The
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The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education

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Section 3 – Book Reviews

Editorial comment

During this past year we have witnessed a continued improvement in our economic fortunes which has led to new calls to examine policies and practices in the field of Lifelong Learning and which take account of findings from research and good practice. With this in mind, we are very pleased to be able to publish another issue of the *Adult Learner* which captures the very best from research and practice. Many adult learners still remain isolated from provision and there is a need to continue the debate on how to be more inclusive in our practices. There are still many unanswered questions about a multitude of issues and we are pleased the journal continues to provide a vehicle for exploration of different viewpoints.

This year we received a record number of submissions and we have only been able to select a small number of proposals for publication. We are most grateful to everyone who submitted papers, and we hope that appropriate channels can be found to publish those which we were not able to include. We would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks to everyone who submitted their work.

In Section 1, we present six articles which give different perspectives on community and lifelong learning. In the opening article, Kevin Hurley presents a critique of the concept of equality arguing that human capital theory has provided highly constraining limitations on state-funded adult education. Many other papers in this issue demonstrate how existing provision is seeking to widen participation for new groups. Shirley Walters, Mark Abrahams and Sally Witbooi show how state education in South Africa has kept the doors open to adult learners using innovative approaches and pedagogies while Moira Green demonstrates how adult literacy work based on social theories of literacy and adult

learning theory can help bridge the gap between theory and practice. Kathronia McHugh takes this a step further by looking at the second chance opportunities available for young adults, demonstrating the need to provide for their mental health. Two further papers look at the role of transformative learning as part of the adult learning experience based on the writings of Jack Mezirow. David McCormack provides a theoretical framework for student writing which brings about a transformative experience while Colin Meneely explores further the possibilities of the inter-connections and inter-dependency of transformative pedagogy, and he proposes a new pedagogy which connects theology and spirituality to the adult learning experience.

In Section 2, Bernie Grummell, Martin Downes, Conor Murphy and Anne Ryan examine the challenges of putting transformative learning and engagement into practice through a review of a project which seeks to use climate change as a vehicle for transformative learning in an African context. Finally, Daniel Sellers and Tina Byrne share some insights on how action learning can influence numeracy teaching and practices.

The *Adult Learner* continues to provide a forum for discussion and debate in the field of adult and community learning and we have welcomed the views of adult educators, managers, researchers and others to these debates.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the contributors for providing us with their ideas and for assisting us in developing our thoughts and practices. I also wish to thank the readers and peer reviewers for the care and attention they have given to ensuring that the articles are clearly presented. Finally, I am sure you will agree that one of the many strengths of the *Adult Learner* is its ability to encourage an informed understanding through developing new insights and in promoting improved links between research, theory and practice for the benefit of adult and community learning.

We are as always very grateful to our funders, SOLAS and the AONTAS Management Board for their on-going support for the Journal.

We wish you pleasant reading.

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SECTION ONE

Perspectives on Community and Lifelong Learning

Equality and human capital: Conflicting concepts within state-funded adult education in Ireland

KEVIN HURLEY

Abstract

This article offers a critique of the concept of equality as it informs the White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life (2000). It also outlines the extent to which human capital theory can be seen to have effectively colonised lifelong learning from the outset of its adoption by the European Union with highly constraining implications for state-funded adult education in Ireland.

Key words: (Equality, Human Capital, Lifelong Learning)

Introduction

As is acknowledged on the website of the Department of Education and Skills[1] (DES), *Learning for Life, White Paper on Adult Education* (DES: 2000), remains the unchanged foundation document of Irish government policy in the sector of adult education where the state is directly involved as funding stakeholder. Equality was espoused as one of three principles underpinning the White Paper, the others being Lifelong Learning as a Systemic Approach and Interculturalism. This paper offers a critique of the White Paper's standpoint on equality in the light of developments in equality theory in the interval since its publication. It also offers an analysis of the extent to which the position is further compounded by the wholesale adoption of human capital theory within the theatre of lifelong learning of which adult education is a key field. Accordingly, it contrasts the perspective on equality informing the White Paper with that which has emerged meanwhile in the field of equality studies. Following this it traces the progress of human capital theory since it first emerged in 1961 and its penetration of lifelong learning throughout the European Union since the

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[1] www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Further-Education-Training / As viewed on 25/01/2015.

mid-1990s, before concluding with the challenges faced by adult education in the quest for a society characterized by what is designated equality of condition.

Equality as espoused within state-funded adult education

At an early stage in the White Paper the express vision adopted for adult education comprised: a national programme of Adult Education within an overall framework of lifelong learning on the basis of its contribution to six priority areas: Consciousness Raising; Citizenship; Cohesion; Competitiveness; Cultural Development; and Community Building (DES, 2000, p. 28).

This augured well for the development of adult education policy which would have at its heart not only a participatory approach to learning but also the promise of real engagement with the building of a just society. Expectation was then heightened with the adoption of *equality* as one of the three principles underlying adult education, as indicated above (DES,2000 p. 30).

The principle of equality is duly summarized in the Paper. It is worth reprising the central tenets of this summary and its tacit acknowledgment of the unequal state of Irish society:

> The Government recognises that barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, ethnicity, disability and gender continue to hinder the emergence of a fully inclusive and cohesive society. (DES, 2000, p. 33)

Following the positing of educational attainment and qualifications as key determinants of inequality, the Paper then sets out a strategy for the field:

> Clearly, if Adult Education is to counteract the impact of disadvantage in early school participation and achievement, there must be careful targeting of initiatives on those most in need DES, 2000 p. 33).

The earlier visionary promise is thereby stifled at birth. While the vision animating the concept of equality as posited in the Paper is one of a society characterised by inclusivity and cohesion, there is clear acceptance that the existing model satisfies those hallmarks. Consequently, the task for adult education is to facilitate access to that reality, equality amounting to nothing more than a nebulous, unqualified condition which is dependent on the provision of educational opportunity. Thus confined, the paper fails to engage definitively with the principle of equality. While access to education is important, equality has implications which are societal-wide and go far beyond inclusion in the status quo.

