of the public. Such activities may well play a significant role in encouraging learners to progress to higher education, but how do we prove their value and the tan-

gible impact which they have on student numbers at the end of the day? While such a question may not be the guiding principle for an initiative such as the Downtown Centre, in the practical world of limited resources, it is one for consideration. From the experience and feedback we have gained so far in working on this initiative, our own view is that provision of such informal support activities is vital to the successful transition and retention of students in the long-term and should continue to be supported.

Educational Guidance Service

The focus on third-level learning opportunities is the unique selling proposition of the Downtown Centre Guidance Service. In practice this means that the service is mapping out new territory. It is not operating within the partner institutions, so the emphasis is not on career outcome or on the links between academic achievement and career goals, although this may be part of the guidance conversation. Neither is it bounded by socio-economic constraints although, in common with other providers, clients who may be experiencing socio-economic disadvantage form part of the primary target group for the service. Nor is it bounded by geographic considerations such as residence in a particular area, as the service is open to anyone over 18 years who is interested in pursuing studies at third-level.

Thus, in these respects, the Guidance Service can be distinguished from other guidance providers currently working in Limerick. Since its inception, the Downtown Centre has worked on developing relationships with other guidance providers and with community groups so that the service can become known at community level. As a result of these connections, it is humbling to see the sacrifices that people are prepared to make to get into higher education. However, the service is developing a growing realisation that if clients are not willing or able to go back into full-time education, there still is not much available to them in their own locality, and distance learning is not necessarily the answer for people who may not have engaged with formal learning for some time. The provision of flexible and part-time courses is crucial to truly open access to higher education and our system has a long way yet to go in doing this.

Financial barriers are a big part of this – for example, people are afraid that they will lose their entitlements to social welfare benefits if they undertake a course. Alternatively, they are keen to have a definite idea of a return on the investment that they will have to make both in terms of time and money commitments.

Thus, we are sometimes asked, 'what kind of job can I get if I do an Arts degree?' There needs to be joined up thinking by Government agencies who deal with provision of allowances and benefits so that individuals can more easily access information about grants and about how their social welfare payments are affected or changed when they decide to undertake third-level study. The development of the new HEA website, www.studentfinance.ie, will go some way towards resolving this issue; however, for people who are not familiar with or who do not have access to the internet it is not the answer.

Support for learning is one of the issues that has surfaced in the guidance service's work with clients. Sometimes people have expressed a need to learn how to structure essays, or want to receive reassurance that they are 'doing all right' in a new course that they have taken on. This is an area that may merit investigation in terms of new services that the Downtown Centre can provide. The response to the current 'Return to Learning' series of evening workshops seems to support this. It is also a matter of concern to see how little the secondary school system has offered in terms of guidance to people who just did not engage with it at the 'appropriate' time in their lives and who have subsequently found themselves excluded from opportunities to enter higher education. Age and lack of subject requirements remain significant barriers, particularly in the 18-22 age group. Another concern is the number of people who have difficulty with mathematics as a subject. There is a need to look at how this can be addressed. One wonders whether there might be scope for the Limerick Adult Guidance Partnership to work more closely together to provide a reconfigured model of guidance within the city area – one that would truly, "accompany the citizen throughout life, supporting transitions and promoting the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to be active contributors to, and participants in, the learning society/economy"? (Sultana, 2004, p14). Legislative change and the development of a new working template which would enable staff to work across boundaries to provide a single client-centred service appropriate to the clients' needs may be required to achieve this.

The critical issue at present for the Downtown Centre Guidance Service is to become known and valued for the additional resources it can bring to the landscape of guidance in Limerick itself and in the surrounding areas. The preliminary evaluation of the service, which will inform the ongoing development of the culture and practice of the Centre, has provided encouragement and support for the educational guidance service at this early stage.

The Future

The concept of a 'one-stop shop' for learning is not a new one. However, it is new for the mid-West region and there is enormous potential for an initiative such as the Downtown Centre to encourage adult learners in their progression to higher education, and collaborate with existing education providers in supporting adults on their learning journey. The extent to which it is feasible to develop such a concept is most often limited by practical issues such as resources. However, the authors recognise that there are also a range of other barriers, financial, social, structural and personal; which any adult learner faces in returning to learning. Unless all stakeholders work together to develop solutions to break down such barriers, the extent to which any one initiative can make a measurable and long-lasting difference is limited.

For the moment, the Downtown Centre is funded until 2010. During that time initiatives will continue to be developed that will bring people who want to engage with higher education closer to the partner institutions. Delivery of guidance services will continue to be a feature of that delivery as will the Certificate in General Studies which offers a FETAC Level 5 qualification. Innovative courses or practices will be built on qualitative feedback from evaluations, and from consultation with other partners. Linkage with work-based learning, and in particular with the development of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) procedures in the partner institutions, and by extension in the region as a whole, may form the basis of activities which will take place in the future in the Downtown Centre. Activities connected to citizenship offer another possibility, especially given the social development initiatives which are particular to Limerick at present, such as the work of the Regeneration Boards.

Conclusion

So far preliminary evaluations conducted show that the Downtown Centre has made a good start to its work in Limerick and in the mid-West region. It has provided a presence for each of the partner institutions in the heart of Limerick city. For many of the current cohort of Certificate in General Studies students, it will provide a pathway into higher education that would not otherwise have been there for them. Evaluations have also shown that clients of the Guidance Service have found it very useful in assisting them with identifying their third-level learning options and would recommend it to others. The challenge now for all involved is to balance the resources available against identifiable needs to which the Downtown Centre can respond, and to sustain the momentum for the longterm.

