

# The Adult Learner 2010

The Irish Journal of  
Adult and Community Education



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## 2010

THE IRISH JOURNAL OF  
ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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## Editorial Comment

If we are to believe the media and what many individuals are saying about Ireland, this past year, may be remembered as one of the most challenging and tumultuous years of recent times. But while ongoing pronouncements may have raised a number of questions about our economic and social welfare, the contribution which education can make to social and economic change and to enhancing the everyday lives of adults can hardly be questioned.

Adult & Community Education is well used to being the underdog, and we have so often had to cry for more bread for our hungry learners. The onset of another economic recession and the pain which it brings might in one sense be thought of as just another issue for adult and community educators to deal with in the struggle for equality and justice. But despite the gloomy picture, I am hopeful that this new edition of the adult learner will provide an opportunity to renew us through engaging with new ideas and experiences which can enrich new and old debates.

With all the news and turmoil at home and internationally, you can also be forgiven if you have overlooked this past year as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. If you, like me, have a sense of guilt about not doing enough, then I invite you to join in opening up your mind to new ideas and recognising and celebrating the contribution of educators from Ireland and elsewhere to create a fairer and more just Ireland and world beyond.

The 2010 edition of ‘The Adult Learner’ also marks a milestone in its development. Since its birth under the auspices of the Adult Education Organisers’ Association in 1985, the journal has for a quarter of a century acted as a mouth-piece for those working across the adult and community sector, highlighting innovative developments and reflecting on issues affecting policy and practice at local, national and international level.

As the years have passed and times changed, it has also responded to new challenges coming from within and outside Ireland and there has been a recognition of the importance of an international focus in the twenty-first century. These new perspectives have also enabled Ireland to position itself as a leader and mediator in the development of knowledge, values and skills which underpin high quality adult and community education provision.

In this current issue a wide variety of topics affecting adult and community education are addressed.

In the first section, Lucy Hearne's article on the measurement of progression in adult guidance provides us with useful insights into client involvement in the development of quality guidance services. Fiona O'Connor reminds us of the ongoing problem of racism in Irish society and the importance of developing provision which takes account of cultural diversity, and which promotes policies and practices which serve the needs of a diverse population as well as encouraging participation of minority groups. Camilla Fitzsimmon's article draws on challenges presented by radical educators and provides us with a radical model for community-university relationships. The theme of providing for radical alternatives is continued by Maggie Feely, who argues for 'learning care' as a concept in the field of adult learning.

There are also new challenges coming from outside Ireland. Writing from the USA, Libby Tisdell returns to an important, and less talked about issue of 'spirituality and culture' in adult learning. By drawing on experiences from the USA and Ireland, she reminds us of the need to develop a more culturally responsive approach to education and to create spaces where learners can draw on their own forms of religious and cultural expression. In the concluding article in Section 1, Tom Schuller shares some insights from a recent independent inquiry into the future for lifelong learning in the UK including the need to rebalance resources, to combine work with other activities and the importance of bridging sectoral and professional boundaries in the development and management of adult learning.

In Section 2, Lorne Patterson and Kathleen Dowd remind us of the significant role which a Women's Community Education approach can play in any education strategy and Barter discusses the role and importance of education in rehabilitation and recovery programmes for drug addicts. Finally, there are also

some interesting reviews of recent publications which have a relevance to adult and community educators in Ireland.

I would like to thank all the contributors and the peer reviewers and readers without whose assistance this issue would not have been possible. Sincere thanks is also extended to the members of the Editorial Board who reviewed articles. I also wish to record my special thanks to the staff at AONTAS for their ongoing support with the preparation of this issue. This past year has seen a lot of changes on the Editorial Board of the Adult Learner with a number of members moving on. I would like to mention the work of Sandra Fisher (DIT), Dolores Gilhooley (WIT), Stephen O'Brien (NUI, Cork) and the previous editor Ted Fleming (NUI/Maynooth) for all their hard work and camaraderie and for ensuring the high quality of this journal, which is unique in its cross-sectoral approach.

I also wish to pay a special tribute to the dedication and inspiration of Jenny Gunning, former Secretary to the Adult Learner. Jenny died suddenly in April 2010, just weeks before she was due to be married. I know I speak for everyone at AONTAS as well as all those who knew her through her work at AONTAS, when I say how much she inspired us with her wisdom, understanding and humility and the cheerful way in which she went about her work. She has left us with so many happy memories and will be deeply missed as a friend and colleague. Finally, sincere thanks is due to the Director of AONTAS, Berni Brady for her ongoing support to the Adult Learner without which this edition (and many others) would not have been possible.

Widening access to adult and community education continues to create new opportunities for active inclusion and enhanced social participation. It also acts as a vehicle to improve the knowledge, skills and qualifications of so many adults, thus preparing them for living in the new multi-cultural Ireland and modern world. It also promotes improved social cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfillment and has the potential to break the cycle of poverty, social disadvantage and exclusion thus contributing to a better understanding of diversity and cultural richness in society.

I began by talking about educational disadvantage and end by reminding us that while education can assist in tackling the problem of disadvantaged it cannot do it alone. Multi-sectoral approaches are therefore needed to articulate

with wider social and economic policies. The ideas contained in this journal can assist us all with these objectives as we prepare for this new decade. I wish you interesting reading.

**ROB MARK**

Queen's University Belfast

*Editor*

*Editorial Board*

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## **SECTION ONE**

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

# Progression measurement in Adult Guidance in Ireland: a contested discourse

LUCY HEARNE, UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

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## **Abstract**

*This article discusses the findings of a research study on the longitudinal measurement of individual progression in the Irish Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI). The research was underpinned by a critical constructivist methodology in its examination of the three main discourses of the client, practitioner, and policy maker in the field of adult guidance. In line with the current discourse on the role of the user in quality assurance, a specific focus of the study was an analysis of the client's contribution to the design of a quality tracking system for outcome measurement. The implications for policy, practice and research in the adult guidance sector in Ireland will be explored in this paper.*

## **Introduction**

This paper explores findings from a longitudinal case study that examined the development of appropriate methodologies to measure the long-term outcomes for clients of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI). The AEGI was established in 2000 by the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2000) as a support measure for adults accessing education. In addressing the main research question of how progression is measured in the current longitudinal tracking system in the AEGI the study examined a number of specific issues. These issues relate to definitions of outcomes, rationale for measurement and the development of suitable methodologies for outcome evaluation within the context of current policy objectives informing adult guidance practice.

The analysis of the impact of interventions is now a priority in the Irish guidance sector which is primarily driven by an economic agenda and the need to justify investment in publicly funded services. Although the advancement of

adult educational guidance is still relatively new in Ireland, it is now evident that appropriate mechanisms are required in the AEGI to evaluate the long-term outcomes of provision. Such propositions reflect a broader discourse on outcome measurement and the need to develop performance indicators and benchmarks in career guidance at a national, European and international level. However, an important critical discourse has emerged on the difficulties involved in outcome measurement for evaluation of the efficacy of interventions and long-term impact on the individual and society.

The overall aim of the research study was to consider the development of a 'best practice' framework for the longitudinal tracking of individual progression in the AEGI. As the focus of the research was primarily methodological, it explored claims that the current methods employed to measure long-term outcomes involving quantitative, objective indicators are insufficient as they disregard the subjective experiences of clients. At present, the Department of Education and Science (DES) employs a top-down, quantitative approach in the AEGI to monitor clients' progression in terms of the hard outcomes of education and employment attainment. These outcomes are tracked and monitored through the AEGI's national database, the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS). One of the specific objectives of the study was to address an identified gap between policy and practice in the field, namely, harnessing the voice of the user in the quality assurance process (NGF, 2007a). Specifically, it evaluated the client's contribution to the design of a quality tracking system to measure progression in the AEGI. This paper will examine existing research in the field, present the methodological approach and findings of the study and then discuss the implications for policy, practice and research.

### **Background of Research**

The necessity for individuals of all ages to safeguard their career paths in the face of growing globalisation is now at the heart of national, European and international guidance policy discourse. The development of adult guidance in Ireland has been and still remains to be influenced by education and labour market policies at a national, European and international level. Adult guidance is firmly positioned within the lifelong guidance paradigm to achieve the three OECD public policy goals of lifelong learning, labour market and social equity (NGF, 2007a). Lifelong guidance refers to the provision of guidance throughout the lifespan to help citizens manage transitions between education, training and work as a consequence of the changing nature of labour markets (Sultana,

2008). The necessity for the development of quality assurance and standards in guidance provision is now a key policy goal to support lifelong career transitions for citizens (Council of the European Union, 2008; NGF, 2007b).

Key arguments for monitoring and evaluation in education and guidance are accountability, improvement and the regulation of outcomes (Scheerens et al, 2003). Since its development in 2000, the AEGI has expanded to forty national services and undergone a series of developmental changes. Such changes have been influenced by the needs of the guidance services on the ground and the requirements of the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and the DES. This has included formative evaluation in 2005 and summative evaluation in 2008.

The impetus for this case study arose from an earlier quantitative study which I carried out for the Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults (REGSA) in 2005. REGSA is an AEGI project based in the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The 2005 study found that although there are merits in using a primarily quantitative approach to measure and analyse the outcomes of guidance for a large cohort of adults, there are significant methodological limitations. Fundamentally, the analysis produced objective results that downplayed the subjective and contextual experiences of the clients' progression over time. I believed that further elucidation through an interpretive approach was needed to examine the long-term outcomes of guidance intervention for clients of the service.

The inadequacy of using a positivistic approach to evaluate long-term outcomes is becoming more and more recognised in the field (Bimrose, 2006; Reid, 2006; Savickas, 2000). Increasingly, there have been calls for more democratic approaches which reflect the clients' subjective experiences and their engagement in the evaluation process (Plant, 2005). As the adoption of new methodologies to evaluate provision still has to be coherently addressed within the AEGI the case study focused on addressing this current deficit. Whilst the clients were the primary data source, the perspectives of practitioners and policy makers on the complexities of outcome measurement were also explicated.

The findings from existing research indicate that the analysis of individual progression is part of a wider debate about the development of quality standards and evaluation of the long-term outcomes of guidance intervention. Quality in

guidance is measured for a number of reasons which include political motivations, securing funding, measuring learner progression, service improvement, monitoring, strategic planning, practice/policy development and the efficient use of public funds (Sultana, 2008; Watt, 1998). Recommendations to address the diffuseness of quality standard approaches include the introduction of monitoring and feedback mechanisms, criteria for the establishment of performance targets, and the involvement of users in the design, implementation and evaluation of quality assurance systems (OECD, 2004).

However, a critical discourse has emerged in the guidance field on the evaluation of the economic outcomes of guidance intervention. Consensus still needs to be reached on specific performance indicators and benchmarks that reflect the effectiveness of guidance and the progressive impact of interventions (Kidd, 2006; Hughes & Gration, 2002). Whilst evidence-based research, such as longitudinal studies, is viewed as crucial for evaluating effectiveness, divergence occurs in relation to the rationale for measuring outcomes and the ability to measure them adequately from the perspective of the client, practitioner and policy maker. Speaking about information, advice and guidance services (IAG), Hughes & Gration note:

Much of the performance of IAG services is monitored in terms of targets that are often seen to be imposed 'top down' from policymakers and funding bodies, and are often restricted to those that are most easily observable and measurable such as volumes of delivery, qualification levels and employment statistics. Hughes & Gration, 2009, p.5

Concerns have also been raised about the use of cost-benefit data to ensure efficiency and value for money through systems of monitoring which may undermine professional practice across the guidance sector (Bimrose, 2006; Brown, 2006; Herr, 2003).

Even though client tracking is viewed by some as a mechanism for surveillance and social control in the pursuit of hard targets for funding and accountability, it is favoured as a methodology to evaluate progression. Specifically, longitudinal studies have the capacity to track individual change and progression and to enable longer-term analysis of key findings and trends within the discipline (Bimrose et al, 2008; Pollard et al, 2007; Kidd, 2006). Nonetheless, progression as an outcome is difficult to define and measure. Currently, as identified

by McGivney (2002), there is an overemphasis on linear, vertical progression to give value and meaning to adult learning and career advancement at the expense of non-linear processes. This is reflected in the strong focus of some stakeholders, such as policy makers, educators and employers to measure progression into education and/or employment in terms of hard, tangible outcomes. It is argued that greater consideration needs to be given to the broader range of softer, intangible outcomes that reflect the distance travelled during times of personal change and transition for individuals (Bimrose et al 2008; Dewson et al, 2000).

On the other hand, McGivney (2002) argues that delineation between hard and soft outcomes is not straightforward as the acquisition of softer outcomes can lead to the hard outcomes of qualifications and employment through increased self-confidence and empowerment. From this perspective, the issue of time is critical in making judgements about clients' educational and career progression in adult guidance practice. In some instances, progression is determined by the client's readiness to pursue learning and work goals. Furthermore, for disadvantaged adults in particular, appropriate time scales need to be considered in the assessment of client outcomes as some clients will have setbacks that prevent them pursuing their goals (Hawthorn & Alloway, 2009). Therefore, a longitudinal perspective can deepen understanding of the multi-faceted and subjective nature of progression, as well as illuminate the personal and structural obstacles that hinder adults in their education and employment transitions (Clayton, 2004; Lynch, 1999).

Evaluating the long-term impact of guidance is methodologically challenging, costly, time-consuming and may depend on the point of view of those evaluating it, such as the policy maker, service funder, practitioner, client. In terms of target measurement, whilst positivistic models may provide reliable quantitative indicators; it is argued that interpretive approaches can reveal the broader range of softer, qualitative outcomes in relation to the client's personal development and change over time (Hawthorn & Alloway, 2009; Bimrose et al, 2004). In particular, a responsive constructivist approach could serve to integrate the viewpoints of all key stakeholders in the construction of a wide range of outcomes for measurement in adult guidance (Kelly, 2004; Killeen, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Plant (2005) suggests two reasons for the involvement of guidance users in policy discussions in adult guidance. The first reason relates to active citizenship and participatory democracy, and the second to guidance policies and services meeting the needs of guidance users. Firstly, within the context of adult education, citizenship refers to the active involvement of citizens in shaping the overall direction of society, culturally, socially, economically and environmentally (DES, 2000). Secondly, it is strongly argued that guidance policies and services must attend to the needs of individuals and the community both locally and nationally (Plant, 2005). This argument is found in the personalisation paradigm in public sector management in the UK which advocates a 'bottom-up' approach that "focuses on government creating the environment for individuals to take decisions about their own lives" (Ravenhall et al, 2009, p.2).

The advancement of sustainable 'bottom-up' approaches which move beyond the provision of customer service-style feedback is required in the adult guidance sector (Plant, 2005). At a national level such activities need to involve the active contribution of the client in quality assurance and policy formation which has been unsatisfactory to date in guidance (NGF, 2007a; Plant, 2005; Wannan & McCarthy, 2005). Therefore, the proposal for a democratic inclusion of clients in outcome evaluation underpinned the methodological approach used in the current study.

### **Research Methodology and Methods**

A critical constructivist methodology was employed to examine the competing discourses of the three key stakeholders involved, the client, practitioner and policy maker, on the topic of outcome measurement (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Constructivism emphasises how people construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their education and career experiences over time (Patton & McMahon, 2006). From a critical perspective, career counselling has a powerful influence on individuals' lives and it is imperative that guidance practitioners are reflexively aware of their own discursive practices (McIlveen & Patton, 2006). This is relevant within the context of the interweaving of the lifelong guidance paradigm with the lifelong learning paradigm which has gained credence in Irish guidance policy discourse in recent years.

In specific terms, the research analysed the subjugation of clients' subjectivities in the DES's scientific model of tracking that prioritises education and employment outcomes over personal outcomes to measure impact (Foucault, 1982).

In using this methodology, ideology critique helped identify and challenge the conservative ideology and hegemonic practices inherent in guidance policy that privileges some outcomes (hard) over others (soft) to meet the needs of the labour market in adult guidance practice (Brookfield, 2005). As a result the study was able to dispute the dominance of the positivist paradigm by examining the transformative processes of personal development, change and transition for clients' post-guidance intervention that need to be accounted for in evaluation systems.

As the primary focus of the study was the clients of REGSA, a bottom-up single-case study framework contextualised and investigated the changes in a number of clients of REGSA over a period of time (Yin, 2003). In addition, perspectives on outcome measurement were gained from the discourse of practitioners and policy makers in the field. In evaluation research case study methodology is used to assess changes in clients and explain the causal links in real-life interventions (Depoy & Gilson, 2008). Yin (2003) proposes that a single-case design can be representative, typical and revelatory in its uniqueness on a particular topic and context. This single-case study highlights the multiple realities of client's experiences, as well as the emergent issues located in the discourse of the other two stakeholders. However, the reliability and validity of case studies as a scientific method is challenged in some quarters (Yin, 2003). Therefore, the research does not claim generalisability, but argues that the learning gained from the case study is typical and transferable to other AEGI projects.

### **Methods of data collection and analysis**

The single-case study design was guided by an ethical framework and a reflexive approach in the multiple methods of data collection and analytical techniques selected. A combination of methods was used during the data collection and analytical phases. The three sources of primary data collection in the fieldwork were: individual interviews with clients of REGSA, focus group interviews with adult guidance practitioners in the United Kingdom (UK) and observation visits to external adult guidance providers. The source of secondary data collection involved analysis of a range of key Irish policy documents which have contributed to current adult guidance practice.

Fieldwork involved the use of grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006) to collect data from five clients, three male and two female, who were purposefully sampled from the earlier exploratory study I conducted in 2005. The selected

clients ranged in age from the late 20s to late 50s. Four of the clients were Irish citizens and one was an American/Irish citizen. With regards to intervention, four of the clients had received one-to-one guidance in 2001 and one client in 2003. The five clients were interviewed face-to-face in 2006 and four agreed to a follow-up telephone interview in 2009, thereby giving a longitudinal time span of between six and eight years. A constructivist approach was adopted in the interviews to elicit the clients' meanings of terms, situations and events for a hermeneutic and interpretive understanding of their subjective experiences of progression (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000).

At the time of the interviews in 2006 each client had reached a different point in their progression towards a qualification and/or employment. Some were further along in the process than others. By 2009, the clients' situations had changed again. Whilst all four of those interviewed had a qualification at some level, two of them had left the education system without completing their degree course, one had a new career and one had returned to a previous job from which she had taken a career break.

During the fieldwork stage triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the case study. Two focus group interviews with adult guidance practitioners were conducted in the UK during 2006. This produced greater insights into issues involved in client tracking by practitioners working in an established sector which had similarities with the AEGI in Ireland. There was also two observation visits to adult guidance providers in the public employment service in Ireland (FA S, 2006) and in Finland (PES, 2006) to investigate the client data management in both organisations. In addition, a secondary data source involved the use of content analysis on a representative sample of Irish policy documents produced between 1997 and 2008. These documents were interrogated to gain a deeper understanding of the (a) the position of adult guidance in Irish policy discourse; (b) the role of lifelong guidance to support the OECD public policy goals, (c) and the construction of progression.

Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework of discourse was used as a critical analytical framework to describe, interpret and explain the current discursive practices and power relations involved in the evaluation of outcomes in adult guidance. As discursive practices render particular aspects of reality meaningful they are open to intervention and regulation through instruments or technologies such as documentation, computation and evaluation (Edwards,

2008). In adult guidance evaluation, power is secured through meaning as it legitimises some discursive practices (positivist) over others (intepretivist). In the study finding meaning on the discourse of measuring progression in client tracking systems raised a number of important questions, for example:

1. *What is measured?*
2. *What is not measured?*
3. *Who is measuring?*
4. *What is the purpose of measurement?*
5. *How is measurement communicated?*
6. *What subjectivities are brought forth in client monitoring systems?*

In addressing these questions, the analysis focused specifically on Foucault's (1982) theory of 'scientific classification' whereby government monitoring systems decentre the subjectivities of citizens making them objects of knowledge through quantitative indicators. A critical approach helped to emphasise the limitations of the positivist paradigm in capturing the contradictions and inconsistencies of human behaviour in adult guidance practice. In particular, it challenged the prevailing assumptions embedded in Irish educational guidance policy which emphasises the importance of education and employment (hard) outcomes as successful indicators of individual progression. A discussion of the findings and an examination of the implications for policy, practice and research address will be provided in the next section.

#### **Research Findings: Progression Measurement as a Contested Discourse**

The findings from the research were that the longitudinal measurement of progression within the context of the three OECD public policy goals of lifelong learning, labour market and social equity involves a set of complex and contested issues. These issues are concerned with ideologies, power relations and the privileging of certain interests over others in adult guidance practice. At the discourse level, it was found that the variances in perspective relate to the definition of progression, the rationale for measurement and the methodologies employed for long-term analysis.

In definitional terms, the study clearly illustrates that progression is a subjective and context-specific construction which is extremely difficult to define, measure and capture through quantitative methods. The discourse of the clients and practitioners in the study show that as the attribution of meaning on pro-

gression is value-laden, and its generalisability is problematic. Specifically, the particularity and uniqueness of the five client cases underline the difficulty of quantifying the various elements of personal progression through the conventional paradigm.

The evidence suggests that there is a major disparity between the value assumptions espoused by Irish policy makers and the personal experiences of clients and guidance practitioners on the ground. The current emphasis of national policy to achieve hard, tangible outcomes is obviating the measurement of a broad range of softer, intangible outcomes that capture the personal progression of clients. The construction of learning and employment outcomes as a more desirable measurement of progression by the DES reflects a logical-positivist perspective which sits uncomfortably with the developmental aspect of clients' progression. The logical-positivist perspective tends to value individualism, ignores the subjectivity of clients, and disregards the importance of the personal development outcome for clients. Furthermore, the transitional elements of "change, shifts in identity and agency as people progress through the education system" are not revealed through this approach (Field et al, 2009). However, this issue is synonymous with a broader policy discourse in education and guidance that views hard outcomes as more valuable than the softer, personal outcomes experienced by the individual. In particular, the research found that securing employment has been the key hard outcome in Irish policy discourse for the last decade. In light of the recent downturn in the economy it is likely that adult guidance services will come under increasing pressure to ensure this outcome is achieved despite the inadequate resources made available to them.

In Irish education policy progression is viewed as advancement or movement forward from a less favourable position to an improved higher level position and with prescribed outcomes related to education and employment. The findings corroborate McGivney's (2002) claim that the process aspect of learning and guidance is overlooked by the DES in the drive for standardised and measurable parameters in the AEGI. Instead progression is predominantly represented in policy as a linear, vertical process of upward mobility from one level of qualification to the next. The variations in the five clients' experiences show that this may be an incongruous concept for adult learners as a number of the clients had non-linear and unstable education pathways. Moreover, as adults tend to bring their past learning experiences to new situations, progression can also be

measured retrospectively by clients who left school early or experimented with different learning options before they found their niche.

A key finding in the study was that there are a broad range of factors that impact on education and career progression including age, decision-making, motivation, expectations, goals, economic contexts and structural and personal obstacles. In spite of the increased level of supports within adult education provision since 2000, clients continue to experience economic, institutional and personal barriers that hinder their access, retention and progression in education and into employment. Whilst, the DES (2000) claim that the dismantling of structural blockages to educational progression is central to Irish adult education policy, barriers are an issue for many adult learners. Three clients in the study encountered the structural obstacles of course postponement, inflexible provision and course attrition due to lack of support, which hampered their progression over time.

Notwithstanding this, however, it was found that personal obstacles were more common for the clients, signifying that the more immediate dispositional barriers of self-concept, blocks to learning and the realities and responsibilities of everyday life can interfere with clients' progression. Even though Lynch (1999) argues that the financial obstacle is regarded as the primary barrier to participation in Higher Education it was only a significant obstacle for two of the clients in the study. Instead, age was the prevalent theme that emerged in relation to the clients' capacity to manage education gaps during transitions from one stage to the next. As has already been identified by (Bimrose et al, 2008; NGF, 2007a), family responsibilities, health issues, lack of support from family and friends and low self-confidence were consistent personal obstacles for the five clients. In addition, poor time-management and the constant juggling of family and work commitments led to personal compromises and a reduced quality of life for the majority of clients at some point in their progression history.

As a result of these obstacles all of the clients demonstrated high levels of emotional resilience in their progression, a concept which is rarely referred to in guidance policy discourse on outcome measurement. The career experiences of the five clients in the case study supports Kidd's (2006) view that individuals "now have to cope with fragmented working lives and continuous transitions across the lifespan" (p.10). Such transitions can be both intentional or outside the client's control and, as Beck (2001) suggests, involve risk and uncertainty as personal and economic situations change over time. In our current economic

climate the concept of resilience has taken on greater significance as individuals are being forced to cope with unemployment and personal change at an unprecedented level.

The range of less tangible outcomes that emerged from both the clients and the practitioners, supports evidence from other longitudinal case studies that the long-term effects of guidance are numerous (for example, Bimrose et al, 2008). They include access to specialist information; development of insight and focus on options; increased self-awareness, confidence and motivation, and opportunities for reflection in the re-negotiation of earlier choices and future alternatives. An appreciation of the importance of these subtler changes for adults must be considered in the development of outcome measures and service evaluation processes in adult education and guidance contexts.

A number of implications for policy, practice and research emerged in the study. It is now advocated that continuous quality improvement of Irish guidance services needs to be pursued through quantitative and qualitative methods (NGF, 2007a). The research has revealed that as hard and soft outcomes are symbiotically linked, quantitative outcomes alone are insufficient measures of individual progression. Qualitative outcomes need to be incorporated into long-term measurement processes. For example, outcomes related to personal, social and economic progression including self-concept, attitudinal change, choices, personal satisfaction, wellbeing, motivation, personal relationships, goals, skills and mobility. In particular, Bimrose et al's (2008) proposition that the concept of distance travelled needs to be "accepted, respected and integrated into service delivery, both by practitioners and their managers at different levels" was evident in the findings (p.58).

Therefore, in terms of the design of an appropriate longitudinal tracking within the AEGI, the study shows that there are particular challenges for policy makers, guidance practitioners, and adult guidance service managers. Specifically, in relation to the collection of client data and feeding it back into the AGMS the issues include cost, human resources, and staff training within an already budget-constrained sector. Furthermore, the inclusion of a broad range of soft outcomes and the capacity to capture the distance travelled by clients would require the democratic involvement of all key stakeholders in the construction of outcomes for evaluation purposes.

In the context of future research in guidance, the implications of the study's findings relate to methodological and theoretical issues. As the research only revealed one aspect of the user's contribution to service improvement in adult guidance, further elucidation from the perspective of other Irish stakeholders such as practitioners, educators and employers is also necessary. From a theoretical perspective, the study provided greater illumination of the progression of a number of clients who pursued third level education. Further research on the tracking of a broad cohort of mature students in third level would provide greater insights into their personal experiences to inform future policy and practice in guidance and education.

### **Conclusion**

Arising from the findings of the study, it can now be argued that the privileging of hard, quantitative outcomes over soft, qualitative outcomes of by the DES to measure progression in the AEGI is a form of hegemonic practice which needs to be addressed. The use of qualitative approaches can provide a greater understanding of the life-changing effects of interventions on individuals and the complexities of measuring individual progression over time (McGivney, 2002). The study has found that softer measures must be accommodated in longitudinal research to enable a longer-term analysis of a broad range of outcomes for clients (Kidd, 2006; Maguire & Killeen, 2003).

As Plant (2005) contends, the adoption of a democratic approach that incorporates the voice of the client at the individual, service and strategic level is imperative in adult guidance. A primary purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the function and scope of client involvement in determining quality issues in Irish provision. So far, clients have had a marginal involvement in such issues within the AEGI. At a strategic level it is recommended that the voices of users are engaged in policy formation (NGFa, 2007). However, more sophisticated evaluation mechanisms still have to be created to achieve this goal. The outcome of the research has been the proposal of a constructivist evaluation framework that would necessitate the democratic inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in the design of evaluation methods to measure a broad range of outcomes. If such a framework were to be adopted in the AEGI it would have implications for users, practitioners, service providers and policy makers in the future.

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# Institutional Racism in Irish Adult Education: Fact or Fiction?