Accordingly, there is no further attempt in the Paper to elaborate on what is meant by an inclusive and cohesive society. Instead, the truism that exclusion from the existing model is the experience of many adults arising from 'the impact of disadvantage in early school participation and achievement' is cited. Following from this, the strategy adopted as a panacea for this historically shameful state of affairs is unveiled as the development of 'an all-embracing system for second-chance and Further Education in Ireland' (DES, 2000, p. 84). The top priorities cited are 'to address the low literacy levels of the Irish adult population … (and) the large numbers of Irish adults (1.1m aged 15–64) who have not completed upper second-level education' (DES,2000, p. 84) as if this is to ensure the onset of a society characterised by equality. Ultimately, the strategy that emerged from this flawed appraisal of what was needed to generate equality subsisted in what were designated as four pillars:

- a National Adult Literacy Programme as the top priority;

- a Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) providing for a significant expansion of part-time options under Youthreach/Traveller, VTOS and PLC courses, with a particular emphasis on promoting a return to learning of those in the population with less than upper secondary education;

- an ICT Basic Skills programme for adults as part of BTEI;

- increased flexibility and improved organisational structures for self-funded part-time Adult Education in schools (DES,2000,p. 85).

As many adult learners have testified in journals such as *Explore*, large numbers of individuals have been empowered by the programmes entailed under this framework since it was first launched in 2001. Such empowerment is not, therefore, without significance. But wider access to education, such as was introduced in the final third of the 20th century, has not led to societal equality. In excess of two million full-time students have progressed from 2nd level to higher education between 1966 and 2006[2] (after which point they could have been expected to begin exercising influence on the socio-economic condition of the nation). Meanwhile, AONTAS (The National Adult Learning Organisation) concluded that there were 'approximately 304,900 people participating in some form of adult learning in 2012'[3] a figure which implies that significant numbers

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2   www.hea.ie/en/statistics/students-attending-all-third-level-institutions
3   www.aontas.com/blog/2012/08/28/how-many-people-are-participating-in-adult-educati/

of people have participated in this field during the decades before 2012. Indeed much adult education, especially community education, has been concerned with equality, and the N.O.W (New Opportunities for Women) project was an important initiative in this regard in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, significant inequality has persisted. An insight into factors that have militated against the potential of community education is revealed in a number of recent research studies. In *Roads to Learning*, a report on education and training by women's groups in North and West Mayo it was noted that:

> … while the women's groups tend towards community activity, none indicated an involvement in political activity. This is a crucial exclusion as these women's groups profess to be driven by community education – "an agent of social change and community advancement" (DES, 2000) and community development principles.' (2004, p. 16).

In an exhaustive study of community education in Donegal a finding relating to structural inequalities noted that only 'a minority of providers see the exploration of structural inequalities, through group work, as the goal of community education' (2008, p. 66). Perhaps the most significant finding is located in the study *Community Education: More Than Just a Course*, conducted by AONTAS on behalf of the DES:

> … the lack of a consistent approach to the management of ALCES (Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme) – funded community education across the VECs means that the unique process and role of it expressed in the White Paper may not be being implemented uniformly. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that VECs were less likely to use process-focused criteria such as participatory methodologies, a focus on social/community action or those pertaining to critical analysis, to make decisions about what groups to fund. Yet, these aspects of methodology are, according to the White Paper, what make community action unique. (Bailey & Ward, 2011, p. 102).

In the The Spirit Level, the study of inequality in the so-called Developed World, Ireland's relatively unfavorable position over a wide range of social and health indices, when juxtaposed with income inequality, is graphically revealed. For instance, using data sourced from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the authors, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010, p. 23) illustrate that, while Ireland veered towards high income inequality, on an index of child wellbeing it was deemed to be only about 66% that of Sweden, the highest.

As they also illustrate, extrapolating from the *United Nations Human Development Report 2006* (UNHDP, 2006) the richest 20% of the Irish population were then almost six times richer than the poorest 20% (*ibid.*,p. 17). Their data refers to early stages in that decade so that it is not unreasonable to suggest that the various indices they explored would nowadays show considerable deterioration, namely increased inequality, given the austerity visited on Ireland since 2009. Evidence to support that contention is indeed to hand in the findings of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2014) in its *annual Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (SILC). The upward path of grinding inequality is clearly illustrated by changes in the deprivation rates experienced by many members of Irish society:

Changes in deprivation rate[4] 2007 – 2013

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
11.8%	13.8%	17.1%	22.6%	24.5%	26.9%	30.5%

All of the foregoing evidence calls into question both the conceptualisation of equality in the White Paper and the measures adopted to counter enduring inequality. A society characterized by equality continues to prove elusive when predicated on empowerment of the individual through access to educational opportunity. Education for individual empowerment, the all-prevailing model in education, needs to be problematized since the juxtaposition of wider access to education and growing inequality strongly indicates that social mobility rather than the elimination of inequality is the over-riding outcome.

Inglis (1997, p. 2), drawing on Foucault, distinguishes between empowerment and emancipation:

> empowerment involves people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power, while emancipation concerns critically analyzing, resisting and challenging structures of power.

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4   Without heating at some stage in the last year. Unable to afford a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight. Unable to afford two pairs of strong shoes. Unable to afford a roast once a week. Unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day. Unable to afford new (not second-hand) clothes. Unable to afford a warm waterproof coat. Unable to afford to keep the home adequately warm. Unable to afford to replace any worn out furniture. Unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month Unable to afford to buy presents for family or friends at least once a year.

Later, he sets out the challenge when he elaborates:

> empowerment … has become synonymous with concepts as varied as coping skills, personal efficacy, competence, self-sufficiency, self-esteem, mutual support, natural support systems, community organization, and neighborhood participation. By contrast, education for liberation and emancipation is a collective educational activity which has as its goal social and political transformation. If personal development takes place, it does so within that context. But this process involves structures rather than individuals (Inglis, 1997, pp. 10 – 11).

Inglis is drawing on more than Foucault, of course. His exposition of emancipation resonates with ideas emanating from Freire and especially those on praxis and critical, transitive consciousness. Of the latter, Freire says it is:

> … characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitutions of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's "findings" and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and for the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old – by accepting what is valid in both old and new (1973, p. 18).

This could be seen as a charter for critical dialogue and analysis but one which would put practitioners at risk of being at odds with certain funders as revealed in the research report *Not Just a Course*, and noted above.

It has to be regarded as ironic then that one chapter of the White Paper – that on Community Education – thoroughly echoes Inglis and Freire when recounting the egalitarian thrust of:

- its collective social purpose and inherently political agenda – to promote critical reflection challenge existing structures, and promote empowerment, improvement so that participants are enabled to influence the social contexts in which they live;

- its promotion of participative democracy. It sees a key role for Adult Education in transforming society. (DES, 2000, p. 113).

This chapter might thus be seen as an enlightened annex within the paper as a whole, possibly reflecting the demand from all quarters of the adult education field for radical responses to the plight of the large proportion of Ireland's adult population experiencing low levels of literacy, following the publication by the OECD of *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* in 1997. It is likely to have been greatly influenced by certain non-governmental, independent figures who were consulted in depth[5].