Rhone Sherry is Project Manager of the Shannon Consortium Downtown Centre and has worked in higher education for a number of years.

Patricia-Anne Moore is an Educational Guidance Co-Ordinator working with the Shannon Consortium Downtown Centre. She previously worked in the Lifelong Learning Department at the University of Limerick.

References

- Bamber, J. & Tett, L. (2000). Transforming the learning experiences of non-traditional students: A perspective from higher education. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22(1), 57-75.
- Coveney-O'Beirne, N. (2006). *Making the Transition: Effectiveness of a Mature Student Access Course for Transition to Degree Studies*, University of Limerick. (unpublished).
- EU Commission (2000). *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/life/memoen.pdf>
- EU Commission (2005). *Report of Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance*. http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/Guidance/expertgroup/
- Higher Education Authority (2006). *Strategic Innovation Fund – Call for Proposals*. <http://www.heai.ie/uploads/word/Final%20Call%20July%2020061.doc>
- McMahon, J. & Whisker, L. (2008). *Evaluation of Certificate in General Studies*. Shannon Consortium Downtown Centre. (unpublished).
- National Guidance Forum (2007). *Guidance for Life – An Integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland*. http://www.nationalguidanceforum.ie/documents/NGF_Guidance_for_Life%20final.pdf
- National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2007). *Annual Report 2006 and Outline Plans 2007*. Dublin: HEA. <http://www.heai.ie/uploads/pdf/Annual%20Report%202006.pdf>
- OECD (2002). *OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies – Ireland Country Note*. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/21/63/1934462.pdf>
- Sultana, R. (2004). *Guidance policies in the knowledge society, trends, challenges and responses across Europe: A Cedefop synthesis report*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Commission.
- Walker, L., Matthew, B. & Black, F. (2004). Widening access and student non-completion: an inevitable link? Evaluating the effects of the Top-Up Programme on student completion. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23 (1), 43-59.

Language Training for Adult Refugees: The Integrate Ireland Experience

EMER GILMARTIN

Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration.

(Council of Europe, Common Basic Principles of Integration, 2001).

Introduction

Living in a new country presents many challenges for adult refugees. Social, legal and cultural norms may differ greatly from those of the country of origin. Tasks such as looking for work, accessing services, even shopping or opening a bank account can be very difficult when you do not know 'how things work'. The initial culture shock and the ongoing stress of surviving in an unfamiliar environment may be augmented by homesickness or trauma from life prior to the move. When the language of the host community is unfamiliar, these challenges intensify. It is difficult for speakers of one language to imagine what it is like to live in an environment where you can understand little or nothing of what is said or written to you or around you, where you cannot express your needs or opinions, and where participation for yourself or your children in the normal life of the community seems difficult or impossible. Without knowledge of the language, access to training and employment is hampered. Research in the United States, a country where immigration is a longstanding phenomenon, shows that employment and earning levels for immigrants are strongly linked to English language ability (Chiswick & Miller, 2002).

While the considerations above demonstrate adult refugees' practical need to learn the language of their new community in order to fully participate in their new environment, these linguistic needs should be situated within the wider

context of language for the adult refugee. In a report on meeting the language needs of refugees in Ireland, Little (2000) identifies two sets of language rights for refugees – stemming from the right to preserve their own language or languages as a central element of identity, and the right to enjoy free access to Irish society which entails the right to develop language proficiency in English. In the design of language provision it is vital that these rights are recognised, and that courses are designed to provide the language needed to participate in the new community, while acknowledging that English is an additional language and is not being learned in order to ‘replace’ the mother tongue.

Learning a language to live in a country where the language is spoken is not a simple matter of attaining an academic understanding of the language. Adults will learn and use a new language where there is a clear need for it – I will be motivated to learn the English needed to talk about my health when I know that my child or myself will be treated by a doctor who only speaks English. Better results can be expected when the texts used and methodology of courses are tailored to the practical communicative needs of participants. Courses should facilitate the development of learner autonomy and motivation with learners taking an active role in the planning of their courses. As language learning is a lifelong process, courses should foster the acquisition of the language learning skills needed to continue learning outside of the classroom and after the course has finished.

Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) has been developing and delivering courses based on these principles in centres around Ireland for several years. This article provides a brief overview of IILT’s founding principles and provision followed by more detailed accounts of facets of the framework and supports which IILT has developed, with discussion of challenges met in their design and delivery.

IILT’s Programme for Adult Learners – Overview

Participants in IILT’s programme come from a very wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds with 93 different nationalities represented in 2007 (IILT, 2007). Educational backgrounds also vary widely; while some participants hold third level qualifications, others have had little or no formal education. Levels of literacy vary with learners presenting with no literacy in their own language, with literacy in a non-Latin alphabet, and fully literate in the Latin alphabet.

Note: Integrate Ireland Language and Training Ltd. is a not for profit campus company of Trinity College, Dublin providing English language courses for adult refugees and learning materials for both the adult education and school sectors.

The length of time that learners have lived in Ireland ranges from several years to a few weeks, resulting in different levels of familiarity with Irish life and the English language. All participants in IILT's language courses have legal status which entitles them to work and attend further education/training in Ireland (Stamp 4).

The two principal focuses of IILT's courses are:

- the development of language knowledge and skills to support membership of and integration into Irish society, and
- the identification by participants of immediate language learning needs as well as possible future areas of employment, with appropriate preparation for this objective.