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## Introduction

This paper examines the concept of institutional racism in Irish adult education. The study of institutional racism in education has been an area relatively untouched by Irish academics to date, and so represents a green field for interested academics and adult educators. For the purpose of providing some context for this concept, a brief outline of race and racism in Ireland is included. This paper will not seek to provide definitive answers to a multifaceted problem, instead, it is intended to present the concept from an Irish adult education perspective and explore its implications for Irish adult education providers. This draws on published literature and from the author's teaching experience. Finally, initiatives which cater for cultural diversity in adult education are discussed.

## Racism and Ireland

The increase of immigrants into Ireland since the mid-1990s has encouraged discussions about ethnic and cultural diversity. Over the years many minority ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups have played their part in making Ireland the country it is today (Regan and Tormey, 2002).

Much of the research suggests that a traditional view of Irishness (a view where cultural diversity and ethnicity is not welcomed or encouraged) has made several Irish people from minority groups feel isolated and excluded. Being "Irish" has also meant that people are part of a "settled" community. This is one reason why the Irish Traveller community have found it so difficult to become part of the "settled" communities in modern Irish society (Ibid, 2002).

Research studies from the 1970s to the 2000s show that Irish people hold hostile views and attitudes toward minority ethnic groups. In 1977, a study conducted by Mac Gréil entitled Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland, highlighted the racist views held by Irish people:

- 16.7 per cent of Irish people believed that Black people because of their temperament could never become good Irish people.
- 10.8 per cent of the Irish sample was of the opinion that Black people were inferior to white people.
- 13.5 per cent of his national sample said that they would welcome a Traveller into the family through marriage, while 59 per cent said they would not welcome members of the Travelling community as next door neighbours.

In 2000, a Euro Barometer study found Irish people to be very unwelcoming to minority ethnic groups in comparison to our European counterparts. The study found that in Ireland:

- 13 per cent of the sample portrayed very negative attitudes towards minority ethnic groups.
- 31 per cent of the sample support promoting equality at all levels of social life (again the lowest figure in the EU).
- Only 32 per cent of Irish people feel minority ethnic groups enrich the Irish culture compared to 50 per cent of all EU citizens.
- Irish people are prepared to welcome Muslims into the country but, are less welcoming to people who have fled situations of conflict or human rights abuses.

(Euro Barometer study 2000, as cited in Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School, NCCA, 2006)

Therefore, while we might as a nation pride ourselves on being the land of a hundred thousand welcomes, it is clear from studies such as the above that there is a certain amount of suspicion in Irish society toward minority ethnic groups. Brady (2008) claims:

Irish people would probably pride themselves on being non- racist and indeed it is probably easier to perceive oneself as such if the population is relatively homogeneous. But one only has to look at the treatment of travellers, or indeed look at the experience in Northern Ireland to see how complex it is to develop a society where equality and justice prevail.

(Brady, 2008, p. 3)

To combat these attitudes the author of this analysis believes an educational response is required to promote and welcome ethnic diversity. Intercultural education requires the student to question, debate, and develop an understanding of the complex issues involved in racism in order to create a more inclusive Irish society (Fanning, 2002).

### **Institutional racism**

The concept of institutional racism first came to the fore in the USA in 1967. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) used the term to depict how white interests, opinions, and attitudes influence the key institutions which form the American way of life. Racism is a multifaceted, occasionally subtle, but forever powerful presence at the core of contemporary society. Education can influence anti-racism and liberation but, all too often, the education system itself adds to the many racist problems which exist in modern society (Haran and Tormey, 2003). Over the years the concept of institutional racism has been variously defined. However, much of the literature suggests there is a disagreement among academics as to what constitutes 'institutional racism'. Most of the literature defines institutional racism with terms such as 'identity', 'culture', 'discrimination', 'ethnic', and 'minority'. It seems bizarre that a concept so obviously significant to Irish society and indeed to education lacks a straightforward and clear definition. Carmichael was one of the first people to define institutional racism:

Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual Blacks, and acts by the total white community against the Black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism.

(Carmichael, 1967, p. 3-4)

In his definition Carmichael (1967) emphasises the concept of institutional racism as a Black/white issue. From reviewing the literature, it becomes apparent that institutional racism incorporates so much more than the colour of a

person's skin. Curtis (1984) cites that due to the famine in Ireland many Irish people had to migrate to Britain. It was during this period that the Irish were often described as 'human chimpanzees', charged with 'backwardness'. Ideas of inferiority were based on the belief that the Anglo-Saxon blood of the English was superior to the Celtic blood of the Irish (Curtis, 1984). The author believes this demonstrates that racism is not always an anti-black issue.

From an Irish educational perspective the term institutional racism has been defined by the NCCA (2006, p. 23) as "a form of discriminatory provisions in legislation, regulations or other formal practices". The author believes this definition does little to define the concept of institutional racism. From an educational context there is no mention of the inadequate English language classes, the insufficient literacy and numeracy classes, the use of unsuitable curricula and assessment methods, and the poor Government funding for education provisions. The recipients of institutional racism are also not included. There is no mention of members of the Travelling community who are the main recipients of institutional racism in Ireland. The White Paper in Adult Education (2000, p. 48) clarifies this point by stating "... Travellers and other minority groups continue to experience serious problems in education generally and in adult education in particular". Two underlying problems faced by Travellers and minority groups are cultural patterns not acknowledged in an educational setting, and poor basic literacy and language education (Ibid, 2000). The author believes that all of the above factors equate to institutional racism in Irish adult education.

The most widely utilised definition of institutional racism comes from a report entitled the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, published in 1999. It defines institutional racism as:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people, because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin, it can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage Black and minority ethnic.

(Macpherson, 1999, p. 28)

The author believes Macpherson's (1999) definition of institutional racism is the most descriptive in terms of what constitutes institutional racism. The author believes this definition highlights that certain processes exist in all

organisations (including education) and as a result of these processes, however unintentionally, disadvantage ethnic minority groups. Carter et al., (2000, p. 3-4) concur with this statement when they highlight that two interconnected processes in particular tend to be focused on: the 'institutional culture', which "is racist if it constitutes a climate of assumptions which are hostile to outsider groups, racially or ethnically defined" and 'routine practices', which are racist if they involve unfair treatment of minority ethnic groups.

The author believes the acceptance of Macpherson's definition by the British Government, and consequent acknowledgement of its applicability to key organisations and institutions' (including education) represents a giant step forward. It entails recognition "that, to thrive, racism does not require overtly racist individuals, and conceives of it rather as arising through social and cultural processes" (Parekh, 2000, p. 71).

Overall, the author maintains the above definitions of 'institutional racism' have given a title to the process of discrimination, and inequality but have eliminated a person's motive, and responsibility for racial abuse. From an educational perspective, the author is of the opinion that much more needs to be done in order to define the concept in the context of adult education. The author maintains factors such as cultural differences, the inappropriate proactive measures used to avoid discrimination, equality of access to and participation of many ethnic minority groups in adult education programmes, the inadequate resources for teaching adults with learning difficulties, and the lack of professional training for adult educators in dealing with diversity all need to be addressed in order to begin defining institutional racism from an adult education perspective.

#### **The Context: institutional racism in Irish adult education**

The relationship between education and racism is extremely complex. Institutional racism in adult education often occurs in an indirect manner and is regularly not acknowledged as racism. It has become entangled with the intellectual and moral standards of many further and higher education institutions in Ireland. Adult education institutions by and large operate with a colour blind approach, and rarely admit that they are institutionally racist.

The White Paper on Adult Education 'Learning for Life' (2000) outlines three principles for the provision and practice of adult education services in Ireland: (1) Lifelong learning as a system approach, (2) Equality and (3)

Interculturalism. The White paper (2000, p. 13) makes a commitment to promote “equality of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education, with pro-active strategies to counteract barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability.”

One particular area mentioned in the document is the term ‘Inter-culturalism’. The paper states:

The need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one, and the development of curricula, materials, training and in-service, modes of assessment and delivery methods which accept such diversity as the norm. This refers not only to combating racism and encouraging participation of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in education, but also to a recognition that many minority groups such as travelers, people with disabilities, older adults, participants in disadvantaged areas may have distinct needs and cultural patterns which must be respected and reflected in an educational context. It also envisages a more active role by adult educators in the promotion of Irish language and culture.

(Learning for Life -White Paper on Adult Education, 2000, p. 13)

The White paper (2000) recognizes that some minority groups have problems accessing the education system and acknowledges the challenge this poses to adult education in terms of: curricula, language, extra-curricular activities, course materials, and modes of teacher training and selection. It reiterates that marginalized groups should be in a position to influence and shape policy. The intercultural principle is welcomed as it illustrates a philosophy of inclusiveness, however, very little has been implemented from the document since its inception in 2000. McDonnell (2002, p.4) concurs with this when she states “much remains to be done in practical terms to make this inclusive vision a reality”. Former Minister of Education and Skills Noel Dempsey (2002) concurs with this when he states that:

Interculturalism in the education sector is essentially about dialogue and interaction, and tailoring of programmes to meet the specific needs of different target groups. It is about inclusion by design, not as a default or an add on. It challenges us to create a more flexible and relevant education system, not only for minority linguistic groups, but also for Travellers, people with

disabilities, and people in disadvantaged areas. It is about realising that “one size does not fit all”, that we must plan to welcome diversity and to cater for it, and that in so doing, we will benefit from the process. It is also about promoting equality and providing positive actions to combat the barriers which different groups face in accessing and benefiting from education.

(Department of Education and Skills, 2010)

This point is further acknowledged by the Parekh Report (2000) in the UK. It states that different language, cultural and ethnic groups often have varied needs and experiences. A fair society and education system is one that can provide for both people’s individuality and their shared identities. The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain –highlights:

Since citizens have different needs, equal treatment requires full account to be taken of their differences. When equality ignores relevant differences and insists on uniformity of treatment, it leads to injustice and inequality; when differences ignore the demands of equality that results in discrimination. Equality must be defined in a culturally sensitive way and applied in a discriminating but not discriminatory manner.

(Parekh, 2000 as cited in Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School, NCCA, 2006)

### **Minority presence in Irish adult education**

In recent times, concepts such as cultural diversity and celebrating difference have been highlighted regularly across many media forms in Ireland. In a so called ‘liberal’ societal context, it could be said that such positive expressions are not respected and celebrated. While primary and second level education in Ireland could be considered evenly balanced as regards access, presently access to further and higher education is incredibly unequal as the low numbers of Travellers, Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and non-EU citizens in Irish Universities and colleges suggest. The Irish Government’s policies of distribution and direct provision for access to third level education have done little to prevent institutional racism from occurring in the Irish education system. In 2004, Former Minister of State Willie O’Dea was quoted as saying that:

It was considered that paying grants to all comers could place intolerable strains on the student support system and might act as an incentive for non-EU nationals to come to the State.

(Dail Debates, May 2004 as cited in Culleton 2007)

The Learning for Life -White Paper on Adult Education (2000) notes the lack of data available relating to Traveller participation in Adult Education. The Travelling Community is Ireland's largest minority ethnic group. It is this ethnic group which suffers the most when it comes to participating in adult education programmes around the country. The white paper (2000) cites that there is a requirement to develop specific strategies to make certain that integration in adult education occurs for Travellers by:

Awareness training, culturally relevant programmes and materials, an inter-cultural anti-racist curriculum, supporting services such as guidance and childcare, and outreach networking and dialogue with Traveller Organisations concerning the delivery of programmes.

(Learning for Life -White Paper on Adult Education, 2000, p. 172)

#### **Participation and achievement rates of minority ethnic groups in Irish adult education**

Participation rates in further and higher education by members of the Travelling Community are extremely low. A report published in 2006, entitled Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy highlighted that in 2004, a total of only 835 Travellers were participating in the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in colleges of further education. Higher education has always been portrayed as playing a role in producing a just and equal society. The Universities Act (1997) is testament to this. The Act compels universities to:

Promote access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people and by people from sections of society significantly underrepresented.

(The Universities Act, 1997)

Similar responsibilities are also bestowed on the fourteen institutes of technology around the country. Until recently very few Travellers have participated in higher education. In 2002 it was estimated that less than 20 Travellers attended higher education. This figure rose slightly in 2004 when 28 Travellers were enrolled in higher education (Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, 2006). A study conducted by the Higher Education Equality Unit (1999, p. 5) highlighted how some Travellers felt about further and higher education in Ireland. The study noted that many Travellers felt that college "environments and staff are not open or welcoming to Travellers and that the

college curricula do not reflect traveller culture and experience". Members of the Travelling community who participate in further and higher education feel "isolated and vulnerable in college" (Ibid p. 5). The high financial cost of attending a further and higher educational institution in Ireland has also prohibited Travellers from attending college or university.

The inadequate empirical evidence available on issues of access, student experiences and achievement rates within further and higher education are stark. For those Travellers that do participate in further and higher education empirical research is urgently required. We only have scraps of anecdotal evidence and personal testimony from families whose children have tried to secure a place at college or university, and the very few who have actually made it to further and higher education. Therefore, without precise quantitative and qualitative information it will be difficult to tackle issues regarding Travellers in adult education. Issues such as nomadism, culture, identity, attitudes, and independence all need to be addressed, if members of the Travelling community are to participate in further and higher education in Ireland in the future (Higher Education Equality Unit, 1999).

Refugees and asylum seekers who live in Ireland also experience very low participation rates at further and higher education. They experience many different forms of discrimination. Many refugees and asylum seekers have come from war torn countries. When they arrive in Ireland they are in a state of legal limbo. Only refugees and those with humanitarian leave can access further and higher education in Ireland. However, residency clauses and recognition of prior educational qualifications cause many problems for this group. Many colleges still endeavour to charge foreign national fees to many people even though they have been granted refugee status (Higher Education Equality Unit, 1999). The link between refugees and poverty has also been established. This can also inhibit many refugees and asylum seekers chances of accessing and participating in Irish adult education.

The White Paper in Adult Education (2000, p. 50) highlights "recognition that many immigrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, have specific urgent requirements, from basic information through to language training". Ward (2001) believes there is little research conducted in Ireland in relation to the language needs of refugees and asylum seekers. This lack of research makes it difficult to assess the 'real' problems associated with refugees and asylum seek-

ers in relation to accessing and participating in adult education. Aontas (2009, p. 5) reports “nine percent of the workforce and 11% of the population are newcomers to Ireland yet there is no dedicated funding to support the teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages” (ESOL Learners: NALA, 2006 as cited in Aontas, 2009). While language programmes exist in the form of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), they have been deemed to be unsuitable because they are designed for people who are educated, and who are learning English as a second language. Such TEFL programmes have reported high absenteeism because of the following factors: long driving distances, no crèche facilities, and people who work illegally cannot participate in such courses in case they are deported (Ward, 2001). These factors hinder refugees and asylum seekers from obtaining formal qualifications because they cannot understand the native tongue. As a result, refugees and asylum seekers are excluded from participating in adult education initiatives. McDonnell (2002, p. 10) cites that “much remains to be done in terms of developing and implementing a coherent national service for immigration groups and speakers of other languages”.

The Higher Education Equality Unit (1999) also draws attention to the language needs of asylum seekers. It highlights that asylum seekers are in low-paid unskilled employment and are caught into a cycle of dependency on social welfare. As a result they do not have access to free language tuition. Inglis (2001, p.23) report’s that “asylum seekers are still one of the most materially disadvantaged groups in Irish society”.

Article four of the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education 1960 (as cited in Higher Education Equality Unit, 1999) compels Governments to develop and apply policy in a manner which will “promote equality of opportunity and of treatment in the manner of education”. The Government of Ireland and particularly the Department of Education and Skills have failed many adults hoping to return to education. The White Paper on Adult Education (2000, p. 49) acknowledges this when it states “...ationally organised education systems find it difficult to respond to the needs of particular sub-groups”. In 2007, the budget for education was approximately €8 billion. However, adult education was only allocated two per cent of that budget (Aontas, 2009). With such an insignificant budget many adult education initiatives such as education and language projects cannot take place. As a result, asylum seekers, refugees and other minority ethnic groups who depend on these adult education services will continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society.

McDonnell (2002) maintains that inadequate provision of literacy and language training is only part of the problem. She claims:

Funding provision for adult education and training opportunities for refugees/ asylum seekers/ migrant workers needs to go beyond the provision of literacy and language training. Otherwise, real inter-culturalism will not be achieved, and the potential of adult education in promoting anti-racism will not be adequately.

(McDonnell, 2002, p. 7)

Brady (2008) is also of the opinion that:

Facilitating intercultural communication in adult/ community education needs to be adequately resourced in terms of funding and materials. Funding must be ring-fenced to facilitate intercultural communication including the training of educators in approaches and materials developed to support that work. Supports must also be put in place to ensure that minority ethnic groups are able to participate in adult & community education.

(Brady, 2008, p. 5)

#### **Practices of institutional racism in teaching and learning in adult education**

Many adult learners’ experiences of institutional racism and discrimination in adult education are not homogeneous; they are experienced in numerous ways by different people in different places and at different times. Racism permeates the very notions that shape our educational system (Richards, 1997). The author believes there are many subtle examples of institutional racism taking place in the Irish adult education system. It exists in our forms of assessment, in the classroom and in the staffroom. From teaching experience, the author has witnessed while sitting in staffrooms racist things being said about adult learners. Many adult educators have openly admitted to ignoring ‘certain’ students in the classroom. Many educators have also suggested that ‘some’ students take different subject modules from their own so that they do not have to teach them.

The role of adult educators is often overlooked in relation to the provision of adult education. Educators need to be aware when considering the teaching and learning environment and the needs of all students. The practice of learning should be inclusive and consider the needs of all adult learners in relation to their ethnicity, religion, gender, disability and so on. Educators must be

aware their expectations for students may be based on stereotypes, and notions about particular ethnic groups and their potential for achievement (Haran and Tormey, 2003). The educator's lack of teaching experience and qualifications can often lead to indirect discrimination, particularly with the lack of teacher training, and the unsuitable teaching methods and approaches often used in a classroom. The White Paper (2000, p. 152) cites "those employed in the Adult Education field have been recruited on the basis of a second-level teaching qualification or a trade or business qualification". This highlights the need for teacher trained adult educators in the sector. The author maintains if students from different backgrounds, cultural beliefs, and educational needs are to be treated equally; the need for trained educators is a must. McDonnell (2002, p.7) maintains a review of internal policies of adult education centres and "addressing staff training needs" is crucial to the Irish adult education system. The White Paper (2000, p. 150) concurs with this as it states "it can only do so on the basis of a highly trained corps of adult educators and trainers who are dynamic and equipped to lead change".

Education institutions and adult educators need to reflect upon their assessment practices, and their curriculum to make sure they consider the numerous ways in which current subject matters may discriminate against minority ethnic groups because of the inappropriate use of teaching resources and materials. Curricula in the adult education system should promote respect for all cultures and traditions in society. Assessment methods used for adult learners whom English is not the mother tongue should be flexible. Whitty et al., (1998) believes exam arrangements should allow the adult learner a dictionary, extra time or an oral exam, should the level of attainment in English prevent an adult learner from understanding or answering a question satisfactorily. These scholars are also of the opinion that libraries in educational institutions should have books in the adult learners' native language.

Much is found in the literature about the benefits of active learning techniques used in education. Active learning approaches are crucial to the successful delivery of most subjects. Active learning techniques allow adult learners an opportunity to show what they know from previous classroom or life experiences. Material must be presented in a number of ways to allow for student engagement in all subjects. However, this active learning approach is not occurring in the adult education sector. Morgan (2000) (as cited in McVeigh and Lentin, 2002) conducted a study into the methods of instruction used in adult educa-

tion courses. The study showed that 80.6 per cent of all adult educators used instruction, seminars or workshops to deliver their subject. Clearly, these teaching methods of instruction may not be meeting the needs of many adult learners. Whitty et al., (1998) claim that experiential learning methodologies must be incorporated into the adult education system. They believe peer education, collaborative learning and cross-curricular work will promote anti-racist intercultural education. However, they also note that teaching staff have to be well resourced in terms of teaching skills, teaching resources, class size and space. The author of this analysis claims if adult educators had the 'appropriate' training they would be in a better position to meet the needs of adult learners, which would lead to a more inclusive adult education system.

In 1997, a survey was conducted by the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey to establish the literacy skills of Irish adults aged 16-24. Findings from the survey are startling. The survey reported that twenty five per cent of Irish adults were at the lowest level from a literacy perspective. The survey found those Irish adults particularly the unemployed, older adults and early school leavers were most at risk of experiencing literacy difficulties (McDonnell, 2002). It is well documented that there are inadequate literacy and numeracy services available to many adults in Ireland. These inadequate services are examples of institutional racism in adult education. As Connolly (2005, p. 56) notes, literacy and numeracy problems are "debilitating for the individual". The White Paper (2000, p. 50) acknowledges this problem when it cites, there is a need to "provide specific tailored programmes and basic literacy....education". From teaching experience the author has experienced the majority of adult learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly members of the Travelling community suffer the most with literacy, and numeracy problems. Access to third-level and adult education programmes is impossible for such people. The White Paper in Adult Education (2000, p. 172) notes there is a need for Travellers to be, "targeted within adult literacy and VTOS programmes and for dialogue on how the schemes can be adapted to strengthen their relevance for these groups".

The author believes that practices of institutional racism in Irish adult education are so deeply rooted in the culture of adult educational institutions that the majority privilege is largely unrecognised. The author is of the opinion that making adult educators aware of their prejudices is the first step to tackling institutional racism.

The author of this analysis is acutely aware that this article gives only an anecdotal account of the issues contributing to institutional racism in Irish adult education. The author acknowledges that without adequate research and hard facts some information in this article could be open to dispute. Therefore, the author maintains that empirical research on how ethnic minority groups experience adult, further and higher education in Ireland is urgently required.

#### **Anti-racist policies and initiatives in the Irish adult education sector**

In recent times, the Irish Government has worked to combat racism and to promote intercultural policies, practices and procedures in Ireland. The Government has introduced both legislation and initiatives. The most applicable initiative to education was the Government's development of the National Action Plan Against Racism (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2010). This is an action plan used to tackle racism in Irish education. The document is informed by legal and policy instruments, incorporating a human rights, democracy and equality framework. Development and intercultural education viewpoints also inform the document.

The National Action Plan Against Racism has developed many initiatives to help combat institutionally racist practices in the adult education sector. It highlights that education can play a crucial role in promoting a respect for different cultures and ethnic minority groups.

In Further and Adult Education funding was secured to Integrate Ireland Language Training for staff development and resources for addressing the literacy and language needs of adult asylum seekers. Programme delivery is provided for in VEC's but only to the extent that that the Literacy budget allows.

Many educational establishments around the country have undertaken research on interculturalism issues with funding provided by the Irish Government. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in collaboration with the Dublin project and the Integrate Ireland Language Training Unit examine the issue of addressing adult literacy and language needs, and make recommendations on a framework and costings for addressing future needs in this area. In 2002, Former Minister of Education and Skills Noel Dempsey acknowledged the importance of research in the area of racism and interculturalism. He highlighted that:

Combating racism and discrimination is not merely an attitudinal issue. A meaningful equality strategy requires that positive actions are put in place to address barriers which particular groups face. In this case, the issue is not merely a question of resources, but also an issue of how best to go about the task, which is new territory for our education system. This is why research and reports...are so important, so that we can build on best practice internationally and adapt it as necessary to meet our needs.

(Department of Education and Skills, 2010)

Over the last number of years many initiatives have taken place to combat racism and to promote intercultural policies, practices and procedures in the Irish education system. The Department of Education and Skills have established an Integration Unit to liaise with other Government departments and educational organisations to address issues of racism and interculturalism.

The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education highlighted in its Plan 2008-2013, that Ireland needs to have special regard to the needs of recent immigrants. Many migrants have experienced dissatisfaction at not having their qualifications recognised in Ireland. To help combat this, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland established 'Qualifications Recognition Ireland' (QRI). It provides advice on international qualifications and their equivalence to Irish qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications. Former Minister for Integration, Lenihan (2008) stated "It is critical for migrants coming to Ireland that their existing education and qualifications are recognised so that they can fully participate and integrate into Irish society" *Department of Education and Skills, 2010*.

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) in collaboration with the students union of Ireland run anti-racism campaigns in third level colleges to promote diversity and multiculturalism in higher education. The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) supports projects aimed at widening participation for all ethnic minority groups in Irish education.

In 2002, Former Minister of Education and Skills Noel Dempsey launched a resource pack developed by the Higher Education Equality Unit aimed at personnel working in the higher education sector on addressing issues of racism and interculturalism. Department of Education and Skills, 2010.

In 2006, the Department of Education and Skills in collaboration with the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education launched a document entitled the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy. The report examined the existing provisions and resources allocated for Travellers from primary education to the third level education. Former Minister of Education and Skills (2006) Mary Hanafin, noted that:

We must ensure that equality and diversity permeate all aspects of our education system. Education is a vital element in supporting greater participation and empowerment by Travellers in our society. The report contains many recommendations across the education spectrum for parents, pre-school, primary, post primary, further education, higher education and lifelong learning. It provides a catalyst for moving on from what was, in the past, a negative experience for many Travellers, towards a quality education for all in an inclusive and integrated setting.

(Department of Education and Skills, 2010.)

In Ireland today, it is illegal to discriminate against people under two vital pieces of legislation, the Employment Equality Act (1998), and the Equal Status Act (2000) (NCCA, 2006). In 2000, the Education (Welfare) Act was enacted to provide an education specific legal foundation for anti-racism inclusive policies in educational establishments. The Education Act (1998) was ratified to:

Make provision...for the education of every person in the state, including any person, with a disability or...other special need and to provide generally for primary, post-primary, adult and continuing education and vocational education and training; to ensure that the education system is accountable to students, their parents and the state for the education provided, respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society.

(The Education Act, 1998)

A large amount of Ireland's policy framework for education has sought to promote inter-culturalism and equality through all sectors of Irish education. The 1995 White Paper on Education – Charting our Education Future – points out that equality and pluralism are two of the crucial issues underpinning our educational policy. It also cites “the democratic character of this society requires education to embrace the diverse traditions, beliefs and values of its people” White Paper on Education – Charting our Education Future 1995, p. 9.

The author believes that the implementation of equal opportunities policies is something to be welcomed. However, it is worth pointing out there is always the danger that such policies become a theoretical blueprint that fails to have any association with the daily procedures within all institutions (including education), or that fails to change the working culture in any way. The author is of the opinion that passing policy is not the same as implementing or developing policy, both of which require dedication and resources with educational institutions.

### **Adult education initiatives catering for diversity**

In the UK, the Rampton Report (1981, p. 27) states that:

A ‘good’ education cannot be based on one culture only...where ethnic minorities form a permanent and integral part of the population, we do not believe that education should seek to iron out the difference between cultures, nor attempt to draw everyone into the dominant culture.

From an Irish perspective, Inglis (2001) concurs with this statement when he claims;

Adult education, or formal learning programmes, can play a crucial role in creating a mature democratic inclusive civil society, in which there is recognition, acceptance and appreciation of difference.

(Inglis, 2001, p. 12)

Therefore, with this in mind it is worthwhile to note while much remains to be done to make the Irish adult education system inclusive to all minority ethnic groups, various initiatives have occurred within adult education which embrace cultural diversity and in turn, prevent institutional racism from happening in the future. Ward (2001, p. 21) reports in certain classrooms, there can be significant ethnic tension among many adult learners. However, there are many adult educators now “with intercultural working experience and conflict resolution skills”. The author believes this allows those educators to deal with difficult situations should they arise.

Ward (2001) also claims there are many adult educators who are taking an active learning approach in the classroom. She maintains adult educators are applying their subjects to real-life situations. She believes educators “began using communicative teaching approaches and started using authentic teach-

ing materials (i.e. bus timetables and so on) to enable students to cope with everyday situations” (Ward, 2001, p. 21). The author believes educators who apply active learning techniques will be in a better position to meet the needs of all adult learners in future years.