Perspectives on equality post 2000

While an increasing number of individuals and organisations engage in highlighting inequality and contributing to a growing dialogue, Baker et al (2004/2009) have led the way in theorizing equality in the interval since the publication of *Learning for Life.* At the outset, they distinguish between three levels of equality: basic equality; liberal egalitarianism; and equality of condition which is the model they advocate. Table 1 is a reproduction of the summary framework formulated by Baker et al (2004, 2009, p. 43) illustrating how equality of condition compares with basic equality and liberal egalitarianism.

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5   While inputs were invited from many quarters and many others were received besides, particular contributions were invited from Professor John Coolahan and Dr Anne Ryan and, in particular, Dr Tom Collins who was accorded leave of absence in order to act as adviser – all three from the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. These assisted in drafting and re-drafting the text but editorial function was confined to the Department of Education and Science. (O'Dea, 2000).

Table 1. Basic equality, liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition

Dimensions of equality	Basic equality	Liberal egalitarianism	Equality of condition
Respect and recognition	Basic respect.	Universal citizenship. Toleration of difference. Public/private distinction.	Universal citizenship. 'Critical interculturalism': – acceptance of diversity – redefined public/private distinction – critical dialogue over cultural differences. – limits to unequal esteem
Resources	Subsistence needs.	Anti-poverty focus. Rawls's difference principle (maximise the prospects of the worst off).	Substantial equality of resources broadly defined, aimed at satisfying needs and enabling roughly equal prospects of well-being.
Love, care and solidarity		A private matter? Adequate care?	Ample prospects for relations of love, care and solidarity
Power relations	Protection against inhuman and degrading treatment.	Classic civil and personal rights. Liberal democracy.	Liberal rights *but* – limited property rights; – group-related rights Stronger, more participatory politics. Extension of democracy to other areas of life.
Working and learning		Occupational and educational equal opportunity. Decent work? Basic education.	Educational and occupational options that give everyone the prospect of self-development and satisfying work.

Liberal egalitarianism can be said to constitute the model that tends to prevail throughout the so-called Developed World. However, as Baker et al (2009, p. 25) point out, 'a key assumption of the views we describe as liberal egalitarianism is that there will always be major inequalities between people in their status, resources, work and power.'

Power relations are ubiquitous. Inglis (1997, p. 1) reminds us of Foucault's argument that 'power must be seen not as something which is static and possessed, but which circulates within and between us.' Acknowledging this phenomenon, we have a responsibility to deploy it to ensure greater equality in the wider governance of society. That means a more thorough engagement with democracy than casting a vote. While the ballot box confers considerable power on the voter and has yielded greater potential for political equality, as Baker et al (2009, p. 29) put it:

> … we need to contrast these equal political rights with the fact that economically and culturally dominant groups have much more influence on public policy in all liberal democracies than disadvantaged groups.

Our responsibility to society means going further, therefore, than:

> Liberal democracy and the conception of political equality that goes with it (which) are thus themselves in line with the general idea that liberal equality is about regulating inequality rather than eliminating it (Baker et al 2009, pp. 29–30).

If adult education were to embrace Equality of Condition (Table 1), among the responsibilities it would place on the field are: facilitating a more inclusive yet critical perspective on citizenship; advocating the distribution of resources conducive to all-round greater well-being; fostering love, care and solidarity as a norm; championing participatory democracy as accepted practice in every context; pursuing secure, positive educational and occupational experience for all. Much adult education theory insists the field must have a role in this. O'Shea and O'Brien propose that:

> … there is a modern view that transformation is possible and that through education as a form of personal conscientisation, collective action and solidarity, we can transform our world (2011, p. 5).

In discussing Habermas's relevance to adult education Brookfield writes:

> Habermas steadfastly refuses to ditch modernity's dream of using human reason to create a more humane world. Part of that dream is bound up with the possibility of adults learning to speak to each other in honest and informed ways so that they can hold democratic conversations about important issues in a revived public sphere. Since learning to talk in this way is the most important hope for creating democracy, there could hardly be anything more important in civil society for Habermas than adult education (2010, p. 128).

However, transformation of this neo-liberally dominated world is a challenge of increasing magnitude since much of what happens throughout all of contemporary learning is determined by the uncritical adoption of human capital theory as a guiding paradigm.

Human capital: A constraint on adult education

Those most associated with originating the theory of human capital were Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker, both economists at Chicago University. In December 1961, Schultz opened his Presidential address to the annual meeting of the American Economic Association as follows:

> Although it is obvious that people acquire useful skills and knowledge, it is not obvious that these skills and knowledge are a form of capital, that this capital is in substantial part a product of deliberate investment, that it has grown in Western societies at a much faster rate than conventional (non-human) capital, and that its growth may well be the most distinctive feature of the economic system … (Schultz, 1961).

The idea of human capital has since been extended pervasively into the unwitting consciousness of the individual who is then increasingly persuaded by the state and those who dominate the economy to assume greater responsibility for her/his so-called human capital. Among the many available definitions of human capital, that offered by the OECD is instructive:

> Human capital is broadly defined as a combination of individuals' own innate talents and abilities and the skills and learning they acquire through education and training … the business world, which has eagerly embraced the concept of human capital, tends to define it more narrowly as workforce skills and talents directly relevant to the success of a company or specific industry (OECD. 2007, p. 2).

Human capital has been embraced by the business sector as indicated in the title of an Irish Business and Economic Confederation's (IBEC) (2008) leading publication *The Essential Guide to Human Capital Management and Measurement: How to Measure the Impact of HR Practices*. The state too has been a major apologist for human capital theory with all the implications that follow for public services, including education. Surprisingly, there is little critique in the public policy area in Ireland of the extent to which it has come to colonise the entire spectrum of lifelong learning – including adult education – so that much of what passes for best practice can be seen to spring from human capital theory. Accordingly, much of adult education, which now languishes under the Further Education and Training Act, 2013, is increasingly coerced into being instrumental. This is best exemplified in the *Guidelines for VECs: Aligning further education provision with the skills needs of enterprise*, issued by the DES in 2013 and which is unabashedly utilitarian. Several adult education programmes reside under this umbrella.

A Union breached

In 1993 the European Union (EU) revealed how fully it had become captivated by human capital theory in its White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century* which also heralded the adoption of lifelong learning. In order to sustain economic growth and turn this into jobs, this White Paper proposed the following as one of six specific actions:

> Raising the stock of human capital: The inadequacy of present education and training systems in meeting the challenge of long-term competitiveness should be addressed by developing a range of measures, in the context of national structures … (p. 133).