IILT is involved at different stages of language and integration training provision including design and delivery of courses in:

- English for Living and Working in Ireland (FETAC Level 3 and 4)
- Pre-Vocational and Academic English (FETAC Level 5)
- English with Literacy (FETAC Level 1 and 2)

These courses create a framework for language learning at 6 levels spanning the A1 to B2 range on the Council of Europe's Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

English for Living and Working in Ireland is offered at 5 levels up to B1, defined as a level where the language learner 'can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.' (Council of Europe, 2001). Pre-vocational courses concentrating on job seeking and preparation for the mainstream training or the workplace are offered for learners with greater competence in the language (B1 and higher). Academic English courses are available for learners at this level wishing to enter 3rd level education or who need to take exams to ratify their existing qualifications.

A number learners present themselves for classes in IILT with no literacy skills or very low levels of literacy in their mother tongue. To meet their needs, IILT provides specialised English with Literacy classes based on approaches developed by IILT teachers working with learners groups and published in IILT's

resource book for ESOL and Literacy, Feach – Looking at Language and Literacy. On completion of English with Literacy classes, learners progress to English for Living and Working in Ireland courses.

Computer classes are provided as an integral part of IILT's courses wherever possible – with one session per week. Computers and the Internet are used as they are used in daily life – as tools to facilitate communication and gather and exchange information. Classes cover the basic computer skills through tasks such as finding information on public services, researching career and further education opportunities, emailing for information, writing CVs or letters. Certification is offered in FETAC Computer Literacy and ECDL's Equalskills programme.

As motivation is a key factor in successful learning and depends on 'deliberate and conscious commitment by the learner' (Little, 1991, 2007), the focus throughout is on fostering learner autonomy as outlined in Little (2000). Courses are designed to meet learners' expressed needs and to equip them with the skills and knowledge to integrate into their new environment and make the transition to the workplace or mainstream training and education. Each learner defines and refines their career and integration plans and takes responsibility for working towards these goals, regularly recording progress and defining concrete shorter term goals during their progression towards greater familiarity and comfort with the social, cultural, training and work environment in Ireland.

Classes are highly communicative, delivered wholly in English, and draw on an extensive and regularly reviewed and updated bank of resources developed in-house by IILT teachers. Learners are engaged in real-world tasks and contexts from the beginning and classroom activities draw strongly on learners' life experience and aspirations for the future. Language skills are developed naturally through a process of learning by doing. Classes revolve around the topics and learning goals nominated by participants with teachers providing relevant material and exercises. For example, in a class based on the theme of education, learners may find out about the education system in Ireland and tasks could include writing a note to their child's teacher, role playing a parent-teacher meeting, researching available courses, or joining a local library. An integral part of IILT's programme involves bringing the class out into the community through visits to services and institutions of interest, and bringing the community into the classroom with invited speakers from local service providers, former students and 'ordinary people' from all walks of life. Assessment is car-

ried out by participants themselves using the Milestone European Language Portfolio (IILT, 2003), based on the Common European Framework, and formally through FETAC awards.

Courses run year round in 14 IILT centres around Ireland. Provision is on a full-time basis of twenty contact hours per week over four terms. In 2007 a total of 906 learners of 93 different nationalities attended IILT classes throughout Ireland. More than half of all participants were women (55 per cent) although the number of female learners self-removing or interrupting attendance exceeded that of males, reflecting difficulties in sourcing suitable childcare. The length of time needed to learn obviously depends on starting level, the mother tongue, and previous language learning experience and literacy levels, in addition to factors such as the learner’s own beliefs and feelings about learning English. Overall, 62 per cent of all learners complete IILT within a year, 86 per cent of all learners will have completed within 16 months. There are learners who take longer to complete. In many of these cases there are literacy difficulties, scant or no formal education, or social factors involved. Outcomes for learners completing in 2007 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Progression for all participants completing IILT in 2007

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Entered Further or Higher Education</i>	<i>Entered Vocational Training</i>	<i>Employed</i>	<i>Job-ready</i>
	105	9	23	48
<i>%</i>	57%	5%	12%	26%

Access, registration and initial assessment

Participation in IILT courses is voluntary and open to all holders of Stamp 4. Learners wishing to register are invited to a one to one interview which explores the learners’ mid and longer term plans and hopes for their life in Ireland, and allows IILT to collect details and information about previous education, employment and English language learning. Prospective students are then invited to attend a test to identify language learning needs and to facilitate appropriate placement in class. This placement test was developed by IILT to pinpoint learners’ language proficiency on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). After testing, learners are offered a place if one is available or placed on a waiting list for classes.

The major barrier to access is availability of childcare. Many learners eligible for IILT classes are parents of young children who do not have a family or social network in Ireland. These learners need childcare in order to attend classes. In many cases the father attends classes while the mother stays at home. Childcare support has been provided to some of IILT's centres as a result of co-ordination between local agencies, resulting in markedly improved attendance of mothers of preschool children. However, the scarcity of childcare places and the expense of private childcare make it impossible for learners to regularly attend courses in many centres, a situation reflected in recent research on the integration of refugees in Ireland (Kinlen, 2008). Inability to access classes means mothers are not learning the language of the community until their children attend school. This in turn means that these mothers will not have the language skills needed to support their child's attendance at an English-speaking school, resulting in difficulties in areas such as liaising with the school or helping with homework, leading to difficulties in the integration of children in the educational system.