The creation and delivery of courses such as Graduate Diploma in Adult Education programmes means the Irish Government and those in decision making positions in education, acknowledge the need for suitably qualified adult educators to deal with all issues in a classroom, including cultural diversity. This is further acknowledged by the Irish Governments’ support for such courses to be applicable for tax relief for people interested in obtaining an adult education qualification.

Therefore, while it is obvious that initiatives have been established and targets set to achieve equality outcomes, these initiatives are not yielding the results that were anticipated and desired. There is an apparent need to tackle racism and discrimination against minority ethnic groups in adult education and indeed throughout Irish society as a whole. It is the opinion of the author, that if institutional racism is to be addressed satisfactorily in adult education, anti-racist legislation must be enforced in order to prevent racism and discrimination in the future.

#### **Tackling institutional racism in Irish adult education in the future**

In order to prevent racist practices from occurring in the Irish adult education system in the future, the National Action Plan Against Racism (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform) sets out a number of recommendations. A summary of which are as follows:

- Adult education programme providers should have clear anti-racist policies which are adequately monitored and committed to developing anti-racist practice.
- Adult education establishments need to develop policies which address recruitment, admission, equality, anti-racism and bullying issues and these policies should be accompanied by clear guidelines which are known and implemented by all adult educators.
- An anti-racist intercultural ethos should underline future policies and practices in the adult education sector.
- Adult educators should be appropriately trained and prepared to facilitate anti-racist education and training.

- Dialogue and partnership between Government departments, Traveller educational organisations and ethnic interest groups is essential to promote policies and best practice.
- Better funding and support mechanisms need to be put in place regarding adults who have childcare and other costs to contend with while attending adult education courses.
- All modules and curricula should promote respect for all ethnic minority groups
- New assessment methods need to be developed in line with best practice to make sure that language, qualification and other barriers do not result in unsuitable placements.
- Teaching and learning resources should be equality-proofed and reflect the cultural diversity of the classroom.

The author believes the guidelines drafted by the National Action Plan Against Racism lay a solid foundation in order to begin tackling institutional racism in Irish adult education. However, unless these guidelines are implemented and monitored adequately by adult education establishments not much success will be achieved in combating institutional racism.

The author also believes that it is worthwhile to note that the existence of anti-discriminatory policies and the seriousness afforded them, can impact on the culture of an educational establishment and influence the views, responsiveness and commitment of adult educators to anti-discriminatory practice.

The author of this analysis believes that to tackle institutional racism in the classroom adult educators should incorporate Bank’s (2001) Dimensions of Multicultural Education into their classrooms and subjects areas. The five dimensions are:

- Content integration: This deals with the extent to which adult educators use examples and subject matter from a multitude of cultures and groups to demonstrate the key concepts and theories in their subject area.
- The knowledge construction process: This refers to adult educators helping adult students learn how knowledge is structured and how it is influenced by social class, ethnic, and racial positions of diverse groups.
- Prejudice reduction: This helps adult learners to develop positive and democratic attitudes towards others.
- Equity pedagogy: This exists when adult educators change their teaching methods in ways that will allow adult learners to achieve academic success.

- An empowering school culture: This entails the restructuring of a classroom so that adult learners from different socioeconomic, ethnic, racial and language groups experience equality.

The author believes if all adult educators incorporated just two of the five overlapping principles suggested by Bank's (2001) it would be one huge step forward to combating institutional racism in Irish adult education.

### Conclusion

Institutional racism is a concept relatively untouched by Irish academics to date. It is a way in which minority ethnic groups endure discrimination because of intrinsic racism in the structures of the Irish adult education system. The current system of further and higher education transparently fails to deliver equality of opportunity to many minority ethnic groups. Different levels of attainment and rates of exclusion highlight the practices of institutional racism in our adult education system. Institutional racism does exist in various guises in adult education. Asylum seekers and refugees more often than not cannot find 'suitable' English language courses because those courses which are available are only suited to educated people. Inadequate literacy services affect Ireland's biggest single minority group, Travellers. Unqualified adult educators have also led to institutional racism occurring in Irish adult education. Such educators lack the skills and appropriate teaching methods to teach adult learners. As a result, these educators fail to meet the needs of the adult learner.

It should be noted, that while institutional racism is occurring in adult education, there are some initiatives taking place in adult education that welcome cultural diversity. Most notably, some adult educators have intercultural working experience and conflict resolution skills to deal with situations. Many educators are starting to use authentic teaching materials which meet the needs of all adult learners. Finally, the creation and delivery of courses such as Graduate Diplomas in Adult Education affirms the Government's acknowledgement for the need of suitably qualified adult educators.

The National Action Plan Against Racism (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform) sets out a number of draft recommendations to tackle institutional racism in Irish adult education. Such developments have resources implications, but the author believes if there is a serious dedication to tackling institutional racism, resources should be provided.

Overall, it is clear that institutional racism occurs in subtle forms in the Irish adult education sector and what is worse, is that little has been done in the Irish adult education system to prevent this most menacing form of racism. If, as educationalists, we are serious about race equality, every one of us must critically examine our practices and beliefs. It is no longer possible or acceptable for adult educators to excuse their role in institutional racism on the basis of their ignorance. As Gambe et al., (1992) notes:

Anti-racism should not be seen as offering certainties, absolute for all time. We have to be ready to change and adopt our ideas in the light of experience, debate and developments.

(Gambe et al., 1992, p. 10)

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# Professionalising Community Work and its implications for Radical Community Education.

CAMILLA FITZSIMONS

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## Abstract

*This article adopts a radical lens and examines the relationship between community development, adult education and professionalism. It draws from research on one specific community- university partnership and presents the professionalisation of community work as detrimental to radical practice because of its encouragement of individual vertical progression for learners and a favouring of professional practitioner benefits over collective community gain.*

## Introduction

Twenty years ago, Mary Whelan (1990) wrote an article entitled Training and Professionalisation in Community Work. In it she identified a tension between community workers residing in disadvantaged areas that were affected by poverty and exclusion, and 'outsider' community workers, people from other areas and usually with middle class origins, also enraged by inequality. She challenged the appropriateness of professionalising community work arguing that to do so would exacerbate tension between these disparate groups. Quoting documentation from a working group within the Community Workers Cooperative (CWC) she refers to their description of professionalisation as an "anathema" to practice and quotes them directly when they state,

The process of professionalisation is about gaining status. It is a search for power, money and control over the practice of community work. It is a process whereby a small group decides on the rules of entry and works to have them accepted and so build up a membership. The profession resulting from this process would be:-exclusive with restricted right of entry;-self-regulating and as such, not answerable to the community.

(1990, p. 154)

During the ensuing years the once marginal suggestion that community development<sup>1</sup> can deliver social change towards egalitarianism has been embraced across the political spectrum. Theoretically the dominant discourse is towards pluralism, and the notion of civil society as the terrain for participatory democracy within which the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS)<sup>2</sup> is a key player would appear virtually uncontested. Despite early objections such as the one that opens this article, the need to professionalise also commonly goes uncontested. Professionalisation is linked to a need to raise standards of practice to ensure a robust, cohesive and effective movement. However the professionalisation debate, although somewhat muted, has not gone away and concerns have been raised about its potential to distance grass-roots activism (Meade & O'Donovan, 2002, p. 8) and of its over-emphasis on technical competence above ideological debate (Thompson, 2007, p. 29).

This paper contributes to the debate on professionalism with a specific focus on its impact on radical community education. It draws from a case study that examines a partnership arrangement between a Community Development Project (CDP) whose origins are influenced by the writings of Freire, and a University Department openly committed to a critical pedagogy agenda. These organisations have been working together for almost twenty years and the fruit of this partnership is a locally delivered and university accredited Certificate in Community Development and Leadership which is delivered over one academic year. This article focuses on a central finding from this research, namely of a continued tension between 'outsider' and 'local' community workers. It argues current professionalisation trajectories are intrinsically linked to the accreditation of learning, and are exacerbating tensions through the promotion of individual practitioner advancement over collective community praxis.

Following an explanation of research methodology, the piece discusses the analogous relationship between community development and community education when considered at their radical ends. It then outlines core arguments surrounding professionalisation with a particular emphasis on its relationship with accredited learning. Theoretical propositions draw on Freirean and Gramscian philosophies, the purpose of which is to identify contradictions between these ideas and professionalisation. Following this, pertinent findings from primary research are drawn out. The article concludes with a brief outline on some of the wider implications for radical community education/community development as a social movement for change.

### **Research methodology**

The data presented is drawn from research I undertook between 2007 and 2009. The primary purpose of this research is to examine the aforementioned community-university partnership's potential to advance social justice; a guiding principle of radical interpretations of both community education and community development, and an aspiration for both organisations. Alongside documentary analysis, qualitative methods were employed namely one to one interviewing of a twenty-five strong research population, the majority of who were past students of the certificate course from 2005-2008. All past students were involved in community work across Dublin, either paid or voluntarily, and all but two identified themselves as representative of the communities the CVS purport to represent. Interviews were also carried out with individuals working within both organisations. Purposeful sampling was used meaning candidates were deliberately chosen in order to encourage maximum generation of relevant data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 56). A case-study approach afforded the opportunity to explore micro-level experiences, which can then be considered in the midst of wider macro-level debate (Robson, 2000, p. 5).

All research brings with it an auto-biographical element (West, 1996, p. 17) and this research was viewed through an anti-positivist critical research paradigm. Ontological assumptions rely heavily on Freirean interpretations of oppressive social stratification, liberation from which can only be realized through radical change, in other words deep-seated political and economic transformation. I also concur with suggestions of Ireland as a "neo-liberal state", a political arrangement that practices neo-liberalism without the utopian vision of state shrinkage usually associated with this particular ideology (Allen, 2007, p. 67). In addition personal experiences are at play including my involvement with the work as past Coordinator of the CDP under examination (as an outsider community worker) and also involvement with the university department as a post-graduate student.

### **Community education, community development and praxis**

Although community development and adult education are sometimes presented as separate disciplines, there is a lengthy history that connects the two. Internationally, adult education as community development has been traced to the UK University Settlement Movements of the 1920's (Gilchrist, 2009, p. 25) and, at its inception, the US National Association of Adult Education (NAAE) declared community the "sociological nexus of adult education" (Spense &

Wolff, 1953, p. 248). However it is community education in particular that is most associated with processes of community development and its interpretation as a socially transformative process has led to elucidations of a symbiotic relationship between the two (Lovett, 1995, Fordham, 1979, Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989, Connolly, 1996). Supporting this, the emergence of community development in Ireland (particularly in an urban setting) has been linked to grass roots anti-poverty focused education groups (Brady, 2003, p. 40, Connolly, 2003, p. 50) and the ideologies of Freire are commonly evoked by both schools. The community development worker becomes the critical educator who, through everyday issues, poses questions that encourage communities to interpret their world in a critical way. Crucially, this new reading is then used to inform actions and, through continual appraisal of these actions, praxis emerges. Connolly (1996) exemplifies the relationship between the two disciplines when she states, “community development without the essential elements of emancipatory learning domesticates the activists and subverts the possibility of radical social change...adult education without the conduit of community development remains located in the personal” (1996, p. 40).

Community development is however a problematic concept. There have been contestations of the virtues of community, a notion usually based on historical images of support and solidarity that often fail to focus on more potent underbellies of NIMBYism and exclusion (Mayo, 2000, p. 41, Shaw, 2008). Equally overlooked are the impacts of residualization; communities are encouraged to galvanise community spirit and overcome disadvantage without due regard for the impact of poor planning decisions and of government policy that is detrimental to adequate social housing provision (Fahey, 1999, p. 20). Not only are geographical depictions questionable, communities of interest, such as the gay or Muslim community, surely signify a level of exclusion from more ‘mainstream’ community in the first place?

Core principles guiding community development namely empowerment and participation also warrant scrutiny. Empowerment - a process that encourages individuals to better understand their capacity to control their lives therefore enabling them to become more active citizens (Schuftan, 1996) is meaningless without a corresponding concession by power-holders. The experiences of the CVS in corporatist arrangements show this has not been forthcoming to date (Murphy, 2002, Meade, 2005). Similarly participation - the involvement of groups otherwise excluded from a range of decision-making fora (CWC, 2008,

p. 26), can be interpreted through Arnstein’s “ladder of citizen participation” (1969). This ‘ladder’ ranges from manipulation/tokenism at one end, to citizen power at its peak but in reality, the term ‘active citizenship’ is commonly used to describe bottom rung information giving and consultation processes that legitimise decisions already made by the state (Cornwall, 2008, p. 270). Another fundamental problem with participation is a potential for presentations of ‘good/welcome participation’ in particular compliant engagement in corporatist governance, and ‘bad/unwelcome participation’ including demonstrations and pressure group campaigning often borne out of discontent with seemingly democratic structures available (McClymont & O’Hare, 2008).

It is also common for community development to be tracked along two distinctive theoretical pathways that are either pluralist or radical (Hanmer, 1979, Popple 1995, p. 4). Each school acknowledges a political dimension to practice but differ on their analysis of power. Pluralism understands power as something diffuse that can be shared by competing groups; a robust CVS can therefore negotiate a more equitable distribution. Radical conceptions arm themselves with a Marxist analysis and link community development to wider class struggle (Hanmer 1979, p. 205, Ledwith, 2005, p. 11, Gilchrist, 2009, p. 26). Radical models position power with those wishing to maintain the status quo arguing systemic change is what is needed rather than negotiation within the realms of current arrangements. However, it is hard to ignore a persistent theory-practice divide as it is likely most practitioners do not consciously endorse either ideology. Increasingly the CVS is becoming enveloped in front line service provision, a situation that has been compounded by the state’s prioritisation of funding for services and reluctance to finance research work or actions that attempt to influence public opinion (Lee, 2006, p. 16-17). Where community development is radically motivated, there can also be a tendency towards prioritising reflective components (oftentimes within community education classroom settings). What can be lacking is due regard for action components upon which praxis is also dependent.

### **Professionalisation and accreditation**

Amidst these contestations and discrepancies, the professionalisation of community work is however gathering considerable momentum. Professionalism is being explicitly linked to the raising of standards, standards that “will provide a benchmark by which we measure the effectiveness of quality community work” (CWC, 2008, p. 20). There is nothing wrong with giving consideration

to technical standards and competence indeed some radical adult educators have expressed concern about in-attention to the proficiencies of the trade at the expense of more 'high-browed' academic discourse (Collins, 1995, p. 47, Holst, 2009). However, there are sociological interpretations of professionalism that present it as something primarily about practitioner self-promotion with the benefits of professional status being most tangible for the professional her/himself and not the clientele (in this case the community) s/he serves (Larson, 1977, MacDonald, 1995, Kennedy, 2007). Although it has been suggested the professionalisation of community work in Ireland "should avoid professional self interest as a main defining character" (Crickley & McArdle, 2009, p. 20), it is unclear how this is to be avoided and processes to date have followed the usual touchstones of professionalisation. Firstly, to support any profession, there needs to be a specialist and 'scientifically verified' body of knowledge validated through university recognition (Larson, 1977, Houle, 1980, Cervero, 1988, Collins, 1995, MacDonald, 1995, Wilson, 1995, Merriam & Brocket, 1997, Flexner, 2001). Last count, there were over thirty domestic university accredited community development courses on offer (O'Leary & Conroy, 2006) as well as a number of home grown academic publications<sup>3</sup>. As with other social justice fields of study, specialist knowledge in community development (and adult education) continues to grow and applying credentials to measure the transfer of these 'specialisms' re-enforce the importance of the university system preserving its image as the gate-keepers of 'expert knowledge'. When disciplines are then built around concerns with equality, justice and the eradication of poverty, surely the resultant professionals become dependent on the continuation of the social circumstances they set out to eradicate for their own academic and professional survival?

A second component to successful professionalisation is the emergence of a state recognised elite. This elite are central to the development of approved ideology, central to agreeing characteristics that form the basis of membership, and central to negotiations with the state to agree levels of autonomy granted (MacDonald, 1995, p. 7-8). Professionalisation in Ireland has most recently been bolstered by the publication of Towards Standards for Quality Community Work, the first account of a consultation process driven in the main by the CWC<sup>4</sup> and The Department of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth<sup>5</sup>. The document clearly favours pluralist approaches when it commits the future of community development to "networking, solidarity and engagement with all of the stakeholders, including central government and local authorities"

(CWC, 2008, p. 13). It identifies its intention to establish agreed standards and approved qualifications for community workers and proposes the establishment of an independent monitoring body to oversee these 'advances'. The publication conceptualises standards as an inventory of agreed requirements listed under the headings "knowledge", "skills", and "qualities". Together these enhance an individual's capacity to support a process grounded in the core principles of community development namely "collective action", "empowerment", "social justice", "equality and anti-discrimination", and "participation" (ibid, p. 22-26).

The quandary with agreeing "essential prerequisites" (ibid, p. 20) is the corresponding need for proof of competence generally measured through academic accreditation. What this does is favour prescriptive curricula, more readily able to gauge the transfer of these attributes, over Freirean methods of being led by a learning group's generative themes. Organic efforts at dialogic learning that take into account group needs, aspirations, and intent are therefore at risk of being standardised and squeezed towards non-Freirean banking approaches where the expert teacher fills the student receptacles with the knowledge deemed most relevant by the academic institution awarding credentials. Whilst it can be argued Towards Standards does not negate radical approaches rather equips practitioners to implement them, we cannot ignore the way our formal education systems have generated class discrimination through inequality of access, participation, and outcome (Lynch & Baker, 2005, p. 135). It therefore seems likely the outsider community worker, more adept in formalised study, will more readily fit into prescriptive and credentialised learning environments. Academic qualifications also place a 'use value' on courses to be exchanged for recognition as an 'approved' community worker. The educational journey becomes an individualised, often costly one, taken in order to satisfy accreditation requirements for professional entry, rather than the collective journey towards praxis led by community concerns and issues.

#### **Why professionalism and radicalism are diametrically opposed.**

Freire suggests that interventions to advance learning can never be neutral. They either maintain the "submersion of consciousness" or "strive for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (1970, p. 62). When learners are liberated towards 'conscientization', they are freed from considering their position in history as either fatalistic or the will of God (ibid, p. 37). Freire was not a reformist and believed the solution to inequality is "not to inte-

grate them [the oppressed] into the structure of oppression” (ibid, p. 48), but to transform the structures themselves. Comparisons can be drawn between Freirean ideology and Gramscian theories of hegemony and intellectualism and it is not unusual for radical community development theorists to evoke the ideas of both (Popple, 1995, p. 44/52, Ledwith, 2005). Gramsci identifies the presence of organic intellectualism in each social stratum. Crucially, rather than being distinguishable by their profession, organic intellectuals are discernable by their role in directing the ideas and the objectives of the class they are bound to (1971, p. 3). The challenge for ‘working class’ organic intellectuals, is to encourage an alternative-hegemony that reframes common sense reason. Apply this contemporarily and it can be argued predominant hegemonic logic is the conjecture that, although not terribly popular, there is simply no alternative to neo liberal style global capitalism. For Freireans, the hopeful nature of his works demands a rejection of this TINA assumption.<sup>6</sup> Freire does not advocate blind utopian hopefulness rather he states, “hope of liberation does not mean liberation already. It is necessary to fight for it, within historically favourable conditions. If they do not exist, we must hopefully labour to create them... Without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible” (1998, p. 44-45).

The professionalisation of community work prevents such Freirean envisioning. It does this by embedding the co-option of community development through its interpretation of ‘good/recognised community development’; practice that reveres harmonious and non-confrontational pluralist approaches and ‘bad/un-recognised community development’; practice that challenges the effectiveness of current participatory structures and, if necessary, engages in actions that accost state structures. The dangers of professionalism did not escape Freire himself and his comments illuminate its contradictory relationship with the oneness with communities he encourages:

To serve the dominant order is what many intellectuals of today who were progressive yesterday are doing when they reject all educational practices that unveil the dominant ideology while reducing educational practices to mere transference of contents that are considered “sufficient” to guarantee a happy life...in embracing what appears to them to be new, they are reincarnating old formulas that are necessary to preserve the power of the dominant class. And they do this with the appearance of considering themselves

up-to-date and able to transcend “old ideologies”. They speak of the great need of professionalizing pedagogical programmes even if they are empty of any possibility to understand society critically.

(2001, p. 40-41)

### **Case-study findings**

Thus far it has been suggested that, both theoretically and in practice, there is a contradiction between the professionalism of community work and the practice of community education as community development. This is because the former is dependent on a state approved understanding of harmonious practice, measured through recognised standards and qualifications, and confirmed by vertical academic professional pathways. This negates radicalism through its dependence on prescriptive curricula and endorsement of ‘good/recognised community development’ only, a trajectory likely to better suit the aspirations of outsider community workers. This next section sets this argument against case study findings.

The overwhelmingly reason learners entered into the Certificate in Community Development and Leadership was to acquire a recognised qualification. Qualifications were described by one as “very desirable”, and by many as the only perceived route either from voluntary to paid work, or for promotion within organisations. Nevertheless, many participants were bothered by a belief that an equally valid measure of a good community worker is a legitimate community connection. As one interviewee put it “you would have a passion coming from a community...if you have experienced something...you have more passion, you are more driven by it, you would have more understanding of all sides of it”. This attribution of importance to lived experience by local community workers has also been identified elsewhere (McVeigh, 2002, Henderson & Glen, 2006, p. 282) and as with these sources, the concern raised in this study is that local knowledge and direct involvement through personal experience is not valued to the extent participants feel it should be. Participants are not anti-qualifications, and generally not completely against the intervention of outsiders. A concern nonetheless is of a culture of outsider workers being valued over both local volunteers and local community workers employed on return to employment initiatives (the single biggest source of remuneration for those I spoke to). This was done through the scheduling of meetings during office hours thus excluding volunteers, and of seniority of role determining organisational representation rather than local knowledge/connections. Many felt com-

pletely excluded from representative positions particularly in Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) arrangements and Local Area Partnerships (LAP), and a large number had no knowledge how community representatives gained entry (or exit) to these structures. For those who did manage to get involved, the predominant complaint was of not being listened to. One interviewee illuminates this when she comments:

There are people around the table who are quite high up in their organisations you know and maybe people from the community weren't really listened to. I think maybe that's why people if they are there representing their community do tend to be, maybe aggressive is the wrong word but, maybe they have this reputation because they are not being listened to.

This sentiment was not unique and another interviewee comments, "I don't think the voluntary community workers are always [pause], what they have to say is always appreciated and that maybe sometimes they do actually know something on what is the best way to do something". Another respondent complains of not being listened to at a meeting called by a LAP because, "they [only] take notice of who works for them and who don't live in the area". One final excerpt referring in more general terms to the CVS as a whole captures the emotions expressed by many:

If some-body is running the project well, fair play to them. But if they are not giving an opportunity for local people to be trained into a chance for them to run the project...The whole picture is that they do not want people locally to know what is going on, now I know it sounds paranoid... If it is supposed to be for the community and yet there is no locals, you know, running the community projects, it's just like I say, outsiders as far as I am concerned.

This situation is blamed in part for a corresponding lack of capacity at local level and a belief that communities are not given the chance to develop local leadership. Part of the reason suggested is because outsider community workers can misinterpret their role and take up representative positions rather than be supporters of local representation. One interviewee links the two stating:

I don't think, in fairness to [outsider] workers, like there is no intention, they don't come in intentionally to do that, it's what happens. So that keeps telling

us, or that should keep telling us that somewhere along the way a bit is missing about the building the capacity of people to be the ones who are saying, you know there is a certain piece of work obviously the worker has to do, but when it comes to making, when it comes to negotiations, when it comes to dealing with the local authority, when it comes to local people representing their community on different projects then it is the local people that should do it.

The *Certificate in Community Development and Leadership* is a piece of work initiated to support the development of the kind of local leadership the above passage refers to. Participants from both organisations identify praxis as an overriding aim at course inception, and tutors currently involved in delivery confirm these continuing ambitions. One tutor describes her hope as follows:

You are kind of hoping that at some point people are going to say 'right', cause they have the confidence, and they have some of the skills so therefore you combine the whole lot. They would go off and, you wish they would start a revolution but I mean again too, it depends how you define revolution. But if they get on a board of management of a local organisation and have the confidence to hold their own on it, well then it's the start of a process that can be moved on.

There is supporting evidence of paradigm shifts by some students towards a new reading of the world. These include a greater awareness of oppression based on gender and class, and a deeper analysis of the function of community interventions. These are set against reports of tangible action outcomes directly attributed to course learning. These include a successful defence of a "direct threat" from a Local Authority to withdraw funding for a community initiative, and the establishment of a support and lobbying group for people affected by suicide. The problem however is deep-seated concerns, by tutors in particular, that professionalisation is threatening this approach. One tutor explains:

The people doing the courses and the people active in the community are the real practitioners of it but yet, they are bringing this so called professionalisation to it that I think could ultimately wipe out, or certainly what happens on the ground, leave it in a very less state. And again it comes back to that whole power thing too and I think that it will scare [local] people off. I think it does scare [local] people off.

Where tutors emotions appear particularly strong is when discussion moves to accreditation, a subject they consider entwined with professionalism. They report change emanating from the university since course inception, namely increased assignment demands and greater scrutiny of the credentials of tutors, seemingly regardless of student evaluations of learning. One tutor goes so far as to suggest:

I do think now that, I am going to use the word elitism. They [university department] have managed to put it in there. I think it is almost like competing with other 3rd level institutions to say that they are producing the best and it is because of these assignments and they are piling stuff onto people. The whole emphasis is on theory and I think the risk in that is the local bit gets lost because they want to, 'if its not backed up by theory it's not really relevant'.

Another tutor draws out the impacts she believes this is having on her pedagogic approach. At no time does she, or the other tutors, question the intellectual capabilities of learners, instead the concern raised is that dominant assessment processes give unfair advantage to those more familiar with formalized assessments. She explains:

my experience from a lot of the women, and men, who came on the course, was that some of them had left school very early. They were very capable of doing the [community] work that they did, but really hadn't ever sat down and sort of wrote up 3,000 word essays or whatever it was, or projects. And this was a huge step, a huge, huge step for them you know.

She names an increased number of 'outsider' workers coming into community education who have existing expertise in formal writing and juxtaposes this against those who "participated and they shared this experience or that, that was very moving, very challenging, and couldn't produce an essay. For me, I kind of felt, you know, who are we backing up here?" A final passage from another tutor summarises sentiment well:

The reality is people in communities that have been disadvantaged and lack facilities and have problems, and those people then come together to try to do something about it, in a lot of cases they haven't had the benefit of education from a young age. You know that they left school maybe early for what

ever reasons, and that has been their life so far and they have gone and done whatever they do in their life so they are at a huge – ye, I think my problem with it is that these kind of courses while they are great, can disadvantage, disadvantaged people again. And I think that is sad.

These tutors are not alone in their identification of friction between accreditation and radicalism. Keyes (2004, P.68) identifies "inherent tensions" between radical approaches to education and accreditation claiming discomfort stems from a belief that curricula are either one of two things; student led or subject led.

Returning to this research, there were similar concerns voiced from within the university. Essay type assignments were described as "problematic" and reference was made to a "credentialisation trap" adult and community education is enveloped in. Overall, university sentiment was paradoxical with the virtues of the written word highlighted for its potential to encourage greater conceptualisation of ideas. Yet despite ambivalence towards dominant methods of accreditation, there is no connection named by university staff between accreditation and professionalism. Quite the contrary, there is an uncontested embracement of professionalism in departmental prospectus. Furthermore, in assisting potential students in choosing from the array of courses on offer, the prospectus clearly plays to individual tendencies and states, "it all begins with you, that is with what you want at this particular time in your life". This individual approach to learning from a university department espousing radical education is not unique. A UK based case study that examined a university Department of Adult and Community Education found similar tendencies and warns of its potential to interpret practice as about "the development of individual vertical progression routes for 'disadvantaged' students" rather than about efforts to collectively mould our social circumstances (Ward, 1997, p. 74).