As promised in the foregoing Paper, another – the *White Paper on Education and Training: Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society* – was published in 1995. Having correctly pointed out that traditional preoccupation with paper qualifications "locks" out much talent and had led to an elite 'which is not truly representative of the available human resource potential' it then indicated what should happen in its place:

> we need to make the best use of skills and abilities irrespective of how they were obtained and to enhance everyone's potential by catering more closely for the needs of the individual, business and industry. What is needed is a

more open and flexible approach. Such an approach should also encourage lifelong learning by allowing for and encouraging a continuing process of skill acquisition (p. 15).

Having adopted human capital as a dominant force in lifelong learning, the EU has assiduously pursued it. Much of the escalation in recent years is traceable to the Lisbon Strategy as agreed by the European Council in 2000.

The goal of this strategy was to enable the EU 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.' (European Council, 2000, p. 1).

The member states were all urged 'to take the necessary steps' to meet such targets as:

> a European framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills; a European diploma for basic IT skills, with decentralised certification procedures, should be established in order to promote digital literacy throughout the Union (*ibid.*, pp. 8 – 9).

Lifelong learning was therefore to be at the centre of the strategy but, as defined, it can be seen as largely focused on human capital development.

Furthermore, towards the end of 2005, the EU Commission submitted a document to the European Parliament and to the Council recommending the adoption of a set of key competences as central to the lifelong learning project, furthering the elevation of human capital theory to a position of primacy within education. The Council was persuaded to accept this proposal: 'the development of skills and competences is a key element of lifelong learning strategies'. (European Council, 2005, p. 21).

Ultimately, these competences – compiled by 'experts' from 31 countries and European level stakeholders – comprised eight in total:

1. communication in the mother tongue
2. communication in foreign languages
3. competences in maths, science and technology
4. digital competence

5. learning to learn

6. interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, and civic competence

7. sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

8. cultural expression

(European Commission, 2007, pp. 1 – 12.)

Of the eight competences, two at most – "interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, and civic competence" and "cultural expression" – can be deemed to address social issues. Consequently, this prioritising of competences, when contrasted with the absence of a tradition of critical pedagogy in all sectors of education, inevitably works to ensure that social justice issues are fated to occupy the margins. Human capital theory was now placed firmly in the ascendant, the rationale being one of annexing the prevailing system rather than reforming or re-directing it.

Ireland follows suit

As indicated within the section on BTEI in *Learning for Life*, Ireland duly replicated the colonisation of lifelong learning by human capital theory, despite much progressive rhetoric earlier in the paper:

> Access to information and communications technology training, electronic technician training, language skills, enterprise development, business, tourism, art and craft, childcare, and a broad range of disciplines within the industry and services sector will form part of the approach .… A particular priority will be to increase provision at Foundation and Level 1 or equivalent for those with low skills … (p. 93).

The annexation of lifelong learning by human capital grew apace in the decade following publication of *Learning for Life.* In the *National Development Plan (NDP) 2007 – 2013: Transforming Ireland: A Better Quality of Life for All* (Department of the Taoiseach, 1997), an entire chapter is designated Human Capital Priority. Within this, all spheres of lifelong learning are expressly co-opted by human capital:

> Further investment in human capital will support greater adaptability in the education and training systems, with a particular emphasis on up-skilling those already at work, those who wish to return to work, including older people, and those whose need for learning is greatest (p. 41).

The NDP ends with the pronouncement 'Lifelong Learning is the guiding principle for education and training policy in the context of the Lisbon Agenda' (*ibid.*,p. 189). It was now clear that the education system was to be deployed in pursuit of a particular agenda which called for a narrowing of vision to take account of the instrumental function education should pursue in serving the needs of the economy.

This was to be accompanied by ritual gestures towards wider participation by marginalised adults – an activation sub-programme was to target the unemployed; people with disabilities; lone parents; women; migrants; older workers; part-time workers and ex-offenders. The specific output projected for this sub-programme was 'To expand the workforce' (*ibid.*, p. 189), clearly reflecting a human capital rather than a social ethos.

The onward march of human capital continued uninterrupted with the appearance of such policy documents as The *Human Capital Investment Operational Programme* in 2007 (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment) and Building Ireland's Smart Economy (Department of the Taoiseach, 2008). It continues with the ongoing reports of the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs.

The invasion and colonization of state-supported adult education by human capital theory is most clearly illustrated in the DES *document Back to Education Initiative (BTEI): Operational Guidelines 2012:*

> … priority must be given to those most educationally disadvantaged … At this level, priority will be given to programmes which demonstrate a response to critical skill shortages as outlined in the National Skills Strategy (*ibid.*, p. 6).

While the fourteen categories identified as constituting the target groups reveal a genuine concern with 'social inclusion', ultimately this could be said to be merely in keeping with basic equality criteria and far removed from any attempt to take account of equality of condition.

Conclusion

Adult education, in view of its intrinsic commitment to the principle of equality, must be free to take account of the greater epistemological clarity now available about the concept, to undertake social critique and to support the social action that is an inevitable outcome. An upgrading of the principle of equality in keeping with equality of condition, fueled by a vision of social justice, would seem to demand a radical overhaul of the thrust of state-funded adult education, together with community education. Such emancipatory development would throw off domination by the neo-liberal, human capital paradigm, and substitute a judicious balance between providing for the social justice needs of Irish society and those of the open, Irish economy.

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Keeping the doors of learning open for adult student-workers within higher education?

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Abstract

The Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC), the triumphant South African liberation movement, proclaims that 'the doors of learning shall be open' for all. Twenty years since coming to power, the doors of the universities are struggling to stay open for adult student-workers. An action research project into implementation of 'flexible provision' at one historically black university is described in response to these realities. Rich experiences from lives of working librarian student-workers illustrate the complex issues that confront individuals, workplaces and institutions in implementing innovative pedagogies within a university.

Key words: (adult student-worker; flexible learning and teaching provision; higher education; South Africa; institutional change)

Introduction

Professional innovation and development are shaped by the abilities of higher education and training institutions (HEIs) and workplaces to adapt to the changing circumstances within which workers live and work. The inability of HEIs to adapt to providing access for professional development in more flexible ways can have major consequences for the professional education of workers. Presently, public HEIs in South Africa are under pressure to increase their intake of young students which can mean that working people are finding their options for lifelong learning limited.

This article is based on institutional research within one university in South Africa, which has a 54 year tradition of providing access to working people. It sketches contradictory contextual factors which can impact professional

development profoundly. It describes the situation which has led to an action research project on 'flexible learning and teaching provision' for working people who are studying, whom we refer to as 'adult student-workers'; and it points to the difficulties for the professional development of librarians who are working, in particular. The action research is part of a process of institutional change.