Curriculum and classes based on learners' needs for life in Ireland

IILT's learner-centred approach requires development and implementation of practical activities and supports to ensure that learners are comfortable in a classroom environment which may be very unfamiliar, understand their role and the role of their teacher in their learning, and actively participate in choosing the form which that learning may take. Regular reflection and target setting are essential tools for learners and an integral part of the learning process. This section describes how IILT's courses have developed to meet these requirements.

On all IILT courses, learners and their class teacher discuss how classes will operate and negotiate the course content. Class contracts are created at the beginning of term, providing a forum for learners and teachers to explore their expectations and to formulate an agreement on norms for many aspects of day-to-day classroom life. Early in their course each class holds curriculum negotiation sessions where learners think about the situations they encounter in daily life and will encounter as their career plans progress, and the language skills and other knowledge needed to achieve their goals. Resource packs have been created in IILT to facilitate this process, with picture based procedures for lower level classes. This guided reflection provides the topic areas of interest to each learner. Common examples for learners in English for Living and Working in Ireland classes include Dealing with Officials (form-filling, phoning, the Irish system...), Health (emergency calls, making an appointment, describing symp-

toms, the Irish health system, healthy living...), and Work (career choice, the jobs market in Ireland, CV and interview preparation...). The topic areas nominated and the order in which they are tackled are discussed and then voted on by the class and the outcome is the course curriculum. Naturally, this curriculum continues to evolve as participants reflect on their progress and refine their learning goals.

As the curriculum for each course is decided by the participants, IILT does not have a set ‘course’ at any level. However, as learners share many communicative needs and goals, many themes recur. Table 2 shows the results of a 2006 survey of teachers in IILT on topics frequently proposed by learners at the content negotiation stage of English for Living and Working in Ireland courses, and includes the FETAC modules covered at different levels of the programme.

Table 2: Topics covered in English for Living and Working in Ireland

<i>English for Living and Working in Ireland</i> Levels 1 – 3	Introductions Alphabet and numbers My family Accommodation Food People Work Shopping Education Daily routines Health	Learning to learn Transport Time Telephone Personal information Cultural awareness My CV Money and banks Media Dealing with officials Computers
	FETAC Language 3	
<i>English for Living and Working in Ireland</i> Levels 4 – 5	Learning to learn Health Shopping Money and banking Travel and transport Dealing with officials Jobs and careers	CV and interviews Leisure and hobbies Accommodation Telephone Cultural awareness Education and training Media Computers
	FETAC Language 4 FETAC Computer Literacy 3	

Pre-vocational or Academic English courses act as a bridge to mainstream training, employment, or further/higher education, with the topics of study nominated by learners reflecting this (Table 3).

Table 3: Topics covered on Pre-vocational and Academic Preparation courses

<i>Pre-vocational</i>	<i>Academic</i>
Career planning	Career planning
Cultural awareness	CAO and applications to colleges
Orientation to training	Education and training in Ireland
Personal identity	Qualifications recognition
The workplace	Study skills
CVs and interviews	IELTS/TOEFL preparation
Telephone	Preparing for interviews
Computers	Computers
FETAC Language 5	FETAC Preparation for Work 3

Pre-vocational courses concentrate on job seeking and preparation for the workplace or further training. Classes use authentic and practical exercises and tasks to the language and ways of the Irish workplace, build confidence and motivate learners to take their next step to a career in Ireland. Academic English courses are aimed at learners wishing to enter third-level education or who need to take exams to ratify their existing qualifications. The programme focuses on language skills necessary for successful integration to higher education and professional life in Ireland in addition to covering interview and application preparation for college entry or qualifications ratification, and preparation for IELTS or TOEFL exams (the commercial ESOL tests used as standards for entry to many centres of higher education or for qualifications ratification).

Regular reflection and target setting are facilitated by in-class use of the Milestone European Language Portfolio (IILT, 2003), weekly in-class reviews with target setting for the following week, and by an individual self-assessment interview at least once a term.

The Milestone European Language Portfolio is one of almost 100 validated models of European Language Portfolios (ELPs) used to facilitate language learning for diverse target groups throughout Europe. The ELP was introduced by the Council of Europe as a tool to support the development of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, and is designed to motivate learners to extend their skills in other lan-

guages and to provide a means of recording acquisition of linguistic and cultural skills. The ELP itself is a document belonging to the learner. The ELP contains a language biography where learners record their proficiency in all of the languages that they know, how best they learn languages, intercultural experiences, and plans for the future. Practical language and communicative goals are expressed as a series of checklists of 'I can..' statements which learners use to plan and record their progress. The Milestone ELP was developed to specifically address the needs of adult migrants learning language in the host community by an EU Comenius project involving IILT and colleagues working in migrant language teaching in The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, and Finland. The 'I can ..' statements were designed to reflect the situations and challenges meeting adult migrants and cover listening, reading, spoken production and interaction, and writing. Sample statements at this level include 'understand what the doctor/dentist is asking or saying to me provided that he/she speaks clearly and slowly' (listening), 'understand the questions on most official forms' (reading), or 'explain to the teacher/class how I learn best' (spoken interaction). The portfolio also contains a dossier section where examples of work can be kept for future reference.

Each class holds weekly review and target setting sessions where learners gather their week's work, reflect on their progress and define achievements and areas which will need more work. Learners keep a record of their own attendance in the Milestone ELP. The review is supported by extra material designed in house.