In this study, there is further evidence through interviews of a bias towards vertical progression. One interviewee, occupying a senior management position in the university department, defends the need for academic rigor, even if it excludes local community members, and suggests that those struggling to achieve academic standards might be better served elsewhere. Following discussion identifying concerns by tutors that local people could be excluded this respondent wonders, "is it a university that should be running those courses? Or is there kind of return to learning at an earlier phase, you know, there are other providers that do that...", the rationale presented is the preservation of

university progression routes and the respondent elaborates, “so if you are on a ladder, you are not on a different ladder that is over there for different people, that there is something about people being allowed into the mainstream”. It would appear that efforts at real world connections through which praxis can be encouraged have been usurped by individualised learning pathways in situ to enhance professionalism.

### **The implications for radical adult educators**

Community development is by its nature a political action and any community-university partnership that involves radical educators should reflect an approach that is critical and questioning. This particular research upholds a claim made elsewhere that professionalisation represents “the professional self-interest of an exclusive elite, aiming to promote increasing credentialisation to exclude others, including unpaid activists and volunteers in the very communities in question” (Mayo, 2008, p. 16). This is happening because, at the point of formation, professionalised community work has exposed the organic connections of those at the helm, not with the ‘oppressed’ but with the ‘oppressor’. They have therefore become what Gramsci describes as the messengers through which the consensual adoption of ideology is supported, and act as “the dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern function of social hegemony and political government” (1971, p. 12). Freire also makes clear potential impacts of outside interventions organically at odds with those they seek to emancipate and states:

As they cease to be exploiters or indifferent spectators or simply the heirs of exploitation and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know. Accordingly, these adherents to the people’s cause constantly run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as harmful as that of the oppressors.  
(1970, p. 36)

Outsider community workers do not deliberately set out to further exclude and marginalise the local community workers they align themselves with. The complexities of contemporary community infrastructures also contribute to confusion, particularly the existence of a manufactured civil society created through top-down state structures (Hodgson, 2004). The community workers employed in these organisations are in all probability motivated by a desire to

do good. However, if adult educators align themselves with other academics in support of the development of specialist bodies of knowledge and towards the commodification of credentialised learning, there is the potential to equally reveal organic connections with those wishing to preserve the status quo. The challenge for radical adult educators is therefore to remain critical and questioning in an increasingly un-critical community development terrain. Anti-professionalism does not mean anti-standards; in fact considerable credence is given to the need for high standards of practice from those critical of the appropriateness of professionalising radical adult education (Collins, 1995, p. 47-48, Freire, 2001, p. 85, Holst, 2009, p. 324). The challenge is to maintain standards of practice that safeguard education as an instrument of social change. By resisting the TINA assumption and preserving the hope Freire inspires, we can again begin to encourage a counter-hegemony that challenges the appropriateness of professionalising community work.

### *Notes*

1. Although some commentators use the expressions ‘community work’ and ‘community development’ interchangeably, ‘community development’ is presented in this instance as a process those practicing ‘community work’ adopt to harness power to instigate change (Banks, 2003, p. 10).
2. The CVS is presented as a sector built from the merging of the ‘voluntary sector’ referring to unpaid workers and the ‘community sector’ referring to paid workers, only when this work is underpinned by equality (Powell & Geoghegan, 2004, p. 119). It is acknowledged there have been contestations to the existence of such a sector in itself (for example Collins, 2002, p. 96-97).
3. Publications include *Changing Ireland*, a state funded community development periodical and *Working for Change*, the Irish Journal of Community Work launched in July 2009.
4. Although community work in Ireland is currently uncontrolled, the CWC has been identified in one European study as the closest thing we have to an explicit regulatory body (Hautekeur, 2005, p. 391).
5. Named organisations in the ‘Towards Standards’ document are Belfast Metropolitan College, University of Ulster, Community Action Network, Community Change, Pobail, Rural Community Network, NICVA, Respond! Housing Association, Anna Clarke Development Consultancy, and the Cork Institute of Technology. The work is funded by the Combat Poverty Agency.
6. TINA (There is no alternative) is the slogan commonly attributed to Thatcherism and refers to an assumption that despite the many short-falls

in capitalism, there is no other feasible economic system. Those who wish to dispute this, offer alternative slogans including 'there are thousands of alternatives' TATA, coined by prominent political scientist Susan George and the slogan 'another world is possible' that is popular with anti-globalisation movements.

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# Literacy Learning Care: Exploring the roles of care in literacy learning with survivors of abuse in Irish Industrial Schools

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## Abstract

*The links between literacy and care have received little attention. A general neglect of the affective domain in the academe is strongly echoed in traditional analyses of unmet adult literacy needs where economic causes and consequences dominate debates. The findings from a study of people who are survivors of institutional abuse and neglect suggest that the affective poverty that results from care inequalities has a major adverse influence on the learning of literacy and all the relationships that literacy should subsequently facilitate. Despite its lifelong impact, educational disadvantage can be overshadowed by more shocking aspects of abuse. Recognising the complex nature of literacy learning care may open up a new perspective on the environment in which literacy can flourish and on where responsibility lies to ensure equal access to those fertile surroundings.*

## Introduction

This paper describes the process and findings of a three-year ethnographic case study into the role of care in the learning of literacy. In the general field of education, the role of the emotions has only begun to be explored in depth in the recent past. Theoretical and empirical work has focussed on a range of issues such as: care and the school curriculum (Cohen, 2006, McClave, 2005), teachers' emotional labour (Hargreaves, 2000, 2001), the role of the affective domain in educational ideology (Lynch et al, 2007), a school ethic of care (Noddings, 1992, 2006, 2007) and mothers' care labour in children's education (O'Brien, 2005, 2007, Reay, 2000). Here, in research carried out with survivors of institutional abuse in Irish industrial schools the approach takes a new turn towards the field of adult literacy. In particular, the perspective moves from that of the teacher or parent as caregiver to the experience of the learner as a care recipient in a learning relationship.

The paper begins by describing the research design and methodology and outlining the current context in which survivors of institutional abuse participate in adult learning. Based on empirical findings, four types of learning care are described. They are primary, secondary and tertiary learning care relations and a fourth enabling duty of care, which is the care provided by the state. The paper concludes that this understanding of the pivotal role of care in learning literacy may contribute to our understanding of persistent high levels of unmet literacy needs and of low participation in adult literacy provision.

## A relational method of inquiry

The research set out to explore the role played by affective aspects of equality in the learning of literacy. Both design and methodology required careful consideration and lengthy preparation because both literacy and care are sensitive areas not readily opened up to outsiders. After an exploratory period of working as a literacy tutor with a number of adult groups who had unmet literacy needs, the Lighthouse Centre for adult survivors of institutional abuse in industrial schools became the ethnographic research site.

The ex-residents of care institutions emerged as the most appropriate partners for a number of reasons. Although survivors were actually resident in state educational establishments they left with a higher proportion of unmet literacy needs than did their contemporaries in wider society (Government of Ireland, 1970; Raftery and O'Sullivan, 1999). In this, and in their experience of care, they were therefore extreme or critical cases that Patton (1980) cites as useful in that they point up issues of wider concern.

The study sample, aged between 40 and 65, reflected the mainstream grouping involved in adult literacy (Department of Education and Science (DES), 2006). At the same time, the diverse nature of the community made it possible to explore the experience of both those with met and unmet literacy needs coming from a comparable learning and care environment.

The cohesive nature of the community meant that the process of gathering data was not only less intrusive than with other groups but actually contributed to a wider, emancipatory process of reflection and dialogue within the Centre. The solitary nature of the group also provided a supportive base for participants who might potentially have been upset by revisiting the detail of a painful past.

Most significantly, the primary care role of the state in the research participants' childhood removed the usual distraction of family deficit discourse and allowed the pivotal state duties to care and to educate, to emerge untrammelled (Hillyard et al, 2004).

In total, twenty-eight survivors took part in semi-structured interviews and a series of follow-up, feedback focus groups. The research sample was purposefully selected to be representative of age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and learning disability and snowballing identified potential participants. It was decided also to sample in terms of literacy status on leaving school so that comparison could be made between those who had learned literacy while in care in industrial schools and those who had not. Of necessity this required detailed insider knowledge and cooperation.

The data was further validated through methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1997) involving ten in-depth interviews with tutors, counsellors, legal representatives and others working closely with survivors. Cohen et al (2000: 112) cite triangulation as a powerful means of 'demonstrating concurrent validity' in qualitative studies. Originally a navigational technique that used a number of markers to more accurately pinpoint a destination, triangulation analogously describes the use of a variety of methods and sources of data collection to confirm the validity and reliability of research data. This is particularly pertinent in ethnography where a single community is being studied and the possibility of collective memory exists Olick and Robbins, 1998.

The affective focus of the empirical study, and the sensitive nature of the research topic, led organically to a relational research method. An ethnographic approach allowed time to build respectful relationships of trust with the research partners and to review and consult throughout the process with community members (Barton et al, 2000, Carspecken and Apple, 1992, Edmondson, 2000, Pardoe, 2000). When adults become motivated to learn literacy, time becomes a significant imperative and adopting a practitioner research paradigm (Fowler and Mace, 2005) allowed this vital literacy work to proceed, and to ground the study throughout. It meant that the research agenda recognised and did not supersede the priorities of the research partners and my role within the community became one of reciprocal learner.

### **Irish industrial schools**

The industrial school system in Ireland existed since the late nineteenth century with the remit of providing state care and education for children whose family life was judged as no longer viable. Although known to be exceptionally punitive, the schools were allowed to operate virtually without either challenge or sanction for almost one hundred years. In 1970, the Kennedy Report (Government of Ireland, 1970) was highly critical of the system and the decades that followed saw survivors speaking out about their experiences and the extent of their multiple abuses becoming public (Doyle, 1988, Fahy, 1999, Flynn, 2003, 2003a, Tyrrell, 2006). In 1999, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, admitted the awful reality of the repressive state care system and apologised to the survivors.

On behalf of the State and all its citizens, the government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue... all children need love and security. Too many of our children were denied this love, care and security. Abuse ruined their childhoods and has been an ever present part of their adult lives reminding them of a time when they were helpless. I want to say to them that we believe that they were gravely wronged, and that we must do all we can now to overcome the lasting effects of their ordeals

(An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, 11 May 1999 as cited in Health Board Executive, 2002)

The Taoiseach acknowledged the importance of affective factors in the lives of children and the detrimental impact of a loveless and careless childhood on later adult lives. An inquiry was instigated to hear evidence of abuses and make compensatory payments to victims. In June 2002, the State signed an Indemnity Agreement with eighteen of the religious congregations who, for their part, contributed 12.5 million to enable the establishment of an Education Fund for survivors and their families ([www.educationfinanceboard.com](http://www.educationfinanceboard.com)). This was (implicit) recognition of the long-term, generational, harmful impact of affective and educational inequalities. The Lighthouse Centre was established by a group of survivors in 1999 to provide healing through adult learning opportunities and adult literacy is a core part of that work.

In 2009, the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse published its findings in five volumes known as the Ryan Report. Amongst its findings is a catalogue of

examples of educational disadvantage that were evidence of neglect in their own right and also the inevitable consequence of other deeply traumatising abuses.

#### **Four types of learning care relationships**

The term *learning care* was developed in the course of the research to denote the complex affective attitude and effort involved in enabling the acquisition of literacy. Activity in the affective domain has a dynamic influence throughout every aspect of our interdependent lives (Engster, 2005). In particular, learning care refers to the impact of care relationships on our capacity to absorb and retain new knowledge and skills. The process and outcome of literacy acts and events, and learning how to perform them, is almost always social and relational. Nevertheless, until recently, learning to read and write has been viewed as a purely cognitive matter (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). Conceptualisation of the affective domain, in general, has also moved beyond the field of psychology. Where psychologists were primarily concerned with individual behaviours, work in sociology and philosophy brings the added insight of the influence of culture, ethics and social structures (Nussbaum, 2001, Turner and Stets, 2005). The importance of recognising affective matters as an important part of how and what we learn is increasingly being recognised in other areas of education (Cohen, 2006, Lynch et al, 2007, Noddings, 1992, 2006, 2007). Here, the four types of learning care that this study has identified are proposed as a set of signposts for further reflection on how care, as praxis, might become transformative in literacy work.

The findings of this study have indicated a model of literacy learning care that builds on the work of Lynch (2007). She proposed a model of three concentric circles of care relations - primary, secondary and tertiary contexts where care is given and received. The history of survivors of institutional abuse is a stark reminder that not everyone in society benefits equally from care-giving. This in turn has a knock-on effect on all aspects of human development that care promotes and sustains, including literacy. The data suggest four discreet but interconnected sources of learning care, each of which has a contribution to make to literacy attainment.

1. The primary learning care relationships experienced within the family or alternative primary care centre.
2. Secondary learning care relationships in school and adult learning centers.
3. Solitary learning care experienced with peer learners and communities of interest.

4. State learning care describes the attentiveness given by the state to ensuring structural equality (equality of condition) across all the contexts that influence family, school and community capacity to support literacy learning.

Below, these four different types of learning care are explored from the survivors' perspective on how this care, or lack of it, impacted on literacy learning. The voices of survivors are prominent in the presentation of the findings

#### *1. Primary learning care relationships*

For most people, the 'natural' locus of learning care is undoubtedly the family or primary care centre, where nurturing relationships promote and model all aspects of human development, including literacy. For the twenty-eight participants in this research the main potential source of primary care was the industrial school although some had also early or intermittent opportunity for care with their family of origin or in foster care. Fifteen respondents left school with their literacy needs met or partially met. The remaining thirteen had attained little or no literacy.

In the majority of cases (87percent) of those who had either met or partially met literacy needs when leaving school, there was a discernible link with levels of consistency in primary care relationships. Only two of these fifteen had no recollection of either a home life or ongoing family contact during their time in residential care. Having some positive primary care was cited repeatedly as positively influencing literacy outcomes.

Similarly, of the thirteen who finished school with unmet literacy needs, eleven (85percent) had no family life or consistent family relationship while in care. Of the remaining two, one had an intellectual disability and the other went into care at the age of eight with virtually no prior school attendance. The conclusive trend in the data therefore was towards a strong link between some continuity of primary care and positive literacy outcomes.

The capacity of the respondents' families to offer care in the home was negatively influenced by extremes of poverty, the disrespect that comes from perceived moral inferiority and the powerlessness of those without privilege to challenge a rigidly authoritarian system. Where some degree of stability was possible in the home, and education valued and promoted, a positive experience of literacy could be traced back to an early age.

My life has been a pattern of in and out of care but I have very vivid memories of my life before I went, say when I was three or four...learning words at home with my mother... storytelling. And then when I did go to school we weren't allowed to eat until our homework was done. There is a bit of a perfectionist in me as well and maybe it's because I remember my mother always checking over our homework. You need that kind of approval. It is a kind of a nurturing thing you know? *Carol, woman aged 50 years who left school with met literacy needs*

The quality of primary care was significant. Liam is 42 now and also moved in and out of care as a child. He lived at home consistently until he was three and although he had a number of siblings he always felt alone. His father was violent and his parents eventually split up after a stormy relationship to which he attributes his unmet literacy needs.

It would be very hard to learn if you feel that nobody cares about you. You are bound to build that wall and make sure that nobody gets in - because that was my little nest where nobody could touch me. To me it is like I was deaf. I couldn't hear anybody. I blocked people out and didn't want to have anyone coming near me because I had never had someone caring about me. I can't remember hearing me Ma or Da saying loving things to me or showing me love. *Liam, man aged 41 years who left school with unmet literacy needs*

Once inside the institution, and often far from any familiar surroundings, there was no provision for nurturing relationships that might compensate for family absence. Girls as young as twelve, who were resident in the institution and struggling to balance care and domestic duties with their own school work, looked after babies and small children. This was drudgery rather than care labour and they had neither the time nor the skill to encourage language or literacy development. Many had no literacy themselves.

Respondents' narratives describe the antithesis of affection. Authoritarianism and regimentation was the pervasive order of the day in a culture where children were identified with the perceived failings of their family. The goal of industrial schools was control and the production of docile, obedient manual and domestic labourers for deployment in religious enterprises or in wealthy families who required servants.

Those who were sustained in any affective family framework could be encouraged and motivated by that relationship or even the memory of it. Kevin had been at home until he was seven and could clearly name the role of primary care relationships in learning.

The way I look at it is that some people did well because they were connected with their families outside. They had their families to support them. They were able to concentrate better. Their thinking was different. People that did well at the school had their families looking after them. *Kevin, man aged 56 years who left school with partially met literacy needs*

The motivation and impetus to learn literacy emerged, for most of those who were successful learners in the study (80percent), from supportive and loving relationships and the desire to satisfy family expectations, even in circumstances of extreme hardship. Conversely, the absence of a primary care figure was seen to be a decisive negative factor. Those whose families were unable to keep them were passed on to those for whom care and learning care was work rather than love labour. In the industrial school system, abandonment and excessive discipline eclipsed care in children's lives. Even in later, more lenient regimes, discontinuity of staff meant that no single care figure existed with whom children could identify.

If a child comes from a family where there is lots of love and encouragement the child will reach their potential. But for someone like me who was brought up in a children's home, it is kind of even dodgier - because they have a family still (pause) their own biological family but then they have so many other people all over the years that have input in their lives, but who have walked away. Bob, man aged 41 years who left school with unmet literacy needs

As adults, and often as parents and grandparents, survivors come to realise the centrality of care labour and to resent the irreplaceable lack of it in their early lives. For Jane, even the success of her own children and grandchildren is tinged with regret for her own lack of primary learning care and lost opportunity.

Well I think it is very different for my granddaughter. When she picked up a book and was able to read it, I was so happy. You know? And it also made me feel (breaks down crying) what I would have been... with a normal (pause) let us put it this way. That is the kind of family I would have liked to come from. *Jane, woman aged 57 years who left school with unmet literacy needs*

Any form of affectivity was discouraged in industrial schools and in the sphere of love labour it seemed as if an anti-relational ethos was pursued. In their critique of the industrial school system both the Kennedy Committee and the Compensatory Advisory Committee to the DES (2002) noted the dearth of personal relationships available to children. They observed the negative impact this had on all aspects of development, including learning opportunities.

Research has shown that a most important factor in childhood and later development is the quality and quantity of personal relationships available to the child... The child who has not experienced good personal relationships will, in time, be lacking in emotional, social and intellectual stability and development.

(Government of Ireland, 1970: 12)

Without such recognition of the pivotal role of affection, the anti-relational ethos pervaded the industrial school in every aspect. A Centre worker summarised her impressions of the narratives she has heard.

The whole thing was separation though. You were separated from your family. The beds were separated. There was no touching and that was the whole ethos there. *Lighthouse Centre Worker*

Whether children knew their parents or not, it is clear that the absence of a primary carer from their lives did have a major impact on every aspect of their well-being and created a desolate backdrop to their early learning. As well as parents, other family connections were also significant. Often separation was extended to siblings who, because of age or gender or some other unexplained logistical factor, were placed in separate institutions and allowed no further contact with their brothers or sisters.

Derek, an Irish Traveler, described the sudden disappearance of his brother as a turning point in his literacy learning. Up until that point he was actually enjoying school and although 'the learning was a bit rough' he was happy and socially integrated and 'enjoying the interactive stuff.' Later in his narrative he explains his adult mistrust of groups and his inability to stay with any group learning process for any length of time. He is a loner who traces this trait to the betrayal and anger associated with his loss of his brother

Michael he is dead now. He used to be in the orphanage with me up until the age of ten. I think that was one of the main reasons (pause) why I do think that I couldn't read and write properly. When he was ten years old, I was seven, and when you reached ten years old you were taken away and put in another institution. And he was taken away at ten and I was left there. That was one of the main reasons why (pause) the turning points of my life. And so that (pause) was a blow and I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't learn. *Derek, man aged 52 years, who left school with unmet literacy needs*

In the total institutional environment, even basic physiological care needs went unmet; children were hungry, cold, and exhausted from exacting contract work. All were isolated from comfort and fearful of punishment, abuse and humiliation. Bedwetting was not uncommon in this stressful environment and resulted in public degradation on a daily basis. A common survival technique was withdrawal and self-protection that has extended into adult learning relationships.

I would keep nice and quiet and still and I wouldn't be picked on or bullied or any of the other things. And it is the same with the literacy and all of that you know? I'll write it and nobody is going to see it. Does that make sense? *Carol, woman aged 50 years who left school with met literacy needs*

The deep interface between learning literacy and being cared for emerged throughout the research process. Language and literacy development take place during a natural period of intense human dependency and so the interlinking of the processes is not surprising.

## 2. *Secondary learning care relationships: the experience of schooling*

Lynch and Lodge (2002:11) have argued for schools and other places of learning also to be recognised as 'affective enterprises' where both teaching and learning are deeply and variously concerned with relationships of care and interdependence. The case is borne out, by default, in the findings of this study where fear and damaged self-esteem dominated accounts of literacy learning and the pervasive atmosphere in the classroom was one of tension. Kevin was seven when he went into care and became fearful of learning.

I didn't like the school there. I hated it. There was a terrible tense atmosphere. And like you would be looking at them to see if they were in a bad mood. There was always somebody getting a right beating. And you were tense all

through the class and afraid. If you got something to do you would be scared. I didn't like it - it was too tense. *Kevin, man aged 56 years who left school with partially met literacy needs*

Corporal punishment was widespread in the education system at this period but those with experience of both 'inside' and 'outside' schools observed difference in the degree of severity.

I went to regular schools so I can say they weren't party places either but they were light years away from this place. Nobody will ever know or be able to recreate the terror in those rooms - reigns of terror every day. It was horrendous. *Bridget, woman aged 51 years who left school with met literacy needs*

In the teacher-learner relationship even the willing learner was anxious and fearful. Large classes were managed in a robotic, adversarial and often violent manner. Individual learning styles were not facilitated. Those who were left-handed were demonised and those unable to learn reading and spelling through primarily auditory methods were additionally disadvantaged.

Depending on the institution, children either attended 'inside school' where they had no contact with the outside world or in smaller institutions they were sent to the local national school where they joined children from the locality. In the 'outside school' children were constantly made aware of their inferior status and many spoke of being carelessly excluded at the back of the classroom. Inside the institution, within an already impoverished learning context, still further hierarchies existed. Irish Travellers, orphans, those perceived as morally defective because their parents were unmarried, those of mixed race and those with learning difficulties all attracted additional disparagement.

On reflection, respondents wanted to be seen as individuals with learning needs that they could expect to have met. They wanted to be treated with patience and care and to have a teacher who would 'draw you out' and find a way of compassionately enabling learning.

Where children had different affective experiences even within the same family they observed a corresponding difference in literacy outcomes within the institutional system. Brenda's literacy needs were met during her schooling whereas those of her younger sister remain unmet today. She attributes this directly to their divergent levels of primary care.

I lived at home with them until I was five and that is hugely influential because my sister was two [going into care] and you can see the three years that I got that she didn't get. The extra three years of nurturing from your own parent made a difference. She hadn't got the same foundation as I had as I would have had five solid years and she would have had only two. Even a little bit of encouragement that I got stood to me. *Brenda, woman aged 55 years who left school with met literacy needs.*

Martin was in care from birth but in regular and constant contact with his mother. She was the cook in a wealthy Dublin family and he benefited from the discarded reading material and copybooks of the privileged sons in her place of work. He used these to supplement the poorly resourced learning he got in the industrial school. For this reason he was always ahead of his peers in literacy and to some extent able to observe classroom relations from this small comfort zone. The absence of kindness was apparent to him.

... it was harsh the way they taught you how to read and write. They didn't know any other way. You have to understand they didn't have any concept themselves of anything done at a level of decency or kindness. I mean kindness was alien to them, utterly alien. *Martin, man aged 64 years who left school with met literacy needs*

Until the age of ten when he moved to a more authoritarian regime, Matt lived in a convent where orphans were housed and educated. Uniquely amongst all the participants, he described a positive, creative learning environment with art, music, storybooks, comics and seaside holidays. He did not remember boys and girls who were unable to read and write. When he moved to the industrial school he noted a visible difference.

It was very intimidating. These men in black whereas the nuns were soft like with their blue habits. And when you went in there was all these big people and there was no colour anywhere. Like even in the convent there was colour everywhere. *Matt, man aged 64 years who left school with met literacy needs*

Matt maintained that those who were in that colourless, careless environment all their lives had little hope of learning. Bob, disappointed that his dyslexia went unattended, believed that the literacy learning relationship has to be infused with care.

The teacher's heart and soul has to be in it to teach someone with special needs. It will come across. The child will see the love that the teacher has for what they do and the care will come across. 'I care and I want to teach you and I want to see you going forward.' Then that is like... That is where the care starts. *Bob, man aged 41 years who left school with unmet literacy needs*

Without primary or secondary advocates to champion the cause of their learning, the majority of those in industrial schools were at the mercy of those who had little belief in either the ability of children to learn literacy or the necessity for them to do so. Despite the nature of their professional role, teachers seemed to subscribe to the wider cultural perception that these children could best aspire to a life of subservience and did not really need to be literate. Tania articulates the implicit ethos enacted in industrial schools.

You will never amount to anything. All you will be good for when you go out of here will be domestic work, laundries and that kind of thing. But sure how could you be any other way? Nobody wanted you. How could you have any brains because nobody wants you? So how can you be clever? Tania, woman aged 52 years who left school with met literacy needs

An absence of primary care is used maliciously to explain and legitimate the withholding of secondary learning care. Even the background presence of a primary carer was shown in the data to make a difference to the secondary learning care received in the industrial school. The lack of positive school learning experience in turn made learning in adulthood more daunting suggesting that the types of learning care outlined have a dynamic and interconnected relationship.

### 3. *Solidary learning care relationships: learning with peers*

More than half of the participants in the research had begun to learn literacy in adulthood. Adult primary and secondary learning care relationships provided a bridge back into learning and there is much evidence in narratives of those who did not make that transition and died prematurely. Successful adult relationships, the desire to make a positive contribution to children's lives, and the empowerment of the personal counseling process, were the most common motivational factors for participation in adult literacy.

Awareness of care matters in the process of facilitating literacy was a consideration for both learners and tutors. One man remarked that 'sometimes as an

adult you can feel that you are being left at the back of the class too.' It is hard for adults to unlearn their fear of formal education. People display their long memories in almost imperceptible but ever-present responses. They wince at sudden movements, closed doors, loud noises or someone approaching from behind. They hit themselves for making mistakes in reading and spelling. As well as learning literacy they are also learning about making new relationships with others and with their past and the learning process needs to make room for this. Tutors are constantly patrolling the borders between past and present, deflecting and disarming negative echoes and substituting positive learning experiences.

I suppose that [building relationships] is part of the learning thing too because they have to talk and we wouldn't get beyond that sometimes. I always notice how people say particularly in the early stages, how different it is from learning they have done before and they can't get over that they are being treated as equals, and as adults, I suppose. *Literacy Tutor*

A common legacy of industrial schools is that survivors feel uncomfortable with the complex dynamic of group learning and prefer a one-to-one learning arrangement where they can build up the confidence needed to move on. In this they demonstrate the need to retrace primary learning patterns. Although a cornerstone of provision, one-to-one literacy tutoring is dependent on volunteers and reflects the realities of other types of unpaid care labour in that women mostly do this work and make immensely valuable contributions for little or no recognition.

Institutional life left little time or space for friendship and group learning was not on the pedagogical menu. It was only in later life that survivors of abuse in industrial schools began to savour the benefits of community solidarity and the second chance it provided for learning literacy. As well as those whose return to learning was enabled by new relationships of primary care in adulthood, the bond that formed around a common experience of abuse and neglect has also been transformational in attracting people back to literacy.

I think that there is actually a lot of solace for people who maybe have felt quite alone that they come into a place and realise that people do have some form of shared history, some sort of shared continuing difficulties and that actually binds them together as a group. One of the features of the groups is

that they do very much look out for each other, especially new members of the group. They try to welcome them in and a lot of support is actually peer-to-peer support. *Lighthouse Centre Worker*

Gill left the industrial school with partially met literacy needs. She returned to learn as an adult and now teaches IT to adult groups. The consideration and care of her fellow adult learners was instrumental in maintaining her drive to progress.