We are concerned with the inter-relationships between the adult students, their working lives and the university – the primary question is how can the university respond meaningfully to the real circumstances of adult students to enhance prospects for their professional development? In brief our research process set out to explore how the university can develop more appropriate pedagogical approaches to help adult student-workers to succeed. This has entailed understanding the working lives of adult students, engaging their workplaces, and influencing the teaching, learning and administrative environment of the university. This is a work-in-progress.

Setting the national scene

The commitment made in the South African Higher Education Policy document (Department of Education, 1997,p. 17), which echoed aspects of the ANC's Freedom Charter, that the education system would 'open its doors, in the spirit of lifelong learning, to workers and professionals' raised expectations in South Africa that provision for the education of adults would be taken seriously. Yet, one finding of the study by Buchler *et al,* (2007) was that adult learners remain poorly served at all levels of higher education institutions. The study set out to investigate whether a higher education system that facilitates access, equity and success for adult learners exists or is being formulated. It asked: what is the place of adult learners in South African higher education policy? The study concluded that adult learners are seemingly not a high priority at a time of scarce resources and competing challenges. However, (Buchler *et al,* 2007, p. 152) urge that:

> …the education of adults in a society, such as South Africa is a political, moral, historical and economic issue – and it is not merely one of these, but all of them. Adults have a critical role to play in the development of South Africa because of their accumulated knowledge and experience, which can be mediated by educational processes to strengthen it and make it socially useful.

Since then, little seems to have changed and the South African situation is

certainly not unique. Within low and middle income countries, the spaces for encouraging and supporting adult learners to embrace higher education opportunities, can easily close down in the face of resource constraints, political pressures from large proportions of youth, and the resilient picture that holds most higher education systems captive, and which is contradicted by the facts, that it is mainly serving young, full-time, able bodied, middle class, urban youth, who have good health, resources and time to concentrate solely on their studies.

The Higher Education Act of 1997 made provision for a unified and nationally planned system of higher education and created a statutory Council on Higher Education (CHE), which provides advice to the Minister and is responsible for quality assurance and promotion. The Act aimed to transform the previous racialized and unequal system of apartheid to one which embraced redress, equity and quality. Between 2003 and 2005 there was major restructuring of public higher education institutions (HEIs) resulting in 36 HEIs being merged into 23. Between them in 2009 they enrolled 837 779 students in total with 684 419 undergraduate students and 128 747 postgraduate students. The institutions vary greatly in terms of size, scope and history. There is also a growing private higher education sector which occupies niche areas (Council for Higher Education, 2009).

In 2009 a new policy was introduced to build a differentiated post-school system (Council for Higher Education, 2009). The Department of Education was split into the Departments of Higher Education and Training and Basic Education, which oversees schooling for youth. As Cosser (2010) stated, the unbundling of the departments paved the way for redrawing the post-school landscape and forced a re-examination of the entire education and training pathway system. He pointed to the estimated 2.8 million 20 – 24 year olds not being in employment, education or training, who are a major concern for politicians and are creating the lever for certain immediate policy imperatives that have implications for adult learners. 51% of the 48 million people in South Africa are under 25 years.

In 2013 a White Paper on Post-School Education and Training was gazetted and it emphasises the principles of 'learner centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision...', (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p. 48). It advocates higher education programmes and modes of provision that are more responsive to learners' needs and realities, including

those of working adults, 'which take into account their varying life and work contexts, rather than requiring them to attend daily classes at fixed times and central venues'. It recognises the important role of educational technologies and encourages the expansion of quality 'online' and 'blended' learning, including open and distance learning programmes.

The tensions at national level between the contradictory messages of access for adult student-workers, on the one hand, and the imperative to get the unemployed youth off the street into education and training, on the other, is leading potentially to the limiting of lifelong learning opportunities and is being played out within HEIs. The action research project exists in the middle of these tensions and contradictions.

Setting the institutional scene: University of Western Cape (UWC)

UWC is an historically black university that was founded in 1960 to fulfil the needs for 'coloured bureaucrats and professionals' to service the Apartheid political vision of separate development. In 2010 it had about 17, 000 students with a student profile of primarily black, poor and working class students, nearly 60% being women. From the beginning, offering of evening classes to adult student-workers, was part of its mandate.

An analysis of UWC as a lifelong learning institution has been done previously (Walters 2005, 2012), where key lifelong learning characteristics were used (Division for Lifelong Learning, 2001). We do not intend rehearsing the arguments but rather to reflect briefly on specific moves that are afoot to create a new approach to meeting needs of adult student-workers through an action research project on 'flexible teaching and learning provision'. A proposal towards this end was first mooted in March 2010 (DLL, 2010) which indicated some fundamental shifts taking place in the institution in response to different pressures. One of these was that the Arts Faculty, for the first time in 50 years, was proposing, and has since decided, to stop delivering courses after-hours except for Library and Information Science and Religion and Theology. The Arts Faculty, as did others, experienced considerable growth in its full-time undergraduate numbers. This resulted in overstretched staff, insufficient tutors, inadequate venues and reliance on inexperienced contract staff. They pointed out that the part-time numbers had decreased dramatically, from 13% to 5% while the full time registrations had almost doubled over the last ten years.

Overall enrolment trends 1998–2011

The graph in Figure 1 below clearly shows that from 2006 onwards the overall growth trends were predominantly driven by increased full-time enrollment. This largely unfunded growth created great pressures for staff (and students). In 2010 alone the first year full-time intake increased by 2200 students. These increases lead to major logistical and teaching and learning challenges.

Figure 1: UWC Enrolment 1998–2011 (All / Full-time / Part-time)
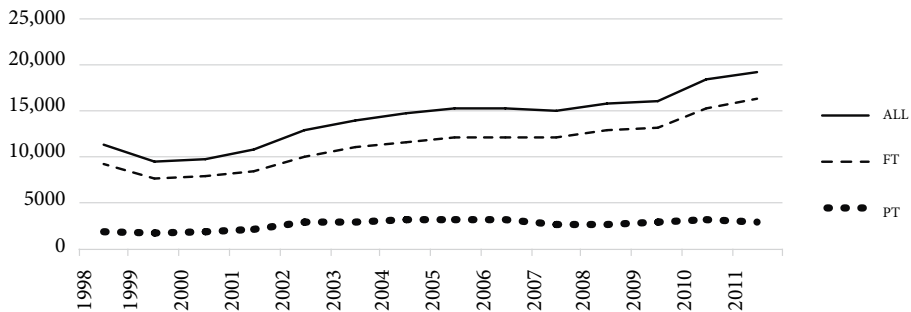
Source MIS per 20 Sept 2011. Source: UWC Oracle/Discovery system, 2012

Since 2002 the proportion of part-time students of the overall student population came down from a high of 23.1% in 2002 to 14.9% in 2011. The part-time numbers for the Arts Faculty went from 231 students in 2010, to 218 in 2011, to 196 in 2012. These figures are not unproblematic, for example, they mask the effects of the faculty's 'alternating offering' provision over the last 7 years. Some BA courses were offered in alternate years. For example, English I and English III would be offered during one year and English 1 and II would be offered, alternately. This affected the patterns of registrations and the trajectories for some adult student-workers. Those failing courses had to wait a year to pick up courses they failed or register for other courses or complete the courses at the University of South Africa (UNISA), a distance-education university.