Self-assessment interviews take place between individual learners and teachers. Learner and teacher review progress and set new short-term and medium-term learning and integration goals. They discuss how these goals can be achieved and both commit to actions in a defined timeframe which will further the learner's progress inside and outside the classroom. As an example; during the interview the learner may say that she needs to improve her reading. Learner and teacher could agree on short term goals for the learner of joining the local library and borrowing a graded reader, and for the teacher of organising a lesson where the class fill in application forms to join the library followed by a visit to the local library. A report on each self-assessment interview is kept on file by IILT together with end-of-term progress reports.

The learner autonomy focussed approach central to IILT's courses has been developed over several years to its present form. Many learners have not encountered communicative teaching methodologies and a learner centred classroom

dynamic before and may initially feel more comfortable with a more traditional and familiar teacher-centred, grammar-based setting. Learner beliefs based on previous learning experience or assumptions can affect motivation (Lightbown and Spada 2006) and it is therefore vital that learners understand why the communicative approach is used and feel that they have a say in what they learn and how their classes are delivered. IILT's classroom contracts and self assessment interviews have been introduced over the years to respond to this challenge by providing a space for learners to discuss how best they learn and for teachers to explain the rationale for the methodologies used in class. These discussions allow consensus to be reached and reinforce learners' confidence that their reflections and suggestions are valued and used to inform the design and delivery of their courses.

Accreditation and progression

Accreditation is becoming increasingly important as Ireland's newcomer population expands and employers and educational institutions look for proof of candidates' proficiency. While the Milestone ELP has European currency, it is not yet well-known in Ireland. FETAC provides learners with nationally recognised accreditation and its portfolio based approach to assessment dovetails with the Milestone ELP. Therefore IILT decided in 2004 to supplement the ELP with FETAC accreditation and now provides assessment in ESOL, Computer Literacy, and Preparation for Work as part of its courses. It has been necessary to develop teaching materials and appropriate approaches in-house to meet the demands of FETAC assessment, particularly in the case of the modules originally designed for native speakers of English. Participation rates are very high and the success rates, 100 per cent at Levels 3 and 4 and 98 per cent at Level 5, reflect learners' enthusiasm for FETAC as a means of validating their learning. Although much progress has been made in the assessment and accreditation of language proficiency with self assessment via the ELP and external assessment via FETAC the question of ESOL accreditation at a 'gatekeeping' level for entry to further and higher education or for qualifications ratification remains problematic. Learners have to pay to sit exams based on American, British or Australian English which are not appropriate to an Irish context and place the learner at a disadvantage as the listening tests are based on accents which may be unfamiliar. While IILT provides preparations for these exams in Academic classes as a pragmatic measure, the organisation is currently exploring ways in which a more complete and relevant ESOL accreditation framework could be developed around the FETAC assessments currently available.

Progression planning for adult refugees can be challenging. Many learners are unaware of the possibilities for progression or have expectations that may be very low or high relative to the realities of the Irish work, training, and further or higher education environment, while Irish society may have unrealistic expectations of what is necessary or what can be achieved by adults in terms of language acquisition. Unrealistic expectations among learners often relate to the length of time needed to learn the language and attain employment or training goals. Learners with little or no formal education may believe that they can attain very ambitious educational goals in an unrealistically short time, which can lead to frustration and lack of motivation if these expectations are not managed sensitively. Learners who have worked or attained qualifications in their countries of origin often hope to ‘slot in’ to the same field in Ireland, and may not be prepared for the need to retrain wholly or partially. Many professional organisations require non-native English speakers seeking qualifications ratification to obtain certification of proficiency in English at levels which require several years of learning the language. For many learners the most realistic option may be to start work at entry level in their field and work towards career progression as their familiarity with Irish working life and proficiency in English grow. Learners need guidance to formulate career plans which take account of all of these factors. IILT centres liaise with local employment and adult career guidance services, inviting representatives in to speak to classes and encouraging learners to use these services. However, IILT’s experience has shown there is a need for career guidance from the beginning of language learning. Provision of this advice and guidance falls to the teacher, drawing resources and experience amassed by colleagues over the years. To facilitate this work, IILT teachers have archived this knowledge base on IILT’s local homepage, recording progression routes that learners have taken and other relevant information. Career guidance places heavy demands on teachers and on class time, and progression would be better served if a dedicated career guidance teacher could be employed by the organisation. This challenge reflects the wider need for clear progression routes for newcomers to be identified and made available to providers on a national level – while progress has been made in the area of qualifications recognition by Qualifications Recognition Ireland, a resource outlining practical tried and tested progression routes on a national level would be very useful.

Social Integration Programme

Many learners find it difficult to make the first steps to use their newly acquired language in the community. To help learners gain the necessary confidence

IILT's courses are underpinned by a social integration programme which brings learners into contact with life in the community.

This programme includes visits to places of practical and cultural interest – libraries, services providers, local museums, theatres, galleries, and practical trips such as visits to the local post office or supermarket which are invaluable in building learners' confidence. Volunteering can provide a setting for learners to meet and get to know people in their community; visits are arranged to charity shops and organisations to present these possibilities. Learners also visit educational and career planning events of interest locally and nationally – college open days and information sessions, education and employment fairs. IILT classes regularly host visiting speakers from the community including representatives from local services and organisations such as the Garda Síochána, Health Services, and Citizen's Information. Central to the programme are visits from 'ordinary' Irish people from all walks of life, and former students who talk about the paths they have taken after IILT and the careers they have pursued. Over the years, it has been found that the simple, inexpensive, and practical activities of visiting 'real-life' sites and meeting and talking to 'real' local people and former students are most useful for learners as they help to demystify the new environment and show that progress is indeed possible.