The praise, the encouragement that you get from an adult group is sustaining. You know you would hand in a piece of work and a big fuss would be made over you. Definitely it was positivity over negativity. It definitely made a difference. I stayed in adult education the whole way up after that. *Gill, woman aged 46 years, left school with partially met literacy needs*

#### 4. *The state's role in ensuring learning care*

The majority of the research participants (68percent) suggested that the state neglected its direct responsibility to monitor the quality of care and education offered to them as children. Respondents described feelings of abandonment that transcended their immediate family and extended to the wider population. They saw an irony in the fact that they were taken away from families perceived to be unfit to offer care and supervision only to be neglected in the alternative state provision.

Despite the fact that orphanages were designed to educate us and protect us from the ills of society, we received only minimal education and most of us were illiterate. Lack of education deeply affected every aspect of our lives, leaving us unprepared for and fearful of the world outside the institution

(Fahy, 1999:54)

Respondents cited wider structural inequalities as central to their being taken out of their primary care centre. Unemployment, poverty, ill health, emigration, family breakdown, moral opprobrium and cultural powerlessness resulted in children being taken into state care and subsequently experiencing abuses that impacted negatively on their ability to learn literacy. State care-lessness was therefore both causal in their original disadvantage and in their subsequent neglect in the industrial school.

While home is undoubtedly the primary place of care, nevertheless the capacity of the family is determined, to a great extent, by the state's achievements with regard to creating equality in society. The state both enables and restricts the measures and systems that shape how egalitarian a society is and whether its goods are shared in a fair manner (Baker, 1987, Baker et al, 2004). The legislative and policy decisions made by the state, in practice, constitute choices about learning care equality.

Bridget argued for an ideal, inclusive, participative view of the state where interdependency is recognised and acted upon by all. Placing borders around who we should have concern for meant she and others were pushed to the margins of care. She proposed that our interdependence brings with it responsibilities that make us accountable for what happens to each other.

Do you know it might sound simplistic but it is every adult's responsibility to ensure that every child is educated. If we all just look after our own - that is why we were the way we were. Those adults who couldn't look after us were equally abandoned by all the adults who could have helped out but instead abused them every way they could. *Bridget, woman aged 51 who left school with met literacy needs*

#### **Conclusion**

The paper began by presenting the rationale, research design and the historical context for this empirical study of literacy and affective aspects of equality. The findings from a three-year ethnographic, practitioner research process in the Lighthouse Centre for adult survivors of abuse in Irish industrial schools were then discussed. This data suggest that caring relationships have a pivotal role in successful literacy learning. For most of the last century, those consigned to state care experienced affective learning inequalities at each of four levels – in primary learning relationships in the institution, in secondary learning relationships at school and in tertiary learning relationships through their separation from peers and siblings in the anti-relational ethos of the institution. Fourthly, the state also, as surrogate guardian of institutionalised children, failed to ensure the provision of satisfactory care and education within the industrial schools. At the same time, through its role in accepting a wholly inegalitarian education system and wider social structure, the state also ensured that some citizens received less learning care at every level than did others.

The data suggest that inequalities of care at all four levels interacted to impede literacy learning. In the austere environment of the industrial school, even small affective differences became discernible and survivors identified these as creating more conducive conditions in which literacy could take some hold. Even in adulthood, it was learning care that emerged as transformational in the lives of those affectively and educationally disadvantaged in early life. As a critical case sample, the literacy and care biographies of survivors of abuse in industrial schools reveal the reality of learning literacy while in the care of the state, but without love. They also suggest that learning care, as a concept, merits greater attention in contemporary literacy studies and in the field of learning.

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# The Role of Spirituality in Irish Adult Education in culturally responsive teaching

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## Introduction

Spirituality, religion, and culture are complicated subjects. Indeed, they are fundamental socialising forces that affect how adult learners make meaning in the world. Adults bring these aspects of who they are with them to the learning environment, though often the spiritual/religious aspects of their development and learning story go unacknowledged by adult educators. But just as emotions clearly affect the learning process (Dirkx, 2006; McCormack, 2009), people's spirituality can deeply influence their learning as adults.

While there has been considerable discussion of the spiritual and religious dimensions of adult learning in North America (Dirkx, 1997; English and Gillen, 2000; English, 2007; Tisdell, 2003, 2007; Tolliver and Tisdell, 2006) and to some extent in England (Hunt, 2006; Jarvis and Walton, 1993), there's been little direct discussion of such dimensions in Irish adult education. This is interesting, given the history of religious conflict in Ireland as well as Ireland's increasing religious, spiritual, and cultural diversity due in part to the Celtic Tiger that has affected social inclusion issues in lifelong education efforts (Healy and Slowey, 2006). The new immigrants to Ireland, with their own unique religious and cultural histories (Fanning, 2007; Ryan and Fallon, 2005) have clearly affected the cultural landscape of Ireland. Thus, the purpose of this article is to examine why it is important for Irish adult educators to consider the spiritual, religious and cultural dimensions of adult learning, and to some extent, how to draw on it in practice. In so doing, I'll draw on my former research dealing with the intersection of spirituality and culture among US adult educators, and my initial research efforts into religion and spirituality in an Irish adult education context, as well as my own recent experience of Ireland while on sabbatical as a US adult education professor. First, it is important to outline what is meant by spirituality and religion, and how it relates to the current Irish landscape.

### **Spirituality and Religion in an Irish Context**

What is spirituality, and how is it different from religion? In general, spirituality focuses on an individual's experience of what they consider sacred; as one participant in my study put it, "spirituality is a journey toward wholeness." It is often connected to inspiration and transformation, in the sense of creating something new, often out of darkness, confusion or pain (London, 2007; Tolliver and Tisdell, 2006; Wuthnow, 1999). This is spirituality as an integration process that might engage one's soul while drawing on metaphor, art, poetry, symbol (Dirkx, 2001 Hunt, 2006). Religion, by contrast, is more about an organized community of faith, with an official creed, and codes of regulatory behavior, that have been determined by those with power in that religious institution. There are clearly positive and negative aspects of religious institutions. On the plus side, religions provide guidance on how to live a spiritual life, and ways of facilitating personal experiences of the sacred (Marty, 2000). They also provide community rituals, music, symbols, prayers, and sacred stories that honor many of life's transitions that serve as gateways to the sacred, that are also part of people's spiritual and cultural history (Inglis, 2005). These are the positive aspects of religion.

But there are also negative aspects to institutional religions just as there are to any human institution. There is ample evidence the world over religious institutions have at times oppressed individuals or entire social groups. Women as a group, for example, have been treated as second-class citizens by many religions. Another current example is the cover up of the sexual abuse scandal of Catholic priests and religious in both the US and in Ireland. Further, people throughout history into the present have been killed or maimed in the name of religion and politics; clearly Ireland is no stranger to this phenomenon. Yet, in spite of these more negative aspects, religions have offered people refuge, spiritual direction, and a sense of communal hope.

While there are distinctions between spirituality and religion, there are also places of overlap, particularly because most people were socialised in some religious tradition, which informs their spirituality, whether or not they continue to practice it. It is important to note here that it is more often because of the negative aspects of religion as human institutions that many people who grew up in some religious tradition no longer affiliate with it, either because they've simply drifted away, or because they are angry or have been hurt by some aspect of it. Nevertheless people continue to have some psychological

relationship with the religion in which they were socialized; further, religious identity often overlaps with political identity (Inglis, 2005). Hence, a complete emotional separation from one's childhood religion is impossible, as it has been formative to one's identity development. Due to the negative aspects of religion, many people, particularly in the US but perhaps in Ireland as well, now refer to themselves as "spiritual but not religious" (Wuthnow, 1999): they find a sense of spirituality important, but are leery of organized religion. Still, it is impossible to completely separate spirituality from religion. Many who define themselves as "spiritual but not religious" actually draw from a multitude of traditions to inform their spiritual practices and beliefs, from mindfulness meditation practices (that originated in Buddhism), to Yoga, to various meditation practices that might have their roots in Christianity, Sufism, or other contemporary spiritual movements that were once connected to more formal religions.

How does spirituality and religion in its many manifestations relate to the contemporary Irish context? Given the processes of globalization and worldwide migration, people everywhere are much more influenced than ever before by religious traditions and spiritual paths other than those in which they were socialized. Clearly the economy that fed the Celtic Tiger brought many new immigrants to the whole island of Ireland who brought new religions and cultures into the Catholic/Protestant landscape. The ways of these new immigrants have influenced contemporary Ireland's spiritual, religious, and cultural milieu as much as the scandals of the Catholic Church and the dissolution (still in process) of "the Troubles" have affected it. These multiple influences in the Irish landscape might add to why those in Ireland who do identify with the religion of their parents are less rigidly defined by it, and take what Inglis (2007) refers to as a "smorgasbord approach" (p. 205) to it, as many Catholics have done. They draw from it what is useful, and leave behind what is not.

The rise of the Celtic Tiger might have also facilitated the fascination in the past decade with all things Celtic by many people around the world, including "Celtic spirituality", and all its "Celtic threads", as folklorist Padraigin Clancy (1999) says. Tourists of Irish descent from North America and other parts of the world return to Ireland in search of their roots, including their Celtic spiritual roots, and travel to places like Newgrange, Glendolough, and Bridgid's Well, as part of re-claiming the Celtic threads of spirituality, sometimes as a spiritual pilgrimage. (To some extent, and being of Irish and Catholic descent I have been one of those "tourists".) This fascination with things Celtic may be more

common to those whose ancestors emigrated from Ireland and serve as a boon to the tourism industry (Kneafsey 2002); nevertheless, this Celtic re-claiming among “spiritual tourists” is another influence in the religious and spiritual cultural milieu of Ireland. The multiple religious and spiritual influences in the Irish cultural landscape have not been discussed in the Irish adult education literature; yet the proceedings from the recent conference on “Alternative Spiritualities, the New Age, and New Religious Movements in Ireland” held at NUI Maynooth in October of 2009 (Cosgrove and Cox, 2009), indicate that they are being discussed in other disciplines. It is time for Irish adult education to consider what these contemporary influences of religion and spirituality in an increasingly culturally diverse Ireland might suggest for Irish adult education. In what follows I attempt to do so by drawing on my former research on spirituality and culture in the US, and my beginning research study in an Irish context, as a midlife US adult education professor trying to make further meaning of my own life by drawing on my own passions and interests.

#### **Studying spirituality: Interconnections of my background, former spirituality research, and teaching**

The subjects of religion and spirituality have always fascinated me. I grew up Roman Catholic in a middle class family in a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts in the US. I am of Irish descent; my great grandparents emigrated from Killarney, and perhaps like many in Ireland, a large piece of my childhood memories are related to the Catholic Church and its adjacent elementary school I attended. I have a master’s degree in religion, and after working for 10 years doing pastoral work in university settings with adult learners, I eventually left the official ministry world behind, and completed my doctorate in adult education in 1992; I have worked as a professor ever since.

In my early years as a professor, much of my teaching and research focused on emancipatory education efforts, drawing on the insights of Brazilian activist and educator Paulo Freire (1971), black feminist cultural critic, bell hooks (1994), and numerous critical multicultural education and feminist scholars. I was teaching in relatively culturally diverse settings, attempting to challenge oppressive systems. But I was motivated to do so because of my own spiritual commitments; I knew other adult educators were as well but few people spoke about it. Thus, in the late 1990s, I began a study of how spirituality informed the work of emancipatory educators, which resulted in numerous publications over the years since 2000.

#### **The study’s findings**

My purpose here is not to discuss the details of the study, as they’ve been discussed elsewhere (Tisdell, 2000, 2003, 2007); nevertheless a brief synopsis is useful here. The purpose of that qualitative study was to explore how spirituality informs the work of a multicultural group of higher and adult educators who were specifically teaching classes that attempted to challenge systems of oppression based on race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation in either higher education or community settings. The 31 participants included 22 women and 9 men; 17 people of color (6 African-American, 4 Latino, 4 Asian-American, 2 Native American, 1 of East Indian descent) and 14 white Euro-Americans. The interviews focused on participants’ individual spiritual journeys, how their spirituality relates to their cultural identity, the sharing of three significant spiritual experiences or, and how spirituality informs their education efforts.

Participants highlighted the role of spirituality both as it informs their teaching and in their own lives in: (1) dealing with internalized oppression and re-claiming cultural identity; (2) mediating among multiple identities (race, gender, class, sexuality); (3) crossing culture to facilitate spiritual and overall development of a more authentic identity; and (4) unconscious knowledge-construction processes that are connected to image, symbol, ritual, and metaphor that are often cultural. While nearly all were socialised in a religious tradition, of the 31, only 6 still associated strongly with their childhood religious traditions; the rest tended to self-define as “spiritual but not religious.” All, however, continually spiraled back and reclaimed images, symbols, and music that still had important meaning from their childhood religious, family, and cultural traditions. This connection to meaning associated with such expression is why one never completely emotionally separates from one’s childhood religious tradition, and is why spirituality, culture, and religion often overlap: one’s religious background is intermeshed with culture and identity.

#### **A Theory and Practice of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The study and its findings as well as my experience of teaching in a diverse context have continued to inform both my attempts at culturally responsive teaching and theorizing about it. I have taught in multiple contexts over the years, both in the community and in higher education, though the majority of my work is as a professor teaching graduate classes, including those that focus on diversity and cultural inclusion issues. Geneva Gay (2000) suggests “culturally responsive education recognizes, respects, and uses students’ identities and

backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments” (p. 3). Educators create such environments by including readings by and about members of diverse cultural communities, drawing on learners’ own experiences, and making use of various teaching strategies that engage multiple aspects of who they are. Latino writer David Abalos (1998) talks about the importance of freeing the “sacred face” in his ideas on transformative teaching for social change. He argues that for social transformation to occur, both individuals and cultural groups need to explore how the mechanisms imposed by cultural hegemony and colonialism have affected multiple aspects of their identity, and to reclaim these aspects of their identity on their own terms. In the process, he suggests they often re-claim and make sacred, ways of knowing grounded in their own culture; indeed these might be expressed through music, art, poetry, or drama, which engages their creativity. This is part of what Abalos means by “freeing the sacred face,” a notion that begins to theoretically give insight to the role of spirituality in emancipatory education. Here I offer a brief example of what this looks like in my own practice.

I currently work with adult learners in graduate higher education settings. Much of our work is about understanding theory and its relationship to educational practice, and is thus quite rationally driven. Yet often I provide a venue as a synthesizing activity to bring in ways of knowing that engage image, symbol, metaphor, art, or drama as it allows participants to give cultural expression to their own forms of knowledge. Many find these types of activities freeing; some even find them inspiring. Some learners connect this process of engaging with image and symbol as part of dealing with their internalized oppression and taking action on their own behalf as a spiritual process. Others don’t map to it that way. Engagement with symbol seems particularly important to women (and some men), and to people of color, and many will bring or create a symbol that speaks to or references their gender or culture as part of re-claiming power.

Based on the literature, the findings of the study, and my own experience of teaching, elements of a spiritually grounded and culturally responsive model of transformative education emphasize the following: (1) the authenticity of teachers and learners; (2) an environment that allows for the exploration of the cognitive (through readings and discussion of ideas), the affective and relational (through connection with other people and of ideas to life experience), and the symbolic (through art form—poetry, art, music, drama); (3) readings that reflect the cultures of the members of the class and the cultural pluralism of the

geographical area relevant to the course content; (4) collaborative work that envisions and presents manifestations of multiple dimensions of learning and strategies for change; (5) A creative synthesizing activity that presents what has been learned in a different medium; (6) recognition of the limitations of any adult education environment and that transformation is an ongoing process that takes time. While space limitations don’t allow for detailed discussion of each of these elements, the model does not require that either the teacher or learner necessarily discuss or use the term “spirituality”. Nor is the intent for learners to necessarily have a “spiritual experience” in the learning activity; rather teaching in such a way creates space for learners to express and discover what connects to their culture which may also connect to their religion, and to their spirituality. But whether learners define this as “spiritual” is up to them.

Would drawing on such a model work in an Irish context? It would be up to readers to determine this, as Ireland is not my cultural teaching context. But after an autoethnographic discussion of my experience in Ireland and its spiritual and religious traditions during my sabbatical and attempt at similar research, I’ll attempt to provide some sort of direction here.

#### **Researching spirituality, religion, and culture in Ireland in the formal and informal context**

I wanted to spend my sabbatical doing a similar research study in Ireland of how Irish adult educators deal with diversity and how spirituality and religion might inform their efforts at doing so because of Ireland’s increased religious and cultural diversity. But I was approaching my sabbatical, not only as a research journey, but also as a spiritual pilgrimage of sorts, though I was somewhat ambivalent about leaving in light of my 89 year-old father’s frail health. I visited him, before I left, and did so with his blessing, and an “Our Father” – the Lord’s Prayer for the journey. I thought of Neil Douglas-Klotz’s (1990) midrash on the Aramaic words of the first two lines, *Abwoon D’bwashamaya Netqaddash shmak* (p. 10) who suggests *Netquaddah shmak* (translated as “hallowed by they name”), is equivalent to being hollowed out so that one’s inner light (schem) can shine more brightly. I was hoping I would be hollowed out.

### A spiritual pilgrimage of sorts

I arrived in County Mayo, and met up with two American friends, and was to begin my Irish pilgrimage journey by joining them and thousands of people who climb Croagh Patrick on Reek Sunday each year. We had decided to join a group of about fifty doing the 22-mile pilgrimage from Ballintubber Abbey. It was the hardest physical thing I've ever done! I had never walked 22 miles before on a road, much less through fields, and water, and bogs, and rivers, and then to climb up and down a mountain. To provide some auto-ethnographic data and context, below is an excerpt from an e-mail I sent to friends and family back in the US when we completed the journey.

We met at Ballintubber Abbey. Fr. Frank Fahey, who oversees the Abbey, gave an introduction to the pilgrimage. A delightful man, I liked the fact that he didn't trash the Druids and pagan people that lived there before Patrick. While I have great respect for St. Patrick who was the patron saint of my Irish ancestors, I'm not sure that I like the fact that Patrick likely tried to do away with the Druid, pagan, and earth-based (and maybe feminist) traditions of those that predated Christianity and were here first. While I don't know the details of this history, there are always stories of power and privilege that don't get told since history is written by the winners. I was interested to find out that the Celtic Cross is a mixture of the circles of the sun with the Christian cross going through it. I like this image, as long as the cross isn't meant to obliterate the circles of the Druid/pagan's sun!!

Fr. Fahey talked of the journey of St. Patrick, in light of the journey of pilgrims. He did explain some of the rules of the journey of the pilgrims "No complain- in" he said, and "when you step in cow pies, you simply exclaim, *'T'anks be to God!'*" I ended up saying, *"T'anks be to God!"* many times through the 22 mile journey, after falling and cutting my hand, through the wind and the rain, and the sopping wetness! He said that people sometimes do the pilgrimage for someone, and/or to do penance. So many people lit a candle at the beginning; I lit a candle for my dad and dedicated the journey to him, in hopes that these final days of his life can be filled with light, schem.

As I began the walk, I imagined my great grandparents, perhaps walking this path, perhaps before they went off to America. Perhaps their parents before them walked this pilgrimage. I thought of those who came before them, and those even before them, wondering if the cells of my body knew this journey.

The road was rough. There were bogs, and water, and there was tremendous wind, and many cow and sheep "pies" that I tried to dodge, but nevertheless walked through. As I walked, I meditated a lot on the Our Father in Aramaic. *Abwoon D'bashamaya Netqaddash shmak* -- especially the *Netqaddash shmak* part, about being hollowed out so that light (or "schem") can shine. I thought LOTS about how my life has been so cluttered and full of stuff, an endless to-do list of so many things in academia that I don't really care about. I hoped and prayed that as a result of this journey I could be hollowed out so that the light inside of me can shine, with good things, rather than endless reactions to just what is happening and what I seem to think I have to do. So may this journey and this sabbatical time hollow me out and hallow me out.

At many of the particularly difficult intervals, I meditated on various poems I knew and said various prayers from childhood to adulthood that I remembered, and used centering techniques I had learned in Zen meditation. I was using everything I could think of to try to help me both meditate on the journey, and allow me to finish: anything to get me through! When the going got really tough, I meditated on the mysteries of the Rosary to keep my mind occupied. I found this surprising at first, but these earliest vestiges of my spiritual development and of what I was taught in Catholic grade school nearly 50 years ago are sometimes very handy in a time like this!! I was so miserable I thought the Sorrowful Mysteries the most appropriate, reframed for these circumstances. Instead of beginning with "The Agony in the Garden", I could reflect on "The Agony in the Bog on the Way to the Mountain". Then when I fell and cut my hand on a rock, I was reminded of the fourth Sorrowful Mystery, "the Carrying of the Cross", and the stations of the cross that I did as a little girl, when Jesus falls – I think 3 times, but I can't remember for sure. Anyway, I only fell once. But the rosaries did keep my mind focused for a time on something besides my misery. I developed a terrible blister on the sole of my foot. But the back of my legs and my lower back hurt so much that the blister was just another thing no more miserable than anything else. (*"T'anks be to God!"*)

When we finally got to the ridge of Croagh Patrick, seeing above and down to the sea was glorious, even though where we were there was tremendous wind, and rain, there was sun shining on the sea below. It was magnificent in its beauty. Just Magnificent. It would've given new meaning to the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary – but at this point, while I could enjoy the view, I was more into my Zen-Buddhist phase of both being in the moment, and thinking of every-

thing I could remember about Tai Chi, and breathing into the hara just to stay grounded, and not to fall off the mountain! I was exhausted, and not sure I could make it down this very rocky, slippery, steep terrain in one piece. So for the rest of the journey, I didn't think of complaining about my sore back, legs, wind-burned face, or very wet body, or blister on my foot, or the cut in my hand ("*T*anks be to God!"). I could only think of doing my Tai Chi breathing into my lower belly, staying grounded, and going slow and steady!! Indeed, I made it!!! And I am somewhat hollowed out. ("*T*anks be to God!"). *Netqaddash shmak*. I'm hoping my shem, my light, shines a little brighter. And that maybe my dad's journey at these closing days will bring him a greater sense of *shem*, Light. *Netqaddash shmak!*

I included this autoethnographic excerpt at some length written only days after the journey, not only because some readers probably have done it, and clearly most in Ireland will know of it. But the excerpt provides an example of how all phases of spiritual development are with us at all times; many of us rely on that sense of spirituality to guide us in our life's journey throughout our adulthood, though the difficulties as well as through the good times. In my own story of Croagh Patrick we see how my Christianity and Catholicism intersect with my appreciation of the Druid and earth-based spiritualities, my foray into Zen meditation and Tai Chi, as well as my appreciation of the insights of Sufi mystics. All of these influences are a part of my spiritual development, and to some extent are with me all the time including when I prepare and teach my classes, just as they are with the adult learners in them. I might not consciously think of these spiritual threads as much as I did during the pilgrimage itself; after all the purpose of pilgrimage is to focus on these things. Nevertheless, what bubbled up on the journey is what grounds me and gives meaning to my life. It's these same touchstones that guided me through my father's dying process, when I was called home from my sabbatical in September due to his further health decline. With failing memory in those last weeks, he expressed a wide range of emotions. But he still always remembered his children's names, and his Catholic prayers and the mysteries of the Rosary; he would sometimes give an unexpected kiss on the hand. I wrote the following about three weeks before he died, about the important lessons I was learning as I fed him some yoghurt:

It was strange, for someone who is into wanting to be productive and at times feels sorry for myself about the untimely end to my sabbatical in Ireland, I did have the sense as I fed my father a spoonful of yoghurt, that this was among the

most important work I would ever do. A spoonful of yoghurt, an unexpected kiss on the hand, and a lesson in the significance of saying prayers at the end of one's life that has been part of the fabric of one's living breathing, and earliest memory. These are simple, but profound lessons. It's still not easy, I have to say. And as the mystery of the light fades as the sun shifts to its autumn horizon, and as I watched the beautiful orange-pinkish-green leaves of the maple tree outside my father's New Hampshire window glitter in that changing light, I thought of the importance of grabbing the mystery of that light as it shifts and changes inside my own soul. I even donned an old sweatshirt in pinkish orange with a dash of green in honor of the luminous leaves glittering in that autumn sun, and to honor that special moment. It does help, and is quite mysterious; but I'm still trying hard not to be depressed in spite of the wonder of the mystery in it all. In these times, it is great to trust that Mystery will appear, and this time, it was in all her autumnal glory!

While I didn't want my time in Ireland to be cut short, I learned some more important life lessons than what I had planned; it was a different sort of adult learning experience than what I expected on my sabbatical. I heard and saw my dad express some similar spiritual touchstones during his journey toward death that I also experienced on the journey to Croagh Patrick, though his were more identifiably and more exclusively Catholic. Those experiences both in Ireland and with my dad made me think of my own life and my spirituality in a deeper way. Life does that, as we make further meaning of its new events and new places, and it also does so in the lives of our adult learners as well. While they might not climb Croagh Patrick, they have touchstones and grounding places from their own cultural context that are part of their own spiritual journey which guides how they make meaning in the world. This is why it needs to be taken account as part of culturally responsive education.

#### **Musings on formal research interrupted**

I did manage to begin the formal part of my research study on the role of spirituality in culturally responsive education in Ireland in mid August, but was only able to conduct two formal interviews before I returned to the US to tend to my dad. However, I did have several informal conversations with those who teach adults either in higher education or in community settings while I was traveling around seeing the sights of Ireland and visiting friends. Both from my interviews and informal conversations, I recognize that the cultural context around issues of spirituality is somewhat different in Ireland than it is in the US. While

clearly a sense of personal spirituality was important to many I spoke with, those in academia seemed to indicate that spirituality was often equated with religion in the whole of Ireland. Because of the history of religious conflict there was great hesitation about discussing anything that might relate to religion (including spirituality) in any kind of public setting. In trying to get a handle on understanding this, in an e-mail exchange, an Irish colleague explained:

Generally it is not considered 'with it' among European academics to discuss spirituality unless one is actually in a theology college. When I studied [academic discipline] we did everything but a spirituality perspective... seems crazy. It is deemed -in general- that you are slightly off the wall if God is mentioned. The same goes for our politicians. In USA it is evidently very different...! Never happens here.

Perhaps it doesn't happen in Ireland as much as in the US, but it is indeed beginning to happen. As noted earlier, there was a whole conference on "Alternative Spiritualities, the New Age, and New Religious Movements in Ireland" last October of 2009 (Cosgrove and Cox, 2009), so it is being considered in other academic arenas, and among socio-cultural workers. Most of the presenters were people who work in academia or in community settings, who are recognizing that the New Immigrants along with other socio-cultural influences, are having an impact on both spirituality and religion in Ireland. Ireland is not just Catholic or Protestant anymore; it is Muslim, Jewish, pagan, Buddhist, New Age, and much more, including people with a blended spirituality. It is important in working with people of different cultural groups, to honor the ways they make meaning in light of their intersecting cultural, spiritual, and religious histories.

### Conclusions

Is it possible to draw on spirituality in culturally responsive education in some of the ways that I discussed earlier in light of my always-developing theory of a spiritually grounded cultural responsive model of transformative adult education I discussed above? I think it is possible with some caveats. While I don't necessarily use the term "spirituality" or discuss it when I'm teaching (unless that's what the course is about), I do create space where learners can draw on image and symbol, and share cultural stories that sometimes do bring up spirituality. Of course, in the US, there is not the history of religious conflict that exists in Ireland. But I do think Irish adult educators can easily create space where the ways people make spiritual meaning can be brought into the learn-

ing environment. It appears that many Irish adult educators are drawing on some of the same teaching technologies that I do, where space is created potentially to do so. Indeed, many Irish educators have talked about and made use of drawing on emotion, the arts, metaphor, symbol, and image, and multiple ways of knowing in adult learning settings (McCormack, 2009). There's also been much discussion of cultural inclusion and equality issues for new immigrants to Ireland, and Ryan and Fallon (2005), in their discussion of citizen education, specifically discuss the importance of creating space for learners to be "in one's world and of one's world". Creating space where learners can draw on their own forms of cultural expression, just might connect to their spirituality; it might be part of "claiming a sacred face" that is "in and of their world." Perhaps it can add dimension to how Irish adult educators can continue to develop a more culturally responsive approach to education.