The Arts Faculty conceded that departments offering professional degrees in Library Information Studies and Religion and Theology accommodate students who were mainly working and could only study after-hours. However, these departments are located within the Arts Faculty and their degree programmes encompass courses offered by other departments within and across faculties.

The decision by the Arts Faculty to close all after-hours offerings for the BA degree as from 2012 was controversial and was discussed at the Annual General Meeting of the university's Convocation where a resolution was adopted to urge the university management and its governing structures to reconsider. There was also engagement with the Registrar's Office on the terminology of 'part-time and full-time' as used within the formal and informal university structures. It was pointed out that while the organizational practice was to refer to after-hours or 'evening classes' as a proxy for 'part-time', this was not necessarily accurate, as there were 'part-time' students who studied in the day and full-time students who attended after-hours.

In the University Calendar Faculty of Arts, it refers to rules for a 3 year BA (full-time) and a 4 year BA (part-time). Therefore the intention of the Arts Faculty was not to exclude part-time students, but to limit the number of courses which were being offered after-hours. The implications of these clarifications were that it was still possible to do a `BA part-time`, even though the numbers of evening classes offered were reduced from 2012. Students had to be advised of all the options available. Senate endorsed the position that it was *students* who were part or full-time *not courses*. However, the confusion and ambiguity in use of language have continued to cause confusion for both students and staff.

The action research project was to help shift the institution from the parallel provision of 'day time' and 'after hours' classes, to embrace `flexible learning and teaching provision`. It resonated with the UWC teaching and learning policy which supported flexible learning and teaching. Calls were made to faculties to propose pilot action research sites. This article highlights one of the pilot sites, the Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) located in Faculty of Arts.

Setting the action research scene

The primary research question was: how can the university respond meaningfully to the real circumstances of working adult students to enhance prospects for their professional development? This has been a three year research partnership between the university and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The action research was endorsed by the Senate and invitations were sent to all departments to participate according to certain criteria. As researchers, we worked within a set of understandings which included the need for: strong support from the leadership of the institution so that the project could be seen as a strategic priority; resource incentives to encourage involvement in

innovative teaching; development of principles and processes for involvement which ensured a sense of fairness and equity; use of leading innovators from other departments to support or work with colleagues; development of project teams for each pilot site which related back to the overall coordinating research team; development of a communication's strategy to back up and support the pilot sites so that they did not remain isolated pockets of innovation but had the possibilities to influence others; communication of 'leading practices' on campus and elsewhere that already existed, to illustrate potential; speed to move quickly while the need for change was obvious and people were willing to innovate; development of a community of scholarship which excited colleagues intellectually and which could lead not only to 'flexible teaching and learning provision (FLTP)' but also to publishable research results.

However, while it has been important to keep these criteria in mind, in reality, not all criteria could be met. In particular, the university was very constrained financially so has not been able to contribute additional finances to the research. This highlighted a key conundrum – even though it was not possible to achieve the criteria excavated from leading innovative practices, should we still go ahead? We have, with external funding support. However, it has been far from ideal and has demanded a great deal of additional work and commitment from colleagues who are already over-burdened.

Working librarians who are studying and their lecturers
In 2013, nearly eighty percent of the students in the DLIS were adult students, working in the public library sector. Many of them worked for the City of Cape Town Library and Information Services and they had to leave work during the day to attend classes.

The first professional qualification for librarians is a four year degree. The degree consists of two professional majors as well as credits from other departments or faculties. In terms of delivery, the first year Library Science modules could be attended in the evening, but not all the other facilitating BA subjects. This situation forced the adult student-worker to select from a very small basket of subjects. It also meant attendance during the day to take subjects of their own choice.

From second to fourth years the LIS modules were attended in the mornings only as per the day-time timetable. The morning preference was a request of the employer. The motivation was to have all personnel in the libraries in the

afternoon when libraries were at their busiest. The DLIS tried to accommodate these students as far as possible in the mornings, which resulted in rather long sessions of 2–3 hours. This timetable arrangement inevitably resulted in clashes with other subjects or limitations on subject choice and selection.

The adult student-workers experienced the challenge of juggling their work and studies as they were only allowed 10 days (80 hours) per annum for all class and tutorial attendance and 10 days (80 hours) study time for assessment activities per annum. The adult student-worker had to clock out as they left work therefore those who travelled further to the campus were at a disadvantage. Having to leave work during the day could also create tensions in the library as other staff members had to cover for them. On days where there were no staff members available, the adult student-worker could not attend classes.

The researchers met with regional managers of public libraries and with the head of Human Resources at the City of Cape Town, who were the employers of many of the librarians who were studying. The purpose of these meetings was to get greater clarity on the work-study policy and to see whether anything could be done to ease the adult student-worker situation. What emerged was that it was the implementation of the policy rather than the policy itself which was the problem. It was some library managers who misinterpreted policy and who could be heavy handed. The employers wanted their employees to professionalize and welcomed the university's attempts to work with them to find solutions to the challenges adult students were experiencing.

Lecturers have accommodated affected students by being flexible in offering additional classes to those individuals after hours (i.e. when libraries have closed and the individuals were free to come to campus) or on Saturdays. This was especially the case for practical subjects where the students needed further opportunities for face-to face clarification and access to resources.

In order to respond to the difficulties experienced by both adult students and staff, the DLIS joined the action research project and as one of the flexible provision strategies, mobilized the use of information communications technology (ICT) in curriculum design, both to facilitate access and assessment. The staff was trained and implemented a first module during 2013. The experience showed that academic literacy levels of students were limited, as were their ICT literacy levels. They also had limited to no access to computers at work to engage their course materials. There were also, at times, university ICT infra-structural problems with irregular access. This caused frustration for staff and students

alike. Students struggled with time-management to access course materials and to submit assessments. Both university staff and adult student-workers have had to be exceedingly resilient and creative to 'work around' the various constraints to 'flexible' learning and teaching.