Classroom material created in response to needs of learners

IILT's flexible curriculum requires material which is relevant, modular, and up to date. Commercially produced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and ESOL material tends to be unsuited to this purpose and does not reflect the needs of learners living in Ireland. Therefore, since IILT's inception, teaching material responding directly to learners' needs has been created in-house.

Some of this material has been incorporated into two resource books, *Anseo – English for Living in Ireland and Féach – Looking at Language and Literacy*. Since 2005, newly created material has been uploaded to IILT's website for use by teachers in IILT centres around Ireland, building an extensive bank of material at various levels covering English for Living in Ireland, Pre-vocational and Academic English, Literacy for ESOL Learners, as well as FETAC assessment and support material for ESOL modules and mainstream modules specially tailored to speakers of other languages. Teachers at IILT regularly carry out projects to expand the materials and other resources available to their colleagues in IILT and, via the website, to others working in the sector. Recent and current projects include the creation of:

- a bank of relevant listening material including interviews with individuals (bank officials, service providers, employers, ‘ordinary’ people), and recordings of automated telephone systems and other listening situations that prove challenging to learners of English. Classroom material is created on an ongoing basis to exploit this resource;
- extra material to meet the needs of beginners and learners with literacy needs, including photo essays on classroom methodology to aid teachers;
- a web-based teacher support resource with practical ideas and information on ESOL teaching in an Irish context.

Much of this material is available free on IILT’s website and download figures show that IILT material is used by providers across the country. The range of material allows teachers to pick and mix exercises and activities most relevant to their class, rather than following a standard coursebook which may not meet their learners’ needs. IILT’s current system of distribution of resources via the Internet could be usefully expanded to include material submitted by teachers and tutors from other providers, building a substantial and dynamic online resource for teachers and addressing the shortage of ESOL material relevant to adult migrants in Ireland.

Conclusion

This article has described the approach developed by IILT, and highlighted some of the challenges met in the design and delivery of courses to adult refugees. While language provision is not the whole answer to the challenges of integration, IILT’s experience has shown that courses where learners’ information needs and interests are used to motivate language acquisition serve as valuable aids to newcomers. Key factors in the success of this approach are the motivation and interest generated by learner involvement in the course design, the reflection and target setting supporting learner autonomy, the assessment framework combining self assessment and external assessment, and the creation of relevant modular materials to allow language learning to be embedded in the context of learners’ current and future lives in Ireland. Mention has also been made of issues that have been met in IILT, some of which reflect challenges to the ESOL sector in Ireland as a whole, particularly the need for childcare, defined progression routes, and a means of pooling relevant resources for use by all providers.

Provision of language and integration training to adult newcomers is still a developing field in Ireland. Adult educators in this area have a wonderful chance

to explore, discuss, and formulate best practice to enable the ‘new’ Irish to reach their own language, life and career goals and thus to bring the benefit of their talents and fresh outlook to the community as a whole. It is hoped that this article will help inform the growing body of expertise in the area.

Emer Gilmartin is the Executive Manager of Integrate Ireland Language Training Limited and has worked in the field of ESL provision for 15 years.

References

- Chiswick, B. R., & Miller, P. W. (2002). Immigrant earnings: Language skills, linguistic concentrations, and the business cycle. *Journal of Popular Economics*, 15, 31-57.
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- IILT. (2003). *The Milestone European Language Portfolio*. Dublin: IILT.
- IILT. (2007). *Annual Activities Report 2007*. Dublin: IILT.
- Kinlen, L. (2008). *The reception, orientation and integration of resettled refugees in the Irish context*. Dublin: Office of the Minister for Integration.
- Lightbrown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Little, D. (1991). *Learner Autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Little, D. (2000). *Meeting the language needs of refugees in Ireland*. Dublin: RLSU.
- Little, D. (2007). Language learner autonomy: some fundamental considerations revisited, *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 1(1), 14-29.

SECTION THREE

BOOK REVIEWS

Banker to the poor: The story of the Grameen Bank

MUHAMMAD YUNUS

(London: Aurum Press, €11.41, pp. 313, 1999)
ISBN: 10 1 85410 924 3 ISBN: 13 978 1 84510 924 8

Should adult educators study economics? Adult education as a field of study and of practice has paid scant attention to economics preferring instead to study psychology and sociology as foundation disciplines. This leaves adult education devoid of the insights of economics and a low level of interest in finance, budgets, capital, credit, exchange rates and collateral among educators. An analysis of globalisation, neo-liberalism, international aid and the role of banks and financial institutions in the reproduction of poverty requires some knowledge of economics as a critical discipline. We have been, as educators, slow in mining the insights of a critical economics.

Muhammad Yunus is a Bangladeshi Professor of Economics who founded the micro-credit Grameen Bank that loans small sums of money to women in Bangladesh as a way of supporting and developing their home-based enterprises. Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 and is a member of Nelson Mandela's Global Elders founded in 2007.

Banker to the Poor is the story of the development of this revolutionary bank that gives loans (often as little as \$12) to poor people who have no collateral, at low rates of interest on the basis that they are honest, hardworking and would make a success of their ventures.