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## Building a Strategic Framework for Lifelong Learning: insights from 'Learning Through Life' .

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### Introduction

“from the earth of farm labour to the heaven of education...”

(Seamus Heaney)

This paper gives an overview of the work of the recent independent Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning in the UK. I first outline the range of the Inquiry, to give an idea of the overall context; this includes its application in each of the regions within the UK ( England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.) . I turn then to two sets of theoretical frameworks which underpin the report: the interlinked notions of human, social and identity capital; and, more originally, the four-stage model of the lifecourse. I outline the way in which resources are allocated across the different stages. I then discuss the notion of intergenerational solidarity, by considering the types of transfers which run between generations. The sections provide only a selection of insights; for a fuller account readers are referred to the main report of the Inquiry, *Learning Through Life*.

### Strategic approaches

The Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (IFLL) was an independent inquiry, sponsored by NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, and carried out from 2007-2009<sup>6</sup>. The origins of the Inquiry lay in the setting up, a decade previously, of the National Advisory Group on Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the new Labour Government, gave this advi-

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<sup>6</sup> NIACE's remit covers England and Wales, but the Inquiry extended to include Scotland and Northern Ireland, in ways I shall describe below.

sory group a wide brief, and himself wrote an inspiring Foreword to the report which resulted, *The Learning Age* (DfEE 1998). In it he gave full recognition to the need for civic and cultural learning, in addition to more functional dimensions. However over the succeeding years the political focus gradually narrowed, with an increasing emphasis on work-related skills. In 2007, the Chief Executive, Alan Tuckett, - asked the NIACE board to allocate resources to an investigation which was intended to kickstart a fresh debate, and political action, on the broader themes of lifelong learning. NIACE is a medium-sized charity, and this was a very significant commitment on their part. The Inquiry was steered by a body of Commissioners, chaired by Sir David Watson, who were invited to produce their own thoughts and recommendations<sup>7</sup>. The overall goal of the Inquiry was specified as follows: to offer an authoritative and coherent strategic framework for lifelong learning in the UK. This was understood to involve:

- articulating a broad rationale for public and private investment in lifelong learning;
- a re-appraisal of the social and cultural value attached to it by policy-makers and the public;
- developing new perspectives on policy and practice.

Adhering to the goal of a strategic framework presented some problems. It necessarily entailed adopting a longer-term horizon than generally characterises policy-making; but in doing so it risked distancing itself from the immediate concerns of practitioners in the field. There is a particular difficulty in the case of lifelong learning, since the 'system' itself is untidy and diffuse, and not easily amenable to coherent discussion.

Secondly, it raised issues to do with the nature of research, evidence and analysis. Developing a strategic framework is an applied exercise. This does not exclude critical thinking, nor theorising; but it means that the main thrust of the arguments is towards a framework which is useful for policy-making and application, at different levels.

Thirdly, there is a difficulty of language. Discussions and documents which claim to be 'strategic' tend to the grandiose or the banal, and often do not invite

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<sup>7</sup> There was strong overlap with the sponsoring body, in that two of the Commissioners were members of the NIACE Board; Alan Tuckett attended throughout; and the IFL Secretariat were NIACE staff, either appointed directly to the Inquiry or seconded. However this overlap generated no significant threat to the Inquiry's independence.

engaged debate. A key test for the Inquiry has been whether it could manage to maintain a strategic focus without floating off into the stratosphere. Readers will have to judge this for themselves.

### **Structure and strands**

The remit of the Inquiry was very broad. It was initially structured around nine main themes:

- Employment
- Demography
- Wellbeing
- Technology
- Migration
- Crime
- Poverty
- Citizenship
- Sustainable development.

For each of these themes we issued a Call for Evidence. This was followed by a day-long seminar, with contributed papers by researchers and practitioners. These elements were then fused into a Thematic Paper, drawing together the various inputs and taking the theme on towards a set of conclusions.

### **However, there were a significant number of other inputs:**

- *Sector papers* were commissioned. These explored the implications of a genuine move towards lifelong learning for each of a number of sectors, both inside and outside the formal education system. The papers cover: early years, schools, further education, higher education, the private training market, cultural institutions (museums and libraries) and family learning.
- *Stocktake*. This strand had two major components. First, we commissioned extensive work to map out the range of investments made in different forms of lifelong learning. This was painstaking, original work, building up the figures from the bottom up. The figures cover expenditure by government departments, both as employers on their own staff training and on broader programmes; by local government and other public agencies; by private employers; by the third sector; and by private households and individuals. We estimate the annual total of public and private expenditure at some GBP £55 billion. (approx €50 billion).

Secondly, we brought together existing data on participation in adult learning, mainly from NIACE's own regular annual surveys. This enabled us to show trends over the last decade.

Bringing these two components together turned out to be a crucial factor in the overall shape of the Inquiry's conclusions. In proposing a new four-stage model of the educational lifecourse, we were able to show how the total resources were distributed across the different stages. By combining the population participation rates at each stage with the different levels of per capita expenditure we were able to show how disproportionate the distribution is.

- Thirdly, we commissioned some analysis of the public value of lifelong learning, that is to say the ways in which learning affects wider areas of public policy. We focussed in this strand on poverty, crime, health and wellbeing. An important goal here was to open up methodological issues involved in such analyses, in an attempt to build stronger bridges between conventional cost-benefit analysis and the types of analysis which recognise wider factors and more complex social interactions. We built here directly on the work of the Research Centre into the Wider Benefits of Learning ([www.learningbenefits.net](http://www.learningbenefits.net); see especially Feinstein 2008; and Schuller et al 2004), and indeed collaborated with colleagues from the WBL Centre on this.
- Finally, we carried out an electronic consultative exercise on *learning infrastructures*. In this we focussed on the interactions between physical environments and spaces on the one hand and technological developments on the other; and the skills required to make such interactions work most effectively to the benefit of learners. Two rounds of consultation took place involving educational technologists, planners, architects, and various other categories of professionals. This exercise resulted in a number of scenarios, built round a set of drivers.

The papers from these strands are all available on the IFLL website: [www.life-longlearninginquiry.org.uk](http://www.life-longlearninginquiry.org.uk). They are a rich resource. However the rest of this article draws primarily on the Inquiry's main report, *Learning Through Life* (Schuller & Watson 2009), launched in September 2009. First, however, I would like to say a few words on the way in which the Inquiry addressed the complexities of the political structures of the UK.

### **A UK Inquiry: the regional dimension**

Readers of this journal will be well aware of the asymmetrical nature of the UK's political structure, and within that of the divergences in education and training systems. The Inquiry set out to draw on the experience of the four UK regions, and to produce findings which would be of relevance to each of them. This was no easy task. We developed two main means of tackling it<sup>8</sup>.

First, we held day-long seminars in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These allowed us to capture some of the key strategic issues from the different regions, even though we would not claim to have covered the full range of their particular contexts. In Wales, for example, the question of partnerships was very strong; in Scotland we dealt extensively with the issue of credit frameworks; and in Northern Ireland the broad topic of community cohesion was the dominant theme of the day. Secondly, we commissioned individuals to 'proof' the text of *Learning Through Life* (LTL) from a national perspective (Gallacher 2009, Nolan 2009).

Following the publication of LTL we have engaged in several meetings in the different nations. These have been lively and productive, and, subjectively at least, the feeling seems to be that the report speaks to the concerns in the different regions of the UK, although with necessary adjustments of emphasis.

In this context it is worth adding that there is mounting interest from other countries in the Inquiry's process, analysis and recommendations. In spite of the fact that LTL focuses very much on the UK, researchers and policy-makers in several other countries, for example Canada, Italy and Denmark, have responded by saying that they have no difficulty in applying the framework to their own contexts.

### **Mobilising concepts**

The strategic framework drew on two conceptual sources. The first brought together three 'capitals' – human, social and identity – and built on work already done (Schuller et al 2004). The second was a new approach to modelling the educational lifecourse, dividing it into four stages.

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<sup>8</sup> We had a Commissioner from Wales, Professor Teresa Rees, and one from Scotland, Professor John Field, but their role was not at all confined to providing respective national perspectives.

### a) *Three capitals*

There is a growing consensus on the need for fresh thinking about the role of education in economic and social development, to get beyond simplistic reliance on single measures (such as a growth in qualifications as the sole driver) and to capture the complex interactions between the different components. We drew on a simple (but not simplistic) framework for thinking about the purposes and benefits of lifelong learning. This consists of three ‘capitals’, that is, forms of assets which have value for individuals and for society: human capital, social capital and identity capital.

- *Human capital* refers to the skills and qualifications held by individuals. It is built up mainly through formal education and training, but informal learning also plays an important part. People deploy their human capital in the workplace as a factor of production, but they also put it to use in social and community contexts.
- *Social capital* refers to participation in networks where values are shared, so that the people contribute to common goals. The networks may be local (including family) or global. It is less of a personal attribute than human and identity capital. Social capital supports learning and is strengthened by it. Although social capital is not acquired directly through education in the same way as skills and qualifications are, getting more education is a powerful way of increasing access to networks<sup>9</sup>.
- *Identity capital* is the ability to maintain healthy self-esteem, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life. As a Nordic thinktank discussing Future Competencies put it, adult education should enable people ‘to deepen their self-knowledge and reinforce their self-image, as this is the basis for effective competence development in other fields.’

There is a long-running debate about these terms: how they should be defined, and how they should and should not be used. The key issue is the interdependence of different kinds of learning. This is not just a conceptual matter. It affects policy and practice in very basic ways. Think of these capitals as forming a triangle, with the three sides linking up the different forms of capital. Without the formal and informal networks which make up social capital, people will find it hard both to build up the skills and qualifications which make up human

<sup>9</sup> The notion of social capital in relation to education really took off with the publication of a major report by OECD in 2001, authored by Tom Healy.

<sup>10</sup> Nordic Network for Adult Learning (2007).

capital, and to apply them productively. Conversely, without skills, they will find it harder to gain access to networks. Without the self-esteem which makes up identity capital, it is difficult both to learn and to apply that learning.

Take as an illustration the relationship between education and depression. Depression is now a major form of ill-health, across most industrial nations, with one in five adults in the UK thought to be affected by depression at some point in their lives. It affects adults and children of all classes. Depression has a major impact on productivity, reducing the value of people’s contribution at enormous cost to organisations and societies, as well as individuals. It is linked to the extent to which people are part of thriving social networks: being a part of a network will help prevent or cure depression, and this includes work-related collegiality, as well as social relations outside the workplace. In turn, work that is unhealthy will have an impact on family and social relationships. The arrows go in all directions, linking each of the three capitals in both directions. This is common sense, but too often our approach to learning is based on splitting these different forms off from each other.

As assets the capitals have different implications according to their specific contexts. In particular, they have different meanings for different broad age groups (see below). Identity capital, for example, will have a very different significance for a young person seeking to establish their professional identity than it will for an old person confronting death. Both sets of circumstances are important – and both need access to learning.

### b) *A new model of the lifecourse*

The overall IFLL analysis was driven by two major trends: demographic change, especially the ageing of the UK population; and labour market change, especially the extension and increasing fuzziness of both entry into employment and exit from it. The combination of these two trends led us to formulate a fresh approach to the lifecourse. We draw three ‘bright lines’, at 25, 50 and 75. (‘Bright lines’ is a legal term, referring to divisions which are based on reasonable empirical assumptions, even though they make no claim to be universal or watertight.) These three lines give us four quarters: up to 25; 25-50; 50-75 and 75+<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Being concerned primarily with adults, we define the first stage as 18-25.

The demographic picture is quite well known, but this does not mean the consequences have been properly assessed. Increased longevity means that the size of older age groups is increasing relatively quickly; the fastest growing group are the very old, but the largest increase in the next decade will be the over 50. So the shape of the population is changing. This poses significant economic and social challenges; our case is that the educational response to these has been very muted. Learning for people over 50 is still regarded as a peripheral issue.

The time taken by young people to move into the established labour market has been becoming not only longer but fuzzier. The work of Andy Furlong has shown how young people shift around between different statuses: full-time and part-time study, full-time and part-time work, unemployment: the sequences are myriad (Furlong et al 2003). It is only around their mid-20s that many young people establish a personal and professional identity. This is, evidently, a large generalisation, but one that is in broad terms empirically sustainable.

At the other end, some people begin to leave employment in their 50s. On the other hand, people are now working longer and longer. Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Adults in England shows how people in all older age groups increased their labour market participation between 2002/3 and 2006/7; for example the rate for 60-64 year olds went up from 37.8% to 45.5% (Banks and Tetlow 2009), and this is set to continue as a result of people having to work longer to meet increasing pensions deficits. As well as paid work, older people also engage a lot in voluntary work, with around 40% of those aged 65-74 engaged in informal volunteering. So we have some kind of mirror image of the youth transition, with older people engaging in a range of different activities, paid and unpaid.

At around 75 – another generalisation, but broadly true – is when chronic illnesses kick in. Almost everyone has by then withdrawn from the labour market, and a majority experiences some degree of dependency. This does not, however, mean that they have no learning needs.

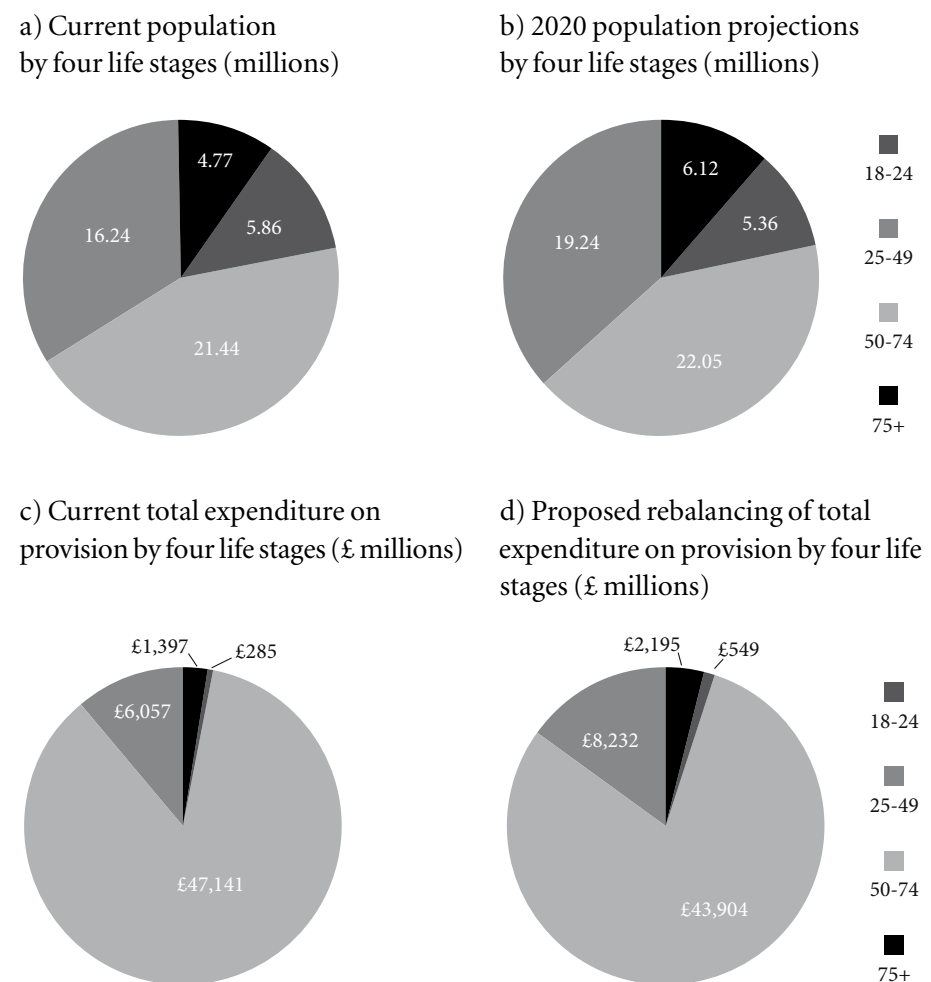
This forms the rationale for our four-stage model (for further detail see LTL Ch 5). Rather than being a neat theoretical construct, it is a recategorisation with direct application to the way we organise learning opportunities across the lifecourse. It poses a direct challenge to many assumptions about what and how people learn.

### Resources for learning

As noted above, we estimated the annual total of public and private spending on all forms of lifelong learning at £55bn. We developed a formula for analysing the distribution of this across our four stages. The formula was based on a combination of age-based participation rates and estimates of the duration of learning by age – ie how long different age groups spent on learning when they took part.

**Figure 1**

a) Current population and b) 2020 population projections (millions)  
 c) current total expenditure on provision and d) proposed rebalancing (£ millions)



The left hand side of Fig 1 (ie pies a and c) gives the result for the current population and expenditure. The right hand side shows how the population is projected to change (pie b) and how resources might be 'rebalanced' to reflect this (pie d), in order to give a more appropriate allocation. There is no intrinsic rationale to the precise figures in the rebalancing, with the reduction from 86% to 80% of the proportion going to those in the first stage and a consequent more than doubling of the resource going to the last two stages. We put it forward as a meaningful proposal to guide the future debate. If this is given the attention it deserves, it will do much to achieve a major expansion of learning opportunities across the life-course.

### Intergenerational solidarity

Having set out the four-stage model, we go on to emphasise that this is not designed to confine individuals to different age groups, nor is it to suggest that learning should be organised on that basis. Social structures do not mean placing people in different boxes as if they all conform to identical patterns. Nevertheless, the way we have constructed the argument, and the rationale for a rebalancing of resources across the different stages, could be taken as accentuating divergences and tensions between different age groups and generations. In this section, therefore, I sketch out how the interests of different generations are interdependent, even whilst there is inevitable competition for resources.

Figure 2

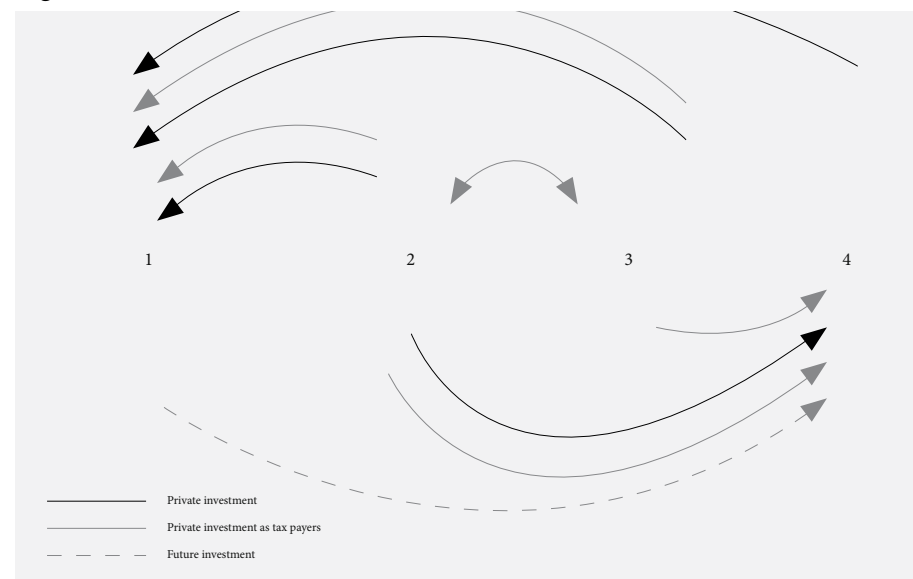


Figure 2 outlines the different types of linkages between generations which underpin investment in lifelong learning. For example, grandparents often invest in the schooling or university study of their grandchildren, either through paying fees or through supporting the young generation in other ways. Those in the Fourth Age have mainly ceased paying taxes, at least income tax, and so this is often private transfer. The Second and Third Ages support initial education both by private transfers and through the taxes they pay to support publicly provided learning. They also support each other; for example, we show how very considerable the tax relief is for employers providing training, and since older workers have far less access to training, this on balance represents a transfer from them to workers under 50.

The impression given is that all these transfers are financial ones. Of course this is not true. The single strongest factor influencing young people's educational achievement is the interest their parents show in their education. This surpasses parental income by a very long way. So these arrows represent commitment of a moral kind, as well as financial transfers. Most obviously, they point to the potential of family learning, where members of different generations learn together, to everyone's benefit (Lamb 2009). So the arrows should be taken to refer to all forms of support which contributes to the building of the three capitals I referred to earlier: human, social and identity.

The lower half of the figure is maybe the more interesting one. The arrows from Second and Third Aged to the Fourth Age signal how working age adults support those in the final years, publicly and privately. In the broad context, of course, most of this support takes the form of social and medical care. But we are arguing for a rebalancing of resources, which would mean that at least some of the taxes paid would go into expanding the very restricted learning opportunities currently offered to older people.

This would be a strong sign of intergenerational solidarity. It would also be an act of enlightened self-interest. For, we argue, increasing learning opportunities for older people (in the Third as well as the Fourth Age) would be a significant way of maintaining their independence, as well as their wellbeing. We know that participation in adult education has positive effects on physical and mental wellbeing (CERI 2007; Foresight 2008, Jenkins 2009), both directly and because it supplies people with social connections and contact. It there-

fore helps them lead their own lives, manage their own health and rely less on personal or institutional care. All this has massive benefits, to themselves, their families and the state.

So there is a firm rationale underpinning educational solidarity between generations. Comment is needed on the dotted line linking the extremes, the First Age with the Fourth. What does this represent? It signals that young people have a clear future interest in improving the learning opportunities available to older people. In part, the rationale is the same as above, ie in reducing unnecessary dependence of older generations. But there is a further component: young people age, and most of them will move through the Second and Third Ages to the Fourth Age. It is in their interest to have, waiting for them, a securely established platform of continuing educational opportunity.

Of course this may sound naïve. The horizons are such that many individuals will not want to commit themselves to these forms of delayed opportunity. It certainly requires more than cool logic to carry the case. But it is important to spell out these interdependencies in order to make the case visible. Too often, there is no framework for setting out and considering the arguments. Too much of current practice is taken for granted. In sketching out the case as we have done, the aim is to extend the range and reach of the debate.

### **Conclusions**

The world has changed dramatically since the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning began its work in autumn 2007. The global economy has seen a spectacular reversal; everywhere public finances are in huge difficulty, and although at the time of writing employment levels had held up surprisingly well for a recession of this magnitude, in many countries the fear of massive job losses is very present. Does this mean that all the recommendations from Learning Through Life have to be shelved, put away till better times re-emerge? Not at all. In fact the Inquiry never intended to pitch its proposals mainly in a context of increased public expenditure, at least not in terms of a sharp short-term rise. It makes the case for lifelong learning as an area of public policy, social action and individual responsibility. There are three particular implications.

First, we suggest changes which need to be managed over a period of years. Thus the rebalancing of resources is something which can only be undertaken in a ten-year horizon. Another of our proposals is for an end to the discrimination

against part-time study, where both individual and institutional funding favour full-timers. This is something which needs perhaps 5-6 years to bring about fully. There is never a perfect moment to start such shifts.

Secondly, the shock to the system has paradoxically opened up the terrain to fresh thinking. This is clearly the case when thinking about the distribution of working time. Instead of making people redundant, more employers are offering short-time working, and sometimes this is in conjunction with sabbaticals or study breaks. The generosity of these offers varies greatly; but they are generally far more satisfactory than simply throwing people into unemployment. The 'new mosaic of time' means that more people are combining employment (of shorter hours) with other activities – including learning. The learning may be instrumental, to equip themselves for the economic upturn, or fulfilling ambitions of learning for personal development. Both are welcome.

Thirdly, we argue for a more intelligent system. By this we mean a system whose different components talk to each other, learn from each other and as far as possible work towards the same goals. This means building consistent information over time. It means developing more imaginative as well as more systematic experimentation to see what works in promoting adult learning; and it means encouraging innovations which promote communication across sectoral and professional boundaries.

It is still too early to judge how far LTL, and the Inquiry generally, will shape the debate and influence decisions. However it would be fair to say that our model of the educational life-course has elicited a remarkably positive response from many different quarters, and that the thinking on public value analysis is already reflected in local policy approaches in several parts of the country. We shall return late in 2010 to attempt an evaluation of the impact so far.

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## SECTION TWO

### PRACTICE ARTICLES

# Using the Women's Community Education Approach to Deliver Community Employment

*Training: a case study from Longford Women's Link*

LORNE PATTERSON & KATHLEEN DOWD

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## **Abstract**

*The recent economic downturn and surge in unemployment has focused attention on education and training as a strategic response to Ireland's socio-economic crisis. However, that attention has been concentrated on training through statutory institutions, particularly FÁS and the VECs. Longford Women's Link, a Women's Community Education centre in Co Longford, presents a case study of delivery of the FÁS-funded Community Employment Scheme using the Women's Community Education approach. Evidence is presented that demonstrates effectiveness in personal, career and community capacity-building in addition to achieving labour-market activation with long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups of women. These outcomes argue that the Women's Community Education approach has a significant role to play in any education and training strategy.*

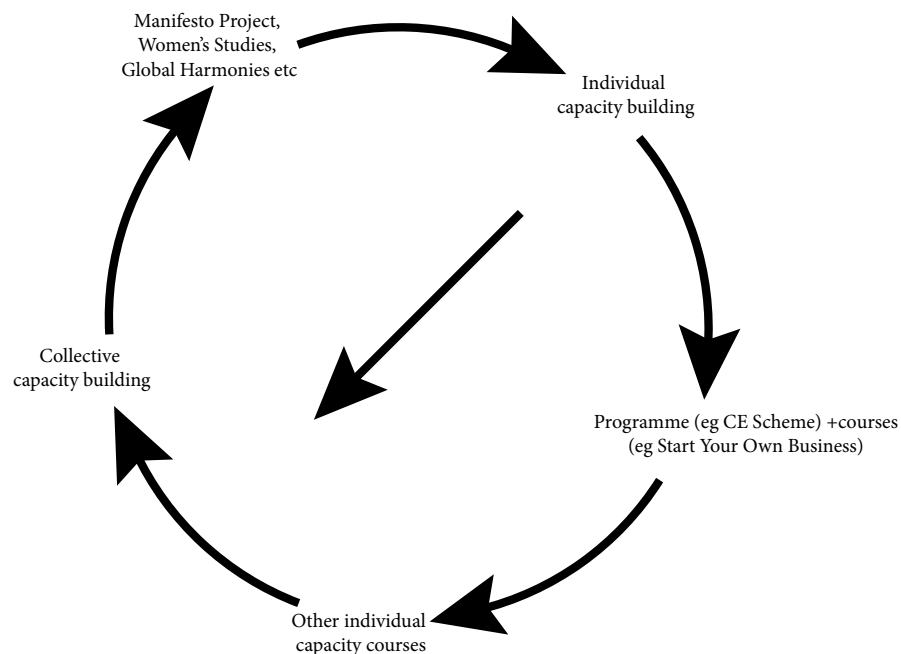
## **Context: Women and Disadvantage**

As noted in the National Women's Strategy 2007, socio-economic opportunity and economic independence are key factors in ensuring women's full participation at all levels of society. For women who experience disadvantage through being a full or part-time carer, a lone parent, living in a rural area, or experiencing domestic violence, for example, lack of opportunities to engage in economic activity – whether through employment or self-employment – means that they frequently become trapped in a cycle of welfare dependency and isolation. This in turn impacts negatively on educational, economic and social outcomes for their children, families and communities. The compound positive effect of specifically supporting women has thus been described by UNICEF's State of the World's Children report (2007) as the 'double dividend'.

Longford Women's Link (LWL), a women's resource centre based in Co Longford, has delivered a number of effective labour-market programmes to women within the County over the last decade. LWL's three core programmes have focused on the areas of employment, particularly through the Community Employment ('CE') Scheme, the 'Gateway' (return to employment) programme<sup>12</sup>, and also self-employment initiatives.

Longford Women's Link offers its CE scheme particularly through its 'Catkin's Nursery' childcare service, but also in administration through its Reception section. In addition to being a CE employer, LWL is also an ECDL and FETAC Quality-Assured and registered education centre, and thus able to offer 'in house' certified training to CE participants. The Women's Link does this using the Women's Community Education approach, a participant-led approach that focuses on women learning from, as well as with, other women.