The case of working librarians who are studying has shone light on many structural, organizational and pedagogical issues which are not easy to resolve. Their resolution requires not only concerted commitment from the university but also workplaces, and professional associations, to clear some of the structural barriers to allow the staff and adult student-workers to focus more time and attention on the pedagogical matters, to ensure successful completion of their studies. During the research, it has been clear that both staff and adult student-workers have developed intricate moves to `work around` institutional and infra-structural barriers. There is still a long way to go to understand and appreciate fully how this has been done, seemingly against great odds. The development of a workable, flexible, pedagogical alternative to ease the burden on both staff and adult student-workers has been one of the objectives of the action research. So what is FLTP?

Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision
A brief dip into the literature on FLTP follows in order to frame what an alternative paradigm might mean. (DLL, 2014)

 Most educationists would agree that flexible learning is about offering choices for when, where, how and at what pace learning occurs. These concepts relate to the *delivery* of learning and can be unpacked as follows. Firstly, **'pace'** which includes accelerated and decelerated programmes and degrees, learning part time, arrangements that allow learners to 'roll on/roll off' ('stop in/stop out'), and systems for recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer; secondly **'place'** which can relate to work-based learning with employer engagement, learning at home, on campus, while travelling or in any other place, often aided by technology which can enable the flexibility of learning across geographical boundaries and at convenient times; thirdly, **'mode'**, especially the use of learning technologies to enhance flexibility and enrich the quality of learning experience, in blended or distance learning and in synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning (Tallantyne, 2012, p. 4; Gordon, 2014).

Our research project adopted the broad parameters of flexibility in learning and teaching provision suggested by the University of Southern Queensland

(2011). They highlight *flexible curriculum design,* including flexible forms of assessment which take into account different learning styles of students; *flexible admissions criteria,* including mechanisms such as the recognition of prior learning (RPL); *flexible delivery,* including distance, online, on campus a mix of these modes as well as accelerated or decelerated options. In addition, we added *flexible support systems and services* that cater for working and non-working students and those with disabilities.

These parameters signal a coherent higher education responsibility for FLTP that can sustain the educational changes needed to support the lived realities of all students, especially adult student-workers, for learning success. FLTP, then, is more than simply re-packaging existing materials: 'we are not just selling a new course but a new concept in education' (Outram, 2009, p. 9). FLTP requires the development of distinctive, more *holistic* forms of *provision,* as well as institutional change.

Principles of FLTP commonly expressed in the literature are: that it is responsive to a diversity of learners – both working and not working – and learning styles; that it is about access and success in higher education; that it is founded on good pedagogy that puts the learner at the centre of learning (Alexander, 2010; Edwards, 2014); that it develops self-regulated learners and well-rounded, knowledgeable and capable graduates who can make a positive difference in the world (Edwards, 2014); and that it requires a coordinated, enabling response.

In addition, although flexibility is regarded as good for students as well as for the university (Alexander, 2010), Barnett cautions that it is 'not an absolute good' (2014, p. 7) as there may be unintended consequences. FLTP, therefore, needs to be monitored and limits to flexibility need to be recognised. We turn now to highlighting briefly technology enhanced learning, as it plays a key role in conceptualising FLTP.

Technology plays an essential role in education today, not only for graduates to succeed in the local and global economy, but also in providing flexible learning and teaching opportunities. But this must not lead to digital exclusion, especially of those already marginalised (Barnett, 2014, p. 7). Technology-enhanced learning (TEL) can mitigate the attendance requirements of full-time study, enabling students to learn in their own time and place and at their own pace; it enables easy delivery of materials from lecturers to students and vice versa; and it connects learners to people and resources that can support their educational

needs online (Lai and Chong, 2007). Technology allows universities to extend their traditional campus-based service to distant and online modes, and has formed the basis of distance education for many years. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) have been touted as the answer to flexibility in education, enabling thousands of learners access to learning in new ways, but there are pedagogical concerns with some of these approaches and course completion rates tend to be low (Gordon, 2014).

Pedagogy is key to TEL. McLoughlin and Lee (2010 p. 28) argue that today's students 'want an active learning experience that is social, participatory and supported by rich media', through the use of information communication technology (ICT) tools and emerging technologies such as Web2.0 social networking tools. But the interactive aspects of social media enabled learning increasingly shift the position of learner, rather than content or institution, to the centre of learning, demanding a curriculum design process that is learner-centred and collaborative (Green *et al*, 2013). The agency of the learner is a significant aspect not only of effective TEL, but also of any quality education that engages the learner in the learning process. Zimmerman (2002) argues that central to such engagement is developing 'self-regulating learners'.

The pedagogic challenges of introducing quality FLTP and TEL are therefore considerable (Salmon, 2005) and academics cannot do this in isolation. There are many examples at UWC and elsewhere, where such challenges have been met without neglecting the disciplinary knowledge that students need to succeed. Implicit within the introduction of FLTP is organisational change and development. Green *et al* (2013, p. 26) claim that, because higher education is a complex system consisting of 'four inter-dependent sub-systems' – teacher, learner, delivery and administrative sub-systems – flexible approaches to learning and teaching require profound shifts in the way that the *entire university* views, engages with and develops knowledge.

Johnston (1997) suggests that (i) higher education change strategies need to be both top down and bottom up; (ii) every person is a change agent and the best organisations learn from the external environment as well as internally, from their own staff. Overall, Johnston advocates a change process that can shift pockets of enthusiasm for flexible learning towards a coherent, institutionalised outcome.

Keeping the doors open?

The action research has been surfacing and naming political, organizational and pedagogical challenges and contradictions both nationally and institutionally with regard to access and success for adult student-workers. These can be politically sensitive, uncomfortable issues to confront. The triangular relationship amongst adult student-worker, workplaces and university, is highly complex and needs to be understood more carefully to know where breakthroughs in the interests of adult student-workers may be possible.

At present, the research reveals that it is largely left up to the adult student-workers to navigate their ways through the institutional minefields both at work and at the university. The priority focus of the university continues to be young, full-time students, who paradoxically are, in all likelihood, also working full or part-time, or seeking work, in order to keep afloat economically.

The attempt to shift the pedagogical paradigm for the whole university from face-to-face, day time provision, to a more responsive FLTP orientation, which can benefit adult student-workers, still has a long way to go, will take time, and is a major undertaking that must be driven by senior leadership, who are responsive to staff and student pressures from below. As the realities of the working librarians who are studying suggest, it cannot be an 'e-learning quick fix' and there must be sufficient, effective support for students and for staff. We are clear that there is no 'one size fits all' approach, and that we must understand more fully the life worlds of students, staff and employers to develop appropriate responses. We also need to understand more deeply how adult student-workers and staff are `working around` the barriers to find solutions to problems they confront. Time, however, is not on the adult student's side and they can be expected 'to vote with their feet' if the institution is unable to respond to their real conditions.