Yunus is critical of economics which, he says, has failed to study poverty. Instead, it studies economic development and the growth of wealth. He critiques the way banks require collateral from borrowers. This ensures, he says, that only those who already have wealth can borrow, and those without collateral cannot borrow. In this way, the more one has, the more one can get and this 'financial apartheid' (p. 81) forms part of a set of myths that supports the status quo and the unequal access to resources. 'What economist would suggest loan-

ing money at very low interest rates?’ he asks. Loaning to women rather than men (94 per cent of its 2.1 million borrowers are women) in a mullah dominated society is another example of how radical this venture is in addressing myths, reconfiguring power and attacking poverty.

This excellent and thought provoking book raises questions about our own society. In Ireland Credit Unions give loans (according to their own web site) mostly for cars, holidays, Christmas and for other personal uses. But in the process they fuel our consumer society and seem to be more interested in becoming banks, owning property and offering members the opportunity to enhance a consumer lifestyle. From their own web page they seem to be more interested in selling insurance, foreign exchange, opening share accounts and selling other financial products. The Grameen Bank is different. It is a lending institution with a social conscience rather than a consumer conscience. It supports the ability of people to establish enterprises and make money to help them survive and perhaps rise out of poverty. The borrowers of Grameen gain water-pumps, latrines, housing, schools and health services (p. 213). Typically, loans are to develop bamboo and cane works, mat making, fishing, weaving, pottery and other ordinary enterprising activities. Credit Unions instead fund foreign holidays – an export industry where currency is spent abroad and in exchange we import a sun tan and duty-free goods.

This is an easy read. There are no difficult or complex ideas or concepts. Every reader will understand interest, loan, credit, capital, repayments, etc. What makes this book fascinating is the way banking ideas are taken and reinterpreted to serve the interests of the poor rather than the interests of large banking. In addition, these are not just ideas that make abstract sense in a study of economics. Yunus has critiqued the way banks and the economy work and gone about setting up an institution to put into practice the ideas he proposes, and has done it successfully. Bad debts run at less than 1 per cent (p. 111). The book recounts a number of stories about how these ideas work in the difficult situations of rural poverty. The process of arriving in a village sounds more like the beginning of a community development project than of an economic project. It has an interesting web page – Grameen.com

A number of chapters are of crucial importance. One on the absence of ‘poverty’ as a subject of concern to economists is exciting (pp. 233ff), as economics is frequently more preoccupied with wealth. The chapter on educating and train-

ing of the poor is important as it prioritises the learning needs of the borrower, rather than the lender. The Grameen borrower wants to learn literacy, to keep accounts, learn about keeping animals and farming. They want in particular to send their children to school and know about modern communications (cellular phones and internet).

I liked in particular the discussion on the 'social-consciousness driven free-market' (pp.213ff). This critique of the profit-driven economies of the West leads to a redefinition of the Left and Right debate, in some ways more appealing than Giddens (*Beyond Left and Right*). In the new configuration, the goal of the economy would be to maximise profit as well as to maximise the social benefits of economic activity.

As the Third World is often the best source of ideas on how to address poverty this book is a rich source of insights and practical suggestions about how to address the financial and credit needs of poor people. However, only we in the First World, can take these ideas and glean from them the appropriate lessons for our forms of poverty and social exclusion. As adult educators we have been preoccupied with addressing poverty from a number of worthwhile angles including education, literacy, capacity building, drug programmes and parenting. However, we remain shy, and unnecessarily so, of addressing access to money, credit, wealth and of offering capital at low interest rates to support ventures. This book allows us redefine economics as a study of a social-consciousness-driven free market. Critical economics might be a foundation discipline of adult education.

TED FLEMING

Senior Lecturer

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Globalisation, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society Vol 2

PETER JARVIS

(London & New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, €35.82, pp. 238, 2007)
ISBN 0-415-35543-5 (Pbk) 0-415-35542-7 (Hbk).

Globalisation, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society (2007) is one of three volumes about lifelong learning and the learning society written by Peter Jarvis, Professor of Continuing Education at the University of Surrey and adjunct Professor of Adult Education at the University of Georgia in the USA. Jarvis has authored many books on a wide range of topics on adult education and lifelong learning over a long period of time and his earlier books will be familiar to many readers.

In the first volume, *'Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning'* (2006), Jarvis looked at the process of human learning, considering the philosophical, sociological, psychological, emotional and experiential aspects of the human process. In so doing, he demonstrated that learning could best be understood through a multi-disciplinary process.

In this latest book, Jarvis examines how lifelong learning and the learning society have become social phenomena globally. Writing from a sociological perspective, he urges that the driving forces of globalisation are radically changing lifelong learning. He also shows how adult education and learning is gradually gaining mainstream status due to global changes and as learning becomes more work-orientated. There are twelve chapters in the book covering a wide range of topics including lifelong learning in a global context, the role of lifelong learning in the learning society, teachers and students, the changing nature of research in lifelong learning and policies and practices in lifelong learning.

The book would be of general interest to different audiences working in the field of lifelong learning. It would be especially useful for those interested in a critical approach to learning and its construction. It could also be of interest to those interested in the new global challenges facing lifelong learning. I would

recommend it particularly for anyone studying in the field of lifelong learning at initial and continuing professional development level. It could be also useful both as a general text and for specific modules/courses at degree and post-graduate level.

For those wishing to read Jarvis's next Volume (No.3), on 'Democracy, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society: active citizenship in a late modern age', you may wish to know it is scheduled for publication in May 2008.