**Figure 1. The process of individual and collective capacity-building at Longford Women's Link**



<sup>12</sup> The FÁS-funded 'Gateway' programme was discontinued nationally in early 2009.

### The Community Employment Scheme

The Community Employment Scheme is designed to help long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups get back into work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities, namely voluntary organisations and public bodies involved in not-for-profit activities. The criteria for participating in the Scheme are based on age (minimum 25 years old) and length of time in receipt of various social welfare payments. Placement is for at least one year and up to three to five years depending on age and circumstance, with specific criteria for Travellers, ex-offenders, refugees, people with disabilities and those referred by a Drugs Task Force. The Scheme is financed and delivered through FÁS, Ireland's training and employment authority. FÁS gives financial support in the form of allowances and funding to assist with the CE Scheme, for example participant wages, Supervisor salary, materials grants and specific skills training grants.

CE Supervisors provide individual support to participants through an 'Individual Learner Plan' process, which focuses on meeting the learning needs of participants. The Individual Learner Plan provides for the planning, organising and recording of the work experience, training and development that each participant receives while working on CE, assisting them to enhance both technical and personal skills. The training provided through Community Employment is delivered within a Quality Assurance framework.

### Women's Community Education

Women live in a political, social and cultural environment that excludes many from equal access to education and employment, the exercise of real choice in their lives and from taking up leadership roles in society. Women's Community Education (WCE) provides on-going social analysis of gender equality and social inclusion issues. It is a potent collective education process that supports the empowerment of women and seeks to address the socio-political aspects of women's experience through collective activism. Women-centred and participative, WCE ensures that women experience affirmation, recognition, dignity and leadership through their learning experience (*A Guide to Best Practice in Women's Community Education*, AONTAS 2009)<sup>13</sup>. As Connolly has observed (2003),

<sup>13</sup> For further reading on Women's Community Education, see also 'Women's Community Education in Ireland' (Connolly, 2001), and 'Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework 2003-2005 Project Report' (McCloy, 2005). Both reports are available as downloads from <http://www.aontas.com/pubsandlinks/publications.html#communityeducation>

‘Women as a group have moulded community education, but, in doing so, they have advocated a model which has been adapted by others, to address particular social issues and disadvantage... Community education is a flexible, emancipating process, which enables people to become more agentic in their own lives, and to bring about change in their worlds.’

The White Paper, *Learning for Life* (2000), significantly influenced by the development and community impacts of Women’s Community Education, affirmed that all adult education should ensure ‘equality of access, participation and outcome.’

**Figure 2. Traditional education characteristics vs. Women's Community Education characteristics**

Traditional Education	Women’s Community Education
Apolitical	Aims to achieve women’s equality
Education developed for learners	Developed with learners
No gender analysis	Feminist/gender analysis
Can be run by men or women	Owned and directed by women
Provider-focused /hierarchical	Community-centred/collective empowerment
Does not usually provide childcare	Provision of childcare a priority

**Delivery of the CE Scheme at LWL**

Community Employment positions are advertised by LWL on the FÁS website. Applicants are required to contact their FÁS office to be assessed for eligibility; the applicant is then requested to send a CV to the CE Supervisor at LWL who arranges an interview. Finally, the CE Supervisor seeks Garda clearance<sup>14</sup>.

Acceptance for employment at LWL is followed by an induction process where the CE participants meet with the CE Supervisor on a one-to-one basis. Information on the centre and its services is provided, the job description is clarified and information on rights as an employee of LWL are provided.

<sup>14</sup> As the Catkins childcare service is part of the LWL facility, all LWL staff require Garda vetting

This induction process ensures the participant has time to think about what she has already done in the line of work and education. With the support of the Supervisor, follow-up meetings help identify existing skills and areas that require refresher or additional training. These are built into an Individual Learning Plan. At the end of each meeting, the participant sets goals for herself and arranges a date for the next meeting.

The meetings thus create a framework for the participant to organise her time. It also provides an opportunity to look at different training options over her time on the Scheme. The fact that the participant constructs and reviews her Individual Learning Plan and its progress with the support of the CE Supervisor, imparts a real a sense of ownership.

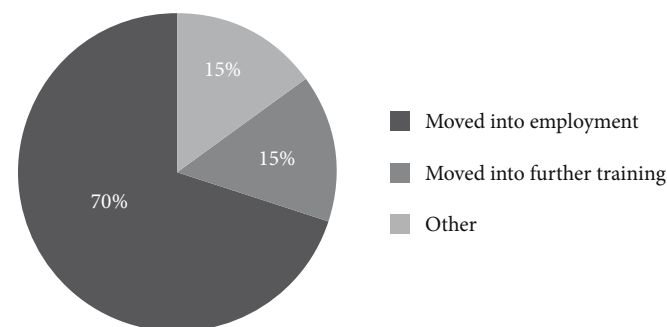
Each participant meets with the CE Supervisor at least once every two months and additional meetings can be requested if required. As members of either the LWL Childcare or Reception teams, regular team meetings take place within the organisation. Moreover, the CE participants themselves elect two representatives to these meetings. These representatives bring forward CE issues to the full Catkins Nursery meetings and feed back to their colleagues.

**Impact of CE Scheme and Training at Longford Women’s Link**

Thirty four women have participated in LWL’s CE programme over the last three years.

- Of these 34, fourteen currently remain employed at LWL, that is 41 % of total CE participants
- Of the 20 women who have left LWL having completed their CE placement, fourteen have secured some further form of employment, that is 70% of leavers
- Having developed an awareness of their specific goals through participation in the CE Scheme, together with the confidence to pursue further training/education opportunities with LWL, a further three are currently under-taking further education having finished the Scheme, that is a further 15% of leavers

**Figure 3. Progression impact of LWL CE scheme**



While this progression-potential is welcome, most of this further employment has nevertheless been restricted to low-income jobs. This has usually occurred as a result of:

- Caring commitments /lack of access to affordable childcare
- Work in low-valued, low-paid employment sectors, particularly childcare
- A lack of appropriate certification
- The gender pay-gap

In addition to addressing the issue of certification, LWL intends to undertake long-term evaluation of its sustained approach to supporting women, in order to determine progression to economic independence through personal capacity building and provision of certified training.

**Self-Evaluation**

In Longford Women’s Link, all aspects of work are subjected to three fundamental questions:

- What were the achievements?
- What were the challenges?
- What was the learning?

The evaluation process of the CE Scheme involved the CE participants themselves, relevant LWL staff and management, and the External Authenticator for FETAC who evaluated LWL’s learning and assessment processes in addition to participant portfolio evidence.

**Creation of evaluation ‘space’ with CE participants**

Organisational ‘space’ was created in September 2009 for facilitated evaluation-workshops with the CE participants. The participation of women themselves, as always, is central to design, delivery and evaluation of education and training programmes at the Women’s Link. 13 Participants took part in the workshops. At the time of evaluation, participants had been on the CE Scheme from periods ranging from 2 weeks, 2 months, 5 months, 1 year, 2 years, and 3 years, providing an excellent cross-section of the timeframe of the Scheme.

Overall, the socio-economic profile of women engaging in the CE Scheme at LWL is predominantly that of women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Of the women in the Scheme during 2009:

**Figure 4. Multiple-disadvantage amongst CE Scheme participants at LWL**

Status	%
Unemployed	100
Rural (ie. experiencing isolation as well as economic hardship)	58
Early school leaver	52
Lone parent	46
Elder-carer	17
Disability	17
Ethnic-minority	11
Traveller	5

**Evaluation feedback**

In relation to the issues of achievements, challenges and learning, the CE participants were asked to address the following specific questions:

There was a mixed level of knowledge about the CE Scheme within the group when they first heard about it/were introduced to it. The widespread perception was that Community Employment was something you did ‘if you couldn’t

get a proper job'. However, the part-time nature of the Scheme and particularly the family-friendly hours offered at LWL, were seen as critical incentives as this facilitated caring responsibilities. This was seen as equally important as the provision of income.

The perception regarding training was also mixed. Some participants were aware that training would be largely certification-based and this was seen as advantageous in gaining future employment. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of worry over abilities to successfully engage in certification training as half the Participants were early school-leavers. An initial lack of confidence as well as fear of being compelled to participate in training were major issues.

The main hope for participants was overwhelmingly 'to get a job'. The group was evenly split between those who specifically wished to work in childcare and those who were prepared to work in childcare in the hope of getting a subsequent job in a different sector. In addition, a number of the participants had multiple objectives, including to 'get out of the house', 'mix with other people', and 'be doing something'.

The longer the participants had been on the Scheme, the more positive their experience. Participants identified a number of very specific reasons for this transformation.

- It was felt that the length of the CE Scheme provided 'space' to develop confidence and learn or re-learn skills. This contrasted specifically with the experience of some 20% of trainees who participated in the same or similar courses previously at an adult education centre, where they reported feeling under enormous pressure to complete assignments within the established educational schedule.
- The attitude and approach of the CE Supervisor, LWL trainer, and contracted external trainers, were all seen as critically supportive – 'I wouldn't have stuck with it unless it has been for them', 'I didn't feel intimidated – the atmosphere made all the difference', 'It's completely different here'.
- The 'collective' philosophy at LWL. A number of the participants formed themselves into a peer-support study group and this was identified as an essential factor in the successful completion of a full FETAC Award in childcare – 'we helped each other, and encouraged each other', 'We got the work done and had a laugh.'

- The 'Individual Learning Plan' focus of the CE Scheme, which meant that training - at, or through, LWL - offered options that met the individual needs, aspirations and learning pace of the participants. The extended time factor of the Scheme also meant that participants could think about what they wanted to do without feeling under pressure to make an early decision.

Growing confidence was repeatedly expressed and affirmed as one of the most important outcomes for participants.

Participants made two specific suggestions in relation to improving the Scheme at LWL, namely that:

- The organisation continue to support the 'homework club', the peer-support study group that the participants had formed and organised themselves
- Sample FETAC portfolios be provided so that learners can picture in advance the sort of evidence they will have to create for each FETAC Level of work

The FETAC External Authenticator had already noted the 'enthusiasm' and 'involvement' of the learners; the quality of the theoretical and practical teaching and evidence preparation; and the supportive learning environment of the provider (ie. LWL). The FETAC Extern encouraged LWL to provide further education opportunities as she felt the standard of work exhibited in the Level 5 portfolios clearly demonstrated the potential of the Community Employment learners to progress to FETAC Level 6. As some of the participants had already expressed interest in Level 6 modules, and having explored the implications of offering Level 6 training for the first time, LWL began to deliver Level 6 Childcare in late 2009.

It was explicitly stated that Community Employment as a Scheme was undervalued and under-promoted nationally – 'It could be sold better', 'More women should be encouraged to do CE.' This latter comment specifically referred to the flexibility of hours that supported the caring responsibilities of the participants.

## Summary

Evaluation and critical reflection are fundamental elements of the Women's Community Education approach. The evaluation of the CE Scheme at LWL confirms its importance. Feedback clearly emphasises the importance of having time and space to grow as individuals; to develop confidence, knowledge and awareness; and to make importance life and career decisions. LWL's Women's Community Education approach and ethos underpin a number of significant elements as identified by CE participants, including:

- The safe and supportive 'atmosphere' for learning and growing.
- The emphasis on 'the collective' that facilitated peer-support and learning
- Achieving a full FETAC Level 5 Award in Childcare
- The identification by the FETAC External Authenticator of progression potential if the level of organisational support was maintained. For some participants, this has already led to progression into FETAC Level 6 learning
- The change in expectations over their time at LWL. An essential element of Women's Community Education is critical analysis of gender inequality, empowerment of women, and activism to address socio-political inequality

The importance of securing relevant labour-market certification cannot be over-stated and the CE Scheme provides funding for this specific element. The findings suggest that greater funding should be allocated to certification training in order to build on its importance and to provide progression paths at the higher education levels now being requested by employers.

Being more confident was seen to tie directly into securing future employment. Critically, increased confidence combined with increased knowledge was also seen to correlate with securing above minimum-wage employment. That 70% of the participants who have completed their CE placement at LWL progress to employment is a remarkable outcome. Nevertheless, it remains partial progress in that all of this employment continues to be minimum wage or low wage, particularly in the childcare sector. LWL intends to undertake long-term evaluation of its sustained approach to supporting women, in order to determine progression to economic independence.

## Conclusion

The White Paper, Learning for Life, acknowledges the substantial impact that local women's groups using the 'responsive' principles and practices that became known as Women's Community Education, had on their communities during the recession of the 1980s. Longford Women's Link, building on this tradition and commitment to gender equality, has found that the integration of the Community Employment Scheme within these principles and practices, represents outstanding value for women: the supporting evidence includes educational engagement and attainments, growth in participant expectations, labour-market certification and employment outcomes. Moreover, this value extends beyond the usual labour-market activation objective, and demonstrates that Women's Community Education remains a catalyst for personal, career and community capacity-building.

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# Return to Education for recovering drug addicts: the Soilse project

DEREK BARTER

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## Abstract

*This article is an account of a return to education course set up to cater to the needs of recovering heroin addicts in a Dublin rehabilitation project in the summer of 2008. It begins with a brief outline of the HSE Soilse rehabilitation and recovery programme and the rationale for seeking association with the Department of Adult and Community Education NUI Maynooth as a way of bridging both the structural and individual gaps that recovering people have en route to educational progression. A full account is presented of the actual Return to Learning (RtL) course, which employed a functional context education methodology and integrated literacy approach, from the reflections of the tutors who delivered the course. The Soilse/NUIM RtL is unique in terms of an adult education programme in Ireland in that it tried to grapple with two distinct yet interrelated issues; recovery from drug addiction and educational progression. The following article attempts to give a full and honest account of the programme and its outcomes.*

## Soilse: organisational background.

Soilse (the name means Light in Irish) was set up as the Health Service Executive Northern Sector's Addiction Rehabilitation, Education and Training Centre. It opened in 1992 following discussion with drug users (former and active) and those involved in providing drug services (statutory, voluntary, and community) concerning the needs of people seeking recovery from drug addiction. It set out to address the personal, social, and vocational needs of participants who had typically experienced significant marginalisation, disadvantage and disempowerment as a result of socio-economic and structural inequalities.

Soilse's work has continued to develop in the intervening years to the point where it now provides two distinct strands of a recovery programme. These are

divided into pre-treatment and post-treatment phases which form part of a continuum of care for the individual. Soilse is based in two locations with the pre-treatment stabilisation/detox programme being carried out in Henrietta Place (HP) and post-treatment drug free vocational, educational and career guidance programme located in North Frederick st. The rest of the article will concentrate on the work carried out in the North Frederick st (Soilse NF) facility.

## Soilse and the Continuum of Care

The Soilse model works in the context of addiction. It believes addicted people typically suffer progressive deterioration of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Soilse's participants also suffer acute social exclusion being characterised by early school leaving; poor literacy skills; criminal records; homelessness and poor general health (diet/alcohol/blood borne viruses/smoking). Soilse realises that where addiction exists its goal is to dismantle dependency through personal and social development by utilising adult education and group centred processes.

Soilse operates along a continuum of care which begins with the addicted person accessing drug services, perhaps through the Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) programme. The continuum aims to bring people along this scale through the various stages of recovery such as detoxification, treatment, rehabilitation and finally to the point of abstinence and reintegration. The continuum is an ideal of progression, however, such is the lack of movement from the starting point of MMT that this particular service has come in for severe criticism. A report from the Comptroller and Auditor General states that of the 8,000 people on methadone maintenance in the greater Dublin area in 2009 only 1.25 percent progressed on to detoxification treatment or follow-on rehabilitation (Irish Times, 6 June 2009). It is movement along this continuum that Soilse's first step in Henrietta Place and later North Frederick's st. adult education and guidance programme seeks to accommodate with the Return to Learning course as the final stage of engagement before discharge from services and the transition to aftercare.

Soilse's understanding of adult education as a major component within the transformative processes from dependency to sustainable recovery and from the margins to the mainstream corresponds with that of UNESCO's declaration on the right to learn<sup>15</sup> and with that of the academic think tank the New

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<sup>15</sup> In 1985 the UNESCO Fourth International Conference on Adult Education determined [T]he right to learn is the right to read and write; the right to question and analyse; the right to imagine and create; the right to read about one's own world and to write history; the right to have access to educational resources; the right to develop individual and collective skills.

London Group (NLG). They engaged in constructing new models of literacy in a multimedia world and who determine that ‘...the mission of education, one could say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community and economic life’ (Cazden et al, 1996, p 60). This is very much Soilse’s philosophy of education and recovery.

#### **The Soilse Programme:**

At present Soilse NF strives to achieve an intake of eight groups per year with an average of twelve people beginning in each group. Participants undertake a six month programme. In the first five months they work on all aspects of their recovery, while simultaneously working on achieving their FETAC certificate. Under the aegis of FETAC participants engage in modules in Communications, Mathematics, Personal and Interpersonal skills, Computer literacy, Art and Design, Craft, Drama, Preparation for Work and Health and Fitness at level 3. At level 4 people can undertake modules in Communications, Computer Applications, Painting, Drawing and Woodcraft. The final month of a participant’s time is given over to working on progression routes with career guidance counselors and an education development worker while simultaneously concentrating on recovery education and relapse prevention.

The idea for some form of a post-Soilse course had been gathering momentum for a number of years. Soilse’s experiences with people in education who are also in recovery brought a number of issues to light. In particular it was recognized how important it is that the recovering person has structure in their lives. The six months that the participant spends in Soilse provides that sense of stability. Ideally this type of structure can then be transferred into a college or university course. However, due to the necessity of a staggered intake and the fact that the academic year runs from September to June while recovery is subject to its own calendar Soilse is often left with people who might have to wait up to ten months before they can enter college or university. This gap presents a number of problems. If the individual returns to work the potential for complications around their recovery and progress arise. In the first instance renewing old social networks and patterns of behaviour allows the possibility of relapse to become a serious threat. Secondly, if the individual has been on one of the social welfare or health benefit schemes, returning to employment makes them ineligible for the Back to Education Allowance, the Vocational and Training Opportunities Scheme or the VEC and HEA grants.

Another issue that staff encountered centred on how prepared the individual is to take on a PLC or undergraduate course. As has already been stated many Soilse participants are early school-leavers this fact coupled with the sense of wasted time in addiction means that quite a number of people feel the need to make up for lost time and seek to embark on educational careers without putting the requisite skills in place. By offering a return to learning course Soilse sought to build on the skills that people already had. By creating an academic milieu, where the emphasis was on education rather than recovery it gave people a taste of the reality that would face them when they began a college or university course. In other words the course was designed to provide a learning methodology known as ‘Situated Practice’ (SP). The New London Group describe SP as:

...the part of pedagogy that is constituted by immersion in meaningful practices within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles based on their backgrounds and experiences. The community must include experts, people who have mastered certain practices. Minimally, it must include expert novices, people who are experts at learning new domains in some depth. Such experts can guide learners, serving as mentors and designers of their learning processes. This aspect of the curriculum needs to recruit learners’ previous and current experiences, as well as their extra-school communities and discourses, as an integral part of the learning experience.

(Cazden et al, 1996, p. 85)

The Soilse/NUIM return to learning course took this approach and provided the expertise that the New London Group espouse. The qualifications of the staff who designed and delivered the programme included two PhDs (Philosophy and History) one MA and one post graduate diploma in (Adult/ Career Guidance) and a BA Community Studies with a background in adult education and literacy provision. In late April 2008 agreement was reached with NUI Maynooth to run a return to learning course and preparations began.

A course outline and timetable were drawn up:

**Figure 1 Soilse/NUI Maynooth Return to Learning timetable.**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
10am	Sociology	English	Study day	Computer Applications	Personal Development
11am	Study skills	English	Study day	Recovery Support	Study Skills
12noon	Lunch	Lunch	Study day	Lunch	Lunch

In relation to the recruitment criteria for the RtL places were offered to people who could benefit most both in educational and recovery terms.

A list of candidates who met the qualifying criteria was drawn up and contact was made with former Soilse participants and some participants who were due to complete the Soilse programme at the end of May 2008. This mix of people at different stages of their recovery became, inadvertently, one of the most positive aspects of the programme. Offers of places were made to 14 people and on the 3rd June 2008 11 people began the first Soilse/NUIM Return to Learning course (to be joined by one other person on 16 June).

### The Participants

The lived experiences of the participants played a crucial role in marrying both components of the course together and this re-enforced Soilse's philosophy of adult education as a transformative practice (Mezirow, 1978, pp 100-110) which endeavours to build on all formal, non-formal and informal learning<sup>16</sup>. The dynamic within the group became part of the transformative experience for participants at early stages of their recovery and it is worth, at this point, looking at the profile of the people who took part in the course.

Of the twelve participants 10 were male and 2 female, the age range was from 22 to 48 years old. School leaving ages ranged from 11 years old to 18 years with the average being 15.5. Three people had been using drugs for over 20 years, three people for 15 years, two people for 13 years, one person each for 8, 9, 10 and 12 years respectively. The length of time people were drug free ranged from

<sup>16</sup> As such this approach corresponds with that of European Commission's approach to lifelong learning by adults as individuals and as members of the community and society (Eneroth, 2008, p. 229).

4 months to 10 years with the majority of people in the 18-24 months category. 11 people used Narcotics Anonymous, 1 Alcoholics Anonymous as their recovery supports while 4 used Aftercare, 2 saw counsellors and 1 used Cocaine Anonymous as further support. 11 were unemployed for various lengths of time up to 15 years (one person had never worked) and one worked part-time. Nine of the twelve had criminal convictions.

Over the course of the next fifteen weeks this group became another level of support for each other and provided a source of inspiration for the groups completing the FETAC course in the Soilse North Frederick St. facility.

### Integrating Literacy

When the Soilse/NUIM Return to Learning course was under consideration one of the primary motives for pursuing the programme was to try to raise the levels of literacy of the participants before they embarked upon a college course<sup>17</sup>. Soilse staff had long recognised that progression from FETAC level 3 / 4 to PLC FETAC level 5 and university requirements was a major hurdle for people to negotiate. It was accepted, right from the outset, that an integrated literacy approach was to be built into the programme. Educators argue that integrated instruction is more effective because it incorporates real world tasks and not those developed solely for schooling. It is regarded as more meaningful because knowledge construction is an integrative process.

Integrated instruction is also considered more efficient because it allows for greater curriculum coverage (Cazden et al; Sticht). It was fortunate that at an early course design stage meeting with Josephine Finn, Head of Continuing Education in the Department of Adult and Community Education NUIM, the idea of the methodological approach to be taken was that of Functional Context Education (FCE). This approach is seen as serving a number of purposes specific to the adult learner. It was recognised by the Soilse staff as having a particular resonance for people in recovery. As Smith explains:

The current functional conceptions of literacy view reading and writing as enabling individuals to accomplish things in life, to be productive, and to provide for oneself and one's family. This view also implies that literacy contributed to individual growth and development, and to a sense of wellbeing and personal satisfaction

(2009, p. 603)

<sup>17</sup> NALA's guidelines for integrating literacy include a literacy facilitator, monitoring system, materials, personnel, premises, induction programme, assessment programme, specialist assessment etc. All of these criteria were included in Soilse/NUIM RtL programme and below is a list of these and other tools for integrating literacy that the return to learning staff found useful:

Sticht is persuasive in his advocacy of this type of learning:

Regarding literacy, a general thesis is that the idea that literacy is something one 'gets' in one program, which is then 'applied' in another is misleading. Rather, (in terms of Functional Context Education) it is argued that literacy is developed while it is being applied. This means that for the large numbers of students in secondary or out-of-school programs for youth or adults who read between the fifth and ninth grade levels, literacy and content skills education can be integrated. Through this means, the need for special "remedial" literacy programs to get students to "prerequisite" levels of literacy before they are permitted to study the "real thing," are obviated. (1997, p. 58).

By adopting the CFE approach right from the introductory sociology session we were able to achieve two things. Firstly, we engaged the students in a subject about which none of them had any in-depth knowledge thus creating a level playing field. At the same time they dealt with concepts from everyday life with which they were familiar such as family, school, the justice system and religion etc. In this way the connection was made between academic subjects and personal experiences (Stitch, 1997, p.6; p 57)

Secondly, by providing them, in the session, with a provocative yet accessible, handout of a cartoon<sup>18</sup> in which Margaret Thatcher denied the very idea of society (Osborne and Van Loon, 2004, p. 6) opinions slowly emerged, (Thatcher holds a special place for many Irish people) and a space began to be established as a safe place to voice ideas and enter into debates. This encouraged engagement within the group and by the group with the subject which is again an important aspect of Situated Practice pedagogy:

There is ample evidence that people do not learn anything well unless they are both motivated to learn and believe that they will be able to use and function with what they are learning in some way that is in their interest. Thus, the Situated Practice that constitutes the immersion aspect of pedagogy must crucially consider the affective and sociocultural needs and identities of all learners. It must also constitute an arena in which all learners are secure in taking risks and trusting the guidance of others - peers and teachers.

(Cazden et al, p. 85)

<sup>18</sup> The use of graphics, cartoons, film, television shows etc., corresponds to the broadening of the concept of literacy to include multi-literacies espoused by the New London Group and the idea of literacy as a social practice as proposed by Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič

This approach underwrites both the therapeutic and educational programmes carried out in Soilse.

### **Induction**

In session one participants were given an induction pack which consisted of a plastic folder, A4 writing pad, hard back journal, a ring binder, a pen and a pocket dictionary. This last item was particularly useful as it led to a discussion as to who uses dictionaries. Initially it was argued that it was mainly stupid people or 'thicks who didn't know words' who would make the most use of a dictionary. As the discussion progressed it emerged that doctors would use medical dictionaries, writers might also use dictionaries and neither of these categories could be classed as 'thicks'.

Therefore within a matter of minutes the counter intuitive perception of a dictionary user had developed. It was acknowledged that it was not the stupid but people with some power who would use dictionaries most. This was the beginning of what we would attempt to achieve in the sociology class, to take the commonplace, and mundane and make them strange and worthy of reconsideration.

### **Achievable Goals**

On day one it was stated that many difficult sociological concepts would be encountered. However, with some effort and the support from the Soilse staff there was nothing that any individual would be unable to come to terms with. From the outset the point was stressed that time management and organisation were key in completing the course. The goals set by the staff were achievable. At this point new words, jargon and technical terms were cited by the students as being their most worrying concern. However, it was made clear that this was part of the learning process and that the language and concepts of sociology would become familiar to each as time progressed. Again the point was made that the class was embarking on something new. Previous experiences of the education system would have limited influence on how the individual would perform on the RtL course.

For most of the students this was the first time that politics, economics, history and society were discussed in any great depth in such a forum. It did not take long to discover how these forces shaped their own lives. The use of *Animal Farm* as the core text on the English module reinforced and reiterated new concepts about politics and the stratification of society that had been discovered in sociology class.

In the first number of weeks there was a palpable sense of excitement among the group members with words and phrases such as anomie, alienation, modernisation, globalisation, sociological mindfulness, social construction and discourse placed on the ‘new word’ notice board and used by the students. There was, also, the unforeseen consequence of the group being regarded positively. It became accepted that it was the next logical step for the other Soilse groups who were eager to partake in future RtL courses. This outcome, in microcosm, accords to the externality effect of the cumulative mechanism of education on wellbeing as discussed by Desjardins (2008, p. 28).

### Focus on Individual Needs

One of the National Adult Literacy Association’s (NALA) criteria is to give each individual a plan as part of the integrating literacy programme. This was done for individuals who showed they had literacy difficulties which accounted for five of the twelve people involved. Soilse’s literacy tutor (Joyce Gough) worked extremely closely with individuals, as in fact all of the tutors did.

This focus of attention became a feature of the programme. A weekly course providers’ meeting developed into an exercise in micro-management where an individual’s progress was assessed and areas of weakness identified. Gough had also drawn up an assessment table which asked each of the participants to evaluate their levels of ability at the beginning of the course; again in the middle of the course and finally at the end, it formed part of what became known as the College Readiness Matrix. Three participants were given one to one tuition. One of these same three was given extra tuition once a week provided by an outside tutor who came to Soilse. For another participant English was his second language and he had extra tuition to prepare him for the Cambridge English Exams.