While the action research is yet to evaluate its influence, it is safe to say that through various processes, there seems to be an emergence of a common institutional understanding of flexible provision. This is but one step in a long and convoluted process to bring Green's (2013) four sub-systems into alignment. Given the political imperative to 'get the youth off the streets', it is clear that the institutional change that is required both within the university and within the workplaces will take sustained advocacy and activism from dedicated champions, working with other activists across campus and workplaces, over long periods of time, if doors of learning are to be kept open for adult student-workers.

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The CABES (Clare Adult Basic Education Service) framework as a tool for teaching and learning

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Abstract

This article describes a Framework that can be used to help bridge the gap between theory and practice in adult learning. The Framework promotes practice informed by three strands important to adult literacy work: social theories of literacy, social-constructivist learning theory and principles of adult learning. The Framework shows how five key factors can be utilised to establish existing learner knowledge onto which new learning can be built, identify relevant and effective learning objectives, and provide a means of evaluating learning.

Key words: (assessment, constructivist learning, learning difference, social practice)

Introduction

Clare Adult Basic Education Service (CABES) is a multi-stranded adult basic skills programme located in County Clare, a predominantly rural country, in the west of Ireland. Almost twenty years ago, the service developed the CABES Framework as a tool for teaching and learning in order to promote an expanded view of literacy that was underpinned by key research in the fields of language, literacy and learning. The Framework is currently used across the service in a range of formal and informal, one-to-one and group classes to help plan, design and assess learning.

In the early eighties, County Clare Vocational Education Committee (VEC) along with other VECs in Ireland, set up a volunteer adult literacy scheme (later transformed into the Clare Adult Basic Education Service) as part of its developing adult education service. Tuition was provided by a small group of volunteers on a one-to-one basis. Some volunteers were motivated by a charitable

concern to help the less fortunate or a desire to 'share the gift of reading'. Others were deeply aware that economic, social and educational inequalities were disproportionately evident in the population of adults presenting with literacy difficulties (Kelleghan *et al*, 1995; Smyth, 1999). They believed that literacy was a social justice issue, akin to education as a basic human right (NALA, 2011). Very few had any experience of adult education or adult literacy tuition. Often their only experience was their own memories of learning.

In the basic training provided by the service, tutors were given an introduction to adult education principles and a number of recommendations for teaching literacy skills. Tutors were encouraged to actively involve the learner in setting relevant concrete learning goals and planning their own learning. For example, for planning, tutors were advised to use a goal-oriented approach derived from the Adult Literacy Basic Service Unit (ALBSU) Progress Profile used in the United Kingdom. Key planning questions included: Where do I want to go? What do I need to learn? How am I going to get there? (ALBSU, nd) (This goal-oriented 'backwards planning' model was later adopted in the CABES Framework). Examples of practical and relevant learning goals identified by learners included reading the local newspaper, helping children with homework, filling forms, writing cheques and composing letters.

While in adult literacy work today, an understanding that literacy involves more than skills is broadly accepted (NALA, 2005; PIAAC, 2009, DES, 2013), at the time literacy was understood as a discrete set of skills which once learned could be applied universally. In the basic training, a big emphasis was placed on word recognition, with methodologies including oral reading, building word attack skills using e.g. phonics, Dolch list, social sight words, developing a personally relevant vocabulary. Work on spelling skills, dictionary skills, basic grammar and punctuation was also stressed. Tutors were encouraged to build these skills using either real life materials (often simplified) familiar to and reflecting the interests of the learner or personal texts developed from the learner's own language experience.

Similar to the experience of other literacy schemes, progress in developing the desired literacy skills was often slow, but most learners seemed to benefit in terms of self-confidence and feeling better about their ability to learn (Street, 1995). Indeed, the emerging view was that literacy progress was not really possible without these. Assessment, when it took place, was very informal. Progress was noted through informal record keeping and reviews.

In the nineties, a number of developments took place which significantly changed the shape of the literacy service. First, research collectively known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) challenged the prevailing view that literacy should be understood as a neutral and discrete set of skills that should be taught systematically in isolation and then applied universally. The focus of much of this research was on studies of how reading and writing were used in social practice (Barton, 2007). NLS researchers argued that literacy was not a single entity but a collection of multi – literacies (Street, 1994), literacy events and practices shaped by the wider social and cultural contexts within which they were created (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000). Moreover, since social practices are not 'neutral', neither are literacy practices (Street, 1994). The term 'new literacies' has since been expanded to encompass the 'new literacies' of the digital age (Leu, 2013) along with the increasingly multi-modal nature of literacy practices (Kress, 2003).

The concepts of multiple literacies and literacy practices helped to make sense of local experience. Ireland was entering an era of rapid social change brought about by economic growth and technological innovation. It seemed that, if people's lives were becoming more complex, so were literacy practices. Increasing numbers of learners were seeking help, but for different reasons. Some learners wanted help using new technologies (mobile phones, computers, automated services such as ATMs). Other learners sought help to cope with workplace demands e.g. the introduction of regulatory exams, new technology, qualifications for previously low-skilled jobs. There were also requests for English language classes, first from newly arrived refugees/asylum seekers and later low-skilled migrant workers who had been attracted to Ireland's growing economy.

The other major change in this period resulted from the publication of OECD's International Literacy Survey (1997) which placed Ireland second last in a group of twenty nations. Close to 25% of adults who completed the survey were assessed at the lowest level of literacy, below that considered 'functional' in the growing 'Knowledge Society' (OECD, 1997). Concerns about the adult literacy problem in Ireland were elevated significantly and the Adult Literacy Development Fund was established. The National Adult Literacy Agency increased its awareness campaign, raising the visibility of literacy as a problem shared by many (NALA, 2011).

The result was that more and more learners began to come forward. However, new literacy learners were presenting with new problems. Many learners had

word recognition skills and some fluency in their everyday reading, but they struggled with texts in new and challenging contexts. Difficulties included navigating unfamiliar text structures, using new technologies, collating information from multiple sources and writing for different purposes, especially in more formal situations. Their anxiety was further compounded when their experience took place in a social situation, e.g. the workplace or public service venue.

It was clear that the one-to-one volunteer model would not be able to cope with either the numbers or the complexities of emerging literacy needs. At this time, the Clare service made the decision to move away from skills-focussed tuition to a themed literacy approach that contextualised literacy within social contexts. The service began to develop models of group tuition built around shared learner goals, e.g. Preparation for Driver Theory, using new banking facilities, helping with