ROB MARK

School of Education

Queen's University, Belfast

Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion. Exploring lifelong learning contexts, issues and approaches

STEPHEN O'BRIEN AND MAIRTIN O'FATHAIGH

(Cork, Ireland: Oak Tree Press, €25, pp. 306, 2007)

ISBN 1-904887-14-7 978-1-904887-14-0

This book is the result of four years work, researching non-traditional adult learning experiences in the Cork, Munster region of Ireland. Partly funded by the Higher Education Authority, the study explores learning across three broad sectors of adult education: community education, further education and higher education. The unique and impressive quality of this book is its significant attempt to place the practice of non-traditional adult education within a sound theoretical basis. This not only provides a deeper understanding of the rationale underpinning government policy agendas, but also helps to unpick the core values and ideological framework underpinning each of these sectors.

The book is divided into five parts. Parts One and Two provide a conceptual overview and critique of the concepts and theories central to their treatise, namely partnerships, lifelong learning and social capital. With regard to the latter, they adopt a Bordieuian stance, which they contend “offers socio-cultural explanations for why under-represented groups remain excluded from the educational process” (p.65). Parts Three and Four deal with the methodology and empirical study, which are clearly situated within and inform the theoretical framework proposed in Parts One and Two. From a dialectical perspective, the research provides a springboard that will enable practitioners and researchers to contribute to the rich tapestry of the emergent themes. The overarching aim of the research is to gain a fuller understanding of best practice in the provision of adult education to non-traditional adult learning groups. Their study corroborates previous research that has highlighted areas of concern for adult learning, in particular, with regard to barriers to participation in adult learning. However, in focusing specifically on the notion of partnership approaches

in non-traditional adult learning, they firmly place such concerns within a collective and multi-dimensional approach to addressing the problems identified.

I would commend this book to adult and community education practitioners, those involved in managing such provision and those engaged in policy-making or challenging government policy. Whilst the first part of the book enables readers to engage in theoretical discourses which inform and affect the nature and practice of adult education at grassroots level, the latter half is more concerned with outlining the findings of the study and how these may impact upon future developments. The empirical study provides much insight and indeed many challenges for practitioners, providers and policy-makers in this field. The discourses and emerging issues pose challenges to practitioners and theorists to keenly address their frames of reference. Whilst the research is posited within the Irish context, this study has wider relevance for British and European audiences.

ROSEMARY MORELAND

Lecturer in Community Studies

University of Ulster, Jordanstown

Radical Learning for Liberation 2

B. CONNOLLY, T. FLEMING, D. MCCORMACK AND A. RYAN

(*Maynooth: MACE, €20, pp. 160, 2007*)

ISBN: 0901519332

As a text, *Radical Learning for Liberation 2* is an interesting and eclectic collection of writings, which stylistically runs the gamut of academic genres, but with their collective (metaphorical) eye firmly on the 'state' of adult learning. The strength of this short text, edited by staff from the Department of Adult and Community Education NUI Maynooth, is this stylistic and conceptual mashing. As I worked my way through the book from cover to cover I was struck by the range which ran from soap-box rhetoric, the stolidly academic, the worthy but discursive post-graduate essay, the exploratory, the reflexive (replete with stories & poems), the passionate and many many more. Each one – all of which I enjoyed – provides the reader with a different window into the changing and changed world of adult education. The titular '2' is, as explained in the introduction by Ted Fleming, a continuation of a critical dialogue which began in textual form at least, in 1996 with *Radical Learning for Liberation* (1996, Mace). Dr Fleming goes on to argue that the intention of '2' was to invite the original contributors to 'explore issues that now occupy their adult education imagination'. As a text it certainly does this and the reader's patience is well rewarded. You are left (no pun intended) with the impression that the notion of radicalism is still important and that the authors (individually and collectively) hold that truth to be self-evident. With the daily deluge of texts (usually from government, supra-governmental or organisations that have the 'ear' of our dear leaders) which unashamedly equate performativity with a moral crusade, it makes a change to spend time with a book that challenges such orthodoxies and reminds us that education is more than just about (as Orwell would have put it), the 'raising of the production of pig iron by 15%'.

DR. ANDREW LOXLEY

School of Education

Trinity College, Dublin

For many years as adult education practitioners we have busied ourselves with the setting up and delivery of programmes, courses and services paying little attention to the underpinning of this work with a theoretical base. Those of us who work in the field are only too well aware of the life changing experience which involvement in adult education can bring to people's lives and in order to give creditability to our work it is essential that a practice which can be so powerful is grounded in a strong philosophical and theoretical base. This would strengthen and lend credibility to a field of experience which we have all struggled to build up for so long. The process of theorising our practice can only assist the teaching and learning dynamic which is at the core of all educational endeavour and lead to greater understandings, insights and outcomes in the educational environment.

In the current issue of *The Adult Learner* this dialogue is commenced. The perspectives advanced in the refereed section of the journal help us to interrogate our practice in terms of our role as tutor, the interactive dynamic of the classroom and the broader contextual policy framework which may be operating. Ultimately, the objective is to strive to develop a pedagogy which explores and engages, one which affirms the human potential and strengthens participation and democracy. The three articles in the practice section document a number of learning initiatives currently taking place and look at the contribution that can be made to enhancing adult learning provision in different learning sites.

The final section of the journal comprises of book reviews of writings of relevance to those in the field of adult education. It is hoped that this combination of the critical and the documentary will offer insights and understandings and help us to sustain the view of the adult educator as "one who initiates wonder, creates perplexity (and) makes the familiar strange" (p.43).



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



Adult Education Officers' Association