Figure 2: College Readiness Indicators Matrix.

Indicators	College readiness indicators	Individual college readiness assessment	Initial literacy assessment. Progress literacy assessment. Final literacy assessment.	Specific learning difficulty assessment. Specialist assessment.
Language	Dictionaries for each student	New words notice boards. Glossaries in back of Learning Journals	Sentence starts, essay opening lines. Removing the subjective ‘I’.	Bibliography and Referencing
Performance	Language Games	Reading aloud	Presentations	Lecture and Library tour NUI Maynooth.
Discipline and Organisation	Student Handbook	Time tables Study time.	Notebooks and Folders	Learning Journals.
Study Skills	VAK tests	Mind-mapping	Reading, scanning, skimming, reading in depth.	Computer Skills
Miscellaneous		Individual library visits.	Film and DVD.	Class Handouts.

On Gough's recommendation an appointment was arranged for one participant to attend a Psychological Assessment where dyslexia was confirmed. The usual accommodations were then put in place whereby extensions to deadlines and the use of a Dictaphone were allowed. This person also used Soile's education development worker as a scribe for two of the assignments which formed part of the course requirements of four written assignments, a sociology essay, an English essay, a personal project (sociology) and a learning journal. The core text in the English class was, as has been noted above with *Animal Farm*. Participants were given a chapter to read every week. That then formed the basis for class discussion and textual analysis which included punctuation; spelling; tenses; homophones; use of apostrophes; sentence structure and paragraphing etc. It also included approaches to writing summaries, reviews, a film review and poetry. Of critical importance was the use of feedback of the draft assignments (see below p 12.)

### **A Sociological Context**

As has been indicated elsewhere the sociology module was designed to engage people in thinking about topics that directly affect their lives yet for the most part go unnoticed by the individual. The course incorporated an overview of the history and development of the discipline of sociology and the main concepts that sociologists are interested in such as processes of change, modernisation, globalisation and industrialisation, etc.

It also undertook a critique of the taken for granted assumptions that predominate in Western society e.g. the universal application of democracy, individualism and consumerism. The development of both functionalism and conflict theory were explored and these schools of thought were then employed to examine processes, phenomena and objects from everyday life that everybody was familiar with such as family, school, socialisation, justice, language, nationalism, identity, etc. The core texts were Schwalbe's *The Sociologically Examined Life: pieces of the conversation* and Giddens' *Sociology*.

Schwalbe was chosen because it is free of jargon and sociological language; its strength lies in its emphasis upon self-reflection and critical awareness and in the numerous examples from everyday life that can be viewed through a sociological lens. Schwalbe gets people thinking like a sociologist without them realising it. Giddens was chosen for exactly the opposite purpose he describes and uses the language of classical sociology and this was the students' first introduction to people like Durkheim, Marx and Weber.

Study skills were integrated to a degree into the sociology class which gave the tutor the freedom to switch between theory and application to the assignments in hand.. Initially, however, much of the time was spent allaying people's fears about course requirements and the individual's ability to meet these. The introductory session concentrated on the twin foundations for successful study, discipline and organisation, as well as a description of the course content. A copy of Schwalbe chapter 1 was handed out with the instruction that this was to be summarized 200-300 words for the following week.

This exercise caused some concern because people were afraid that they 'couldn't do it'; they 'didn't know what to do'; or that they would 'get it wrong'. These anxieties were expected and were ameliorated by getting the participants to complete the NALA Learning in Practice work-sheets 'Looking at our own experiences of learning' and 'Exploring the learning process' (the second of which had been slightly modified). It was obvious that past experiences of learning had to be exorcised in order for people to move on and it was also very necessary to let the students know that it was the process rather than the result that is important. Handholding, at this early stage, is extremely important but by getting people to write from the beginning a baseline for criticism and feedback was established.

An emphasis was laid on the need to draw up a realistic time-table as a way of putting structure on the participants' week. In the early weeks of the course the students did not take this requirement seriously, however once it was pointed out that it was to be incorporated into their recovery after-care plan with recovery supports i.e. Narcotics Anonymous meetings, AA meetings and counselling sessions forming the basis around which all of the rest of the week was to be planned, it then became more real and was considered useful. Week two of the sociology class saw all of the students with a summary of chapter 1 of Schwalbe's book and a lot of nervous people who were afraid that they did not do the exercise correctly.

The study skills session which took place on the following Friday began by handing back the summaries that they had submitted previously with corrections made to each piece. There was a short one or two line positive critical comment at the foot of each. The use of positive but honest feedback drew out some of the fear that people had about putting pen to paper and committing their opinions in writing. This aspect of evaluation has been explored by the

### **New London Group:**

Within this aspect of pedagogy (Situating Practice), evaluation, we believe, should never be used to judge, but should be used developmentally, to guide learners to the experiences and the assistance they need to develop further as members of the community capable of drawing on, and ultimately contributing to, the full range of its resources (Cadzen et al, p. 85)

The idea that, in relation to the concerns of mainstream society, one's opinions matter and can be taken seriously was a new experience for most of the class. This validation is an essential element in adult education. Self-effacement is very common in adults returning to education and a verbal comment can easily be passed off as a joke, or misunderstanding. The permanency of the written word carries with it a degree of commitment. This session recalled the questions asked about Schwalbe's chapter and reinforced how important it is to read with a question in mind in order to fully engage with the material. It also allowed the class to look at different types of reading i.e. scanning, skimming, and reading in depth.

Each week a chapter of either Giddens or Schwalbe was given to the class to read for the following week. The option of reading aloud was taken up and to the tutor's surprise it was always the individuals who had the most difficulty reading that were first to volunteer. It was made clear during individual consultation with students that those with reading difficulties began reading the chapters as soon as they got them. They might read it four or five times before they had to attend class the following week. The same individuals were the first to read aloud in English class. Whenever a new word arose it was noted and a student would be asked to look it up in the dictionary. Each reader was thanked for their efforts by the whole class which went some way to define the class as a community. This type of appreciation for the efforts of the group members is something that the participants were familiar with from their therapeutic sessions in drug treatment and their experiences in the fellowships of Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous.

Due to the length of the course we did not have a lot of time before the assignments were handed out. The sociology essays were based upon Schwalbe's first two chapters and chapter 1 and 3 of Giddens' book. A first draft deadline was set for mid-July. At this time one participant had a 'slip' and dropped out of the course. This participant linked straight back in with his key worker and a suit-

able care plan was put in place for him. If for no other reason this showed the value of the RtL as adding another dimension to the continuum of care.

The draft for the first sociology assignment highlighted many shortcomings in the students' understanding of the brief and what was expected by way of referencing and bibliography. However, the most important result was that out of the eleven remaining students, all had handed in a draft. This gave both the sociology tutor and the computer tutor a baseline to work from with each individual. A lengthy commentary was handed back to the student and areas of particular concern were pointed out. Work on bibliography skills and referencing began in earnest.

A deadline of Friday 1 August was set for the completed essay and nine of the eleven remaining participants submitted. For a first attempt at essay writing the standard of work was high and it focused the work of the participants. The following week the students were given a provisional grade and a comment sheet. The evaluation of the whole process of essay writing was undertaken. This was a useful piece of work as it opened up a discussion around the feelings attached to accomplishment and failure. Both of these phenomena hold risks for the recovering person. The sense of achievement that most people said that they felt on completing the essay brings with it a feeling of entitlement or reward.

Words and phrases such as 'very elated', 'satisfied', 'relief' etc. were used to describe their feelings. From experience, Soilse staff recognise that this has led people to reward themselves by celebrating with alcohol or other substances which can then become the motivation for continued action until the reward becomes more significant than the actual work. The other side of the coin failure or rather 'fear of failure' is often the source of procrastination and an accompanying sense of guilt and enormous stress. In this situation the recovering person can rationalise a 'slip' or a 'relapse' by assuming their addicted default position. The phrase 'I'm an addict, what do they expect' is well known to people working in addiction services.

The overriding feeling in the class however, was one of great relief and a sense of achievement by all but this relief was short-lived by the realisation that another assignment was due. At this point there was some attrition within the class. Three students left because of either personal commitments, child care issues, or the pressure of the work-load. However, this was still a positive result for

Soilse as it has provided an indication to the staff of people who might need further support as the college year progresses.

Besides the core modules of English and Sociology the other subjects covered were recovery support, self development for learning and IT skills. This last module was delivered by Sinead McNerney one of Soilse's career guidance counsellors and its inclusion was meant to evaluate participants' existing I.T. skills and to consolidate and build on them. The content of the module included setting up E-mail accounts; using the internet efficiently (search engines, web addresses etc); I.T. skills for essay/assignment writing; M.S. Word – basic skills e.g. alignment of text, setting margins, basic formatting of text (bold, italics, underline, etc), line spacing, using thesaurus, spell check, word count and writing a bibliography.

The modules Recovery Support and Self-development for Learning were delivered by Aoife Kerrigan and Julie Keating respectively. The latter was designed to focus students awareness on the personal skills needed to cope with returning to education. The aim was to increase students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses in this area and to encourage preparation for the some of the personal challenges they were likely to face.

The content was informed by feedback from teaching and guidance personnel in colleges of further education attended by past participants of Soilse. This was by way of an email request to college staff who had attended the Soilse Spring 2008 seminar on 'Supporting Adult Learners in Recovery.' A list of desirable personal skills was then compiled from the feedback. The students were asked to rate themselves on each of these and indicate which they would like to work on. From the students' answers an initial list of priority areas was developed:

1. Dealing with conflict;
2. Maintaining motivation;
3. Giving and receiving help to and from other students;
4. Challenging self- limiting beliefs;
5. Concentrating;
6. Self esteem and self confidence.

Sessions were then planned to cover these areas. In practice this became a loose framework as sessions tended to develop from material that arose at the previous session.

By the end of the course all of the above and other items on the original list had been explored. Participants were asked to rate themselves on their personal skills again at the end course. All reported increases in competency across the board. It was discovered that the course as a whole and not merely the self-development modules that helped participants to improve in self-confidence, esteem and challenge their self-limiting beliefs. The value of the self-development module was in raising self-awareness and awareness of the personal challenges each would face. Another benefit was that it highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each student for the staff team.

The decision to include a recovery support session in the Return to Learning timetable was based on feedback from former Soilse participants about the personal challenges experienced in the course. Their returning to further education and training, and the ways in which these challenges could undermine the recovery process and contribute to a decision to discontinue/drop out of follow on courses.

Through the provision of a facilitated peer support forum participants could discuss recovery related issues, their experience of the Return to Learning course, and their thoughts, feelings, and concerns about prospective college courses. The weekly group session was intended to support progression, promote recovery balance and to serve a relapse prevention function. The format for this module, which was facilitated by Aoife Kerrigan (HSE education officer) was a one hour, reflective/experiential peer support circle with emphasis placed on respectful and constructive feedback.

## Conclusion

Of the 12 people who started the course 7 people finished. Eleven people completed the first Sociology essay, 7 completed the English assignment, 7 completed the Personal Project and 7 completed the Learning Journal). In September 2008 eleven of the twelve had gone onto further education, nine onto CDVEC colleges, one onto the Trinity Access Programme and one person was working, while waiting to take part in a FÁS training programme for people with dyslexia. The person who did not go on failed to do so only because the course to which he had chosen was cancelled, however he stayed linked in with Soilse and began an arts degree in UCD in 2009.

For participants who have returned to some form of education the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to succeed in college were recognised as making this transition less daunting. Also, the past participants of the RtL have stated that the course has not only helped them to cope with the academic demands of course work but have been able to take a leading role among their peers and safeguard their recovery.

The fraught nature of recovery from drug and alcohol addiction means that not all the participants have remained drug free. As has been mentioned earlier one participant relapsed during the programme and staff were able to link that individual straight back in to the necessary services where he again became drug free and has embarked upon a undergraduate degree. In the duration since the course finished there has been two confirmed relapses and one unconfirmed. The follow up work done by Soilse's aftercare team has attempted to maintain a relationship with these individuals in order to help them to re-engage with addiction services. Therefore an essential ingredient in the success or otherwise of the Soilse/NUIM RtL is the twin track approach that is necessary in educating recovering people. The primary concern must be to keep the person's recovery as solid as possible, without this the risk of relapse becomes extremely high. Recovery is the cornerstone upon which all other progress must be founded. However, it is through educational progression and the accumulation of social and cultural capital (knowledge) that the individual will re-integrate into mainstream society, thereby consolidating their recovery.

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## **SECTION THREE**

BOOK REVIEWS

# AONTAS (2010) Flower Power: AONTAS Guide to best practice of women's community education

*AONTAS: Dublin. ISBN No. 978-0-906826-30-0*

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## *The Power Behind Us*

When Emerson said 'The task ahead of us is never as great as the power behind us' he could well have been speaking about this new publication, Flower Power: AONTAS Guide to Best Practice of Women's Community Education. The power behind Flower Power was generated in the small, informal women's groups which emerged in the social and personal hardships of the seventies and eighties. As such, those informal women's groups valiantly supported communities which faced the problems of poverty, unemployment and drug misuse. Moreover, their roles went beyond support, towards social change, aiming at changing the conditions which fostered inequality and inequity. Flower Power honours this legacy, in terms of both the content and the presentation. With regards to the presentation, it is very pleasing to look at, in vibrant design features, such as the rainbow of colours specific to each section, and the clear template drawings. Indeed, the entire production manages to convey the vivacity and verve of women's community education.

## *Quality Assurance*

This guide book was developed in the context of a Quality Assurance Framework. Quality assurance exercises provide the opportunity to reflect and review current practice. However, quality reviews are always in danger of becoming a series of empty checklists, meaningless and of no value whatsoever. Anyone who has completed a daft satisfaction rating on provision, be it on a train or after a car service, will know that these surveys are mere inventories designed to tick some box, somewhere.

This guidebook offers a bulwark against such a danger. It clearly outlines how a Quality Assurance Framework is developmental. It provides a structure for

women's community education groups to review and transform their work, from naming what they do, to identifying what improvements could be made and how to work towards ultimate social goals.

#### *Roots and Grassroots*

This structure underpins the organisation of the guide. The image of the flower is the predominant symbol of the entire process, from the roots to the individual petals. This image succeeds in combining a complex set of features which characterise women's community education, together with the aesthetic of the plant and the analysis of the exercise of power.

The guide is divided into a series of steps from committing to the vision of women's community education, to the creation of an action plan, underpinned by the philosophical principles ranging from equality to justice. It is clearly signposted, with criteria ranging from activism to extending practice. It succeeds in encompassing the entire range of possible activities and outcomes, characteristic of women's community education, in a logical manner while keeping the spirit of the movement at the forefront.

The image of the flower is particularly pertinent at this point, as the plant roots symbolise these fundamental principles. This is a key characteristic of women's community education which is often missed in the economic analysis which prevails in this post-Tiger era in Ireland. It clearly shows that the value of the process cannot be counted only in economic terms, and that grassroots social movements contribute significantly to the well being of the society at large.

#### *Portfolio of Resources*

Flower Power has a portfolio of resources which will empower community education groups and empower them to reflect and develop. The portfolio includes a huge number of elements, including the definitions of common words and phrases; templates for implementing the framework; reflective check-ins for principles and elements of practice and discussions on the elements and dimensions of the women's community education in Ireland. For example, on pages 82-83, Step Three – Rooted in the Reality of Women's Lives Dimensions includes an analysis of the ways in which women's community education reaches women in a genuine and authentic manner: inviting women in regardless of background and prior educational attainment and working proactively to make contact with women who would otherwise be isolated and excluded.

#### *Real World Education*

This is a model that other sectors in society could learn from. When we consider how inequalities are perpetuated, we must conclude that there is a lack of commitment to re-dressing the imbalance. Education as a social institution plays a part in the perpetuation of inequality: this can clearly be seen in literacy levels, school completion rates and subsequent outcomes. A central aspect of women's community education is the breadth of the backgrounds of the instigators. Few are educationalists as such, in terms of trained teachers or academic theorists, but all have a clear vision of what education ought to do. One of the most significant achievements that have been attained by women's community education is that it has reached deep into women's lives, bringing the dividends of feminism and social justice. This is real world stuff. In terms of outcomes, learners emerge as agents and mediators of social and cultural norms. That is a considerable achievement in any terms.

#### *The Task Ahead*

I recommend Flower Power to all women's community education groups to reflect in a deep and meaningful way about their work. But more than this: I think that other community education workers could learn from this guide, to illuminate their own practice. In many ways, this is the real task ahead, to develop community education as a model from which all other education provision could learn. This guide provides a vital resource to groups which have been attacked directly and indirectly by the new social hygiene aimed at limiting the power of groups whose work is rooted in principles of justice and equality. Women's community education groups, who reflect on their practice using the guide, are assured of an inspirational source which will reinforce their belief and confidence. Their task will be eased by experience and knowledge harvested from the women who have nurtured and cherished the ground on which it flourished.

**BRID CONNOLLY**  
NUI/Maynooth

## Adult Education and Lifelong Learning, Co. Cork VEC Adult Education Service. Co Cork VEC

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Do you want a clear idea of what goes on in a VEC Adult Education Service? If so, this publication by Co. Cork VEC will be an invaluable resource. It is clear from the opening pages that one of the explicit aims of this publication is to provide an overview of what is happening in the Co. Cork VEC Adult Education Service so that they can build from there. However, there is an implicit aim to showcase the significant contributions Co. Cork VEC has made to adult education in their area. Thus, this publication is a useful organisational PR tool in addition to one that sheds important light on the value of Life Long Learning in general.

To anyone working within the VEC structure, the Table of Contents of this publication will not be unfamiliar: Understanding Life Long Learning, The National Framework of Qualifications, Adult Education Partnerships, Community Education, Adult Basic Education, Adult Education Guidance Support, Youthreach, VTOS, etc. However, the clear explanations of each, coupled with references that are current and relevant, will serve as a useful resource to other VEC colleagues of Co. Cork VEC, as well as those outside the VEC.

The structure of the publication favours looking at Life Long Learning from the perspective of the macro to the micro. Thus, the opening chapters provide clear synopses of crucial ideological legislation that values adult education and education in general. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is quoted, followed by an explanation of Life Long Learning in a European context. The European Context includes a summary of the EU benchmarks for 2010. The book includes a detailed look at the Irish response in the form of the Green Paper on Adult Education, the White Paper, and other significant documents and reports. Relevant quotes by significant educational theorists, such as Paulo

Freire, Malcolm Knowles and John Dewey, to name but a few, are peppered throughout this section of the book and make for informative reading.

The publication goes into detail about the specific government initiatives introduced to promote Life Long Learning since the year 2000, such as the Back-to-Education Initiative and Adult Educational Guidance. Throughout this section, the important outcomes of community education and Lifelong Learning are mentioned, such as active citizenship, social inclusion and competitiveness. There is a concerted effort in this publication to stress the importance of the personal and community benefits of adult education, rather than just the economic. This is reflected in the quote, “the health of the economy is very important to the individual. However, it is not the only thing that is important to individuals and the economy needs to serve the interests of society.” (p.16)

A section is devoted to the explanation of the National Framework of Qualifications. This is very useful for anyone working in the area of education. Naturally enough, this publication does a great job at promoting the value of VEC’s within the area of Life Long Learning. It goes into detail about the role of the VEC as a statutory provider, and importantly, that the sector provides for Levels 1-6 on the NQF.

The main body of the publication explains in great detail the staff structure of North Cork VEC Adult Education Service and the various programmes run within the service, such as Adult Literacy, Community Education, Youthreach, VTOS, Adult Guidance, BTEI, etc. There is a huge amount of detail here about the other educational partners in Co. Cork and how the adult education service in this VEC links in with them in very practical ways. There are specific examples of working in partnership with programmes that focus on the elderly, family learning, and non-nationals. The different centres in North Cork are highlighted and work that they are engaged in, and a specific Case Study of how to integrate men into BTEI is outlined. The book is current in its reference to the need more than ever to upskill.

The publication ends with very useful recommendations for the service, including the continuation of promoting self-directed learning and the importance of training for tutors and front-line staff in helping learner retention.

There is an excellent bibliography on current publications concerning adult education.

This publication by Co. Cork Adult Education Service is, in the words of the Co. Cork VEC Chairperson, an “invaluable resource for all involved in Adult Education, not just in North Cork, but in the whole VEC sector as well.”

**EILEEN CONDON**

Co. Tipperary VEC

## Beyond the Workplace: An Investigation into Older Men’s Learning and Well-being in Northern Ireland

ROB MARK, VANESSA MONTGOMERY & HARRY GRAHAM (2010)

*School of education, Queen’s University Belfast, Report for the Changing Ageing Partnership ISBN: 9780853899600*

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*<http://www.changingageing.org/Research/ResearchLaunchReports/Fileupload,184289,en.pdf>*

As one of three international studies, this report addresses men’s learning and well-being in Northern Ireland. The other two studies, taking place in Republic of Ireland and Australia were also published in 2009 and direct comparisons are visible. The study examines older men’s attitudes to and experiences of learning in informal contexts in Northern Ireland with the aim of discovering what kind of provision would encourage older men to further engage in learning, active community involvement and the benefits this involvement would bring to their lives, their families and their communities were identified and explored.

Using very accessible language, the researchers set out a clear need for this research at a local level through a thorough and succinct literature review. The majority of the cited relevant research has been taken from outside Northern Ireland indicating at another level the lack of established investigation into these issues in a localised context. This is particularly true when we consider Northern Ireland’s troubled past and the unique impact this history has had on the older men of Northern Ireland, their families and communities. The full impact of these past experiences on the lives of the research informants learning and well-being is a key theme which emerges in the findings of the report. Another characteristic of the data collection was that the research was informed by older, working class men attending both literacy classes and community based learning. This too was to impact the findings.

The contrast in their current and past experiences of learning is one of the key findings in the report. The “adventure..school should have been” is how one participant describes his recent experience of learning, which was in stark contrast to his past negative experience of school. A number of the interviewees named physical and emotional punishment as memories of school. Descriptions such as “being put to the back of the class and being forgotten about” and “the majority of it (school) turned out to be a nightmare” outline some of the personal challenges that may have made it difficult for these men to re-enter a learning situation.

The report goes on to highlight other challenges which the participating learners have overcome and several of the benefits of participation to the learners, their families and their communities. It also outlines a number of reasons for drop-out, non-entry and non-attendance at courses. While reading the report you will be made privilege to several quotes of descriptive and down to earth language which indicate realness in the findings and also, ability by the research team to retrieve the information from a deep level from within the research informants. Some of the positive impacts for the families and the communities of the participants were identified as better communication and respect within the family setting, developing friendship networks, and a deepening understanding of diversity including ethnic diversity within community.

It may be safe to assume that the practitioners of adult literacy and community education would welcome this report for two key reasons. Firstly, it clearly deepens (compared with previous literature) the link between learning and well-being for older working class men. In an era when adult education may be seen primarily as a tool to increase employability, this report reminds us that a positive educational experience may bring, what have become known as, softer outcomes to even the hardest of men; enjoyment, encouragement, confidence, stress relief, social skills, feeling rejuvenated, fun, self-respect and empowerment are but some of the beneficial personal outcomes named in the report. Any mechanism that can inject this list of benefits into people’s lives must be considered a health promotion tool. In fact one of the recommendations goes further to say; “Community education provides a lifeline and mental stimulation for older men, so it should be regarded as a health initiative which prevents psychological regression and related illnesses especially for older men who lack social ties and networks that facilitate community engagement.” If the ethos of

this recommendation was to be integrated into policy then the case for many more such programs would be undeniable and therefore many older men’s lives would be enriched with the benefits identified.

Secondly, this report has a reassuring message to the adult and community educators who keep their learners needs and wants at the centre of their practice. The report recommends that programmes need to be designed in consultation with the older men that are being targeted. This practice where participants and education providers co-create their programmes must continue if the true benefits (outlined above) are to be experienced by older men across Northern Ireland. Finally, even though the report outlines that what works in engaging older adults in other jurisdictions may not necessarily work in Northern Ireland, the lessons and principles found in this report may be very valuable in planning our work south of the border and further afield.

**JOHN EVOY**  
Co Wexford VEC

# Adult Teaching and Learning: Developing Your Practice”

SUE CROSS (2009), MCGRAW-HILL

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‘As the author explains “teaching, like other abilities develops through a combination of thoughtful practice, reflection and stimulation” (p1)

Taking cognisance of this, the author aims to present a book which acts as a guide to provide some of that stimulation which introduces some very interesting key concepts and practical uses. It contains advice for those starting out as teachers of adults such as the “identification of potential learners, potential learners, estimating their requirements and breaking the ice” (p18). Fundamentally it reminds us as teachers of adults that “Adult learners are real people. Treat them like it” (p129)

What I particularly like about this book is that it presents an unique argument as to why a full conception of the idea of "the teacher" is immensely valuable for adult teaching and learning (p.1). Notably Cross recognises throughout the book that teaching is fundamental to all forms of learning, in all situations.

The author emphasises that theory is essential and that a sound understanding of theory is necessary for the teacher. However what this book does is that it provides a connection between theory and practice. It does assist the practitioner explore the assumptions which support current performance and promote experimentation with new approaches (p3). As Cross states, this book is not a textbook but a “*primer for future study, thought and professional reflection*” (IBID)

Interestingly Cross explores theories of abundance (p13) which is characterized by a concern with what the learners bring to the classroom environment. This is in sharp contrast to the deficit model or the traditional view which sees

learners as “*empty vessels waiting to be filled*”. I admire the author’s symposium that “*at its best, an abundance model of teaching does not draw attention to the teacher. Rather it highlights and celebrates the experience of everyone present in the room*” (p13). She discusses four theories (Maslow, Rogers, Gardner, and Goleman) which do undeniably point to the benefits of working within this abundance model. In my opinion Cross in her book advocates for what I would describe as an “inclusive environment” for all learners where they feel welcomed and valued and each step of the learning process including assessment for the adult learner is indeed positive, trustful and constructive.

The subject of chapter5- “*Positive approaches to participant wellbeing: Social, environmental and emotional factors in teaching*” presents a discussion on the promoting wellbeing within education for both the teacher and the learner. It identifies that this is primarily reliant on recognizing that all participants are complex and diverse beings with varying holistic needs and preferences. This chapter which is indeed my favourite offers splendid advice on positive approaches to participant wellbeing (pp.128-132) and advocates that “*teaching is not just about output; it is just as important to listen, to watch and to think*” (p128).

In my view there are some, but few criticisms to delineate. While this reviewer is aware that the term “*andragogy*” refers to learner focused education for people of all ages I would have appreciated a definition from the author from the onset. Moreover, I would welcome a more precise definition of what Cross believes the “adult learner” to be. Furthermore pictures would have enhanced appearance as the seven anecdotes presented in shaded boxes did little to highlight to this reviewer the experience of learning and teaching.

Notably, as an experienced practitioner in the field of adult education I found this to be a most motivating and thought provoking read. I would recommend this book to both practised and novice practitioners as it provides many useful tips and tools. The author’s wealth of experience together with a thorough knowledge and understanding of educational theory is evident throughout. This book which is very reader friendly will be a welcome and useful resource for anyone involved in facilitating the education of adults with good exposure of key issues in the field of adult education and lifelong learning.

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The Adult Learner is the Irish journal for adult and community education founded in the mid 1980s and is published by AONTAS.

Its primary aim is to serve the needs of the adult education and lifelong learning community in Ireland by providing a forum for critical discussion and reflection. The journal seeks to make new knowledge easily accessible to the widest possible audience through emphasising the importance of describing and critiquing practice and through publishing the results of research. The journal gives priority to subject matter that addresses issues of community, citizenship and learning and which focus on disadvantage, literacy and equality. It also includes contributions on how adults learn in formal, non-formal and informal settings including life and work contexts.

The journal provides a forum for publication and dissemination of reflections on research, policy and practice in the broad field of adult and community education which are relevant to the Irish context.

The journal can also be viewed on the AONTAS web-site, where further details on how individuals can make contributions are made available each year. [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)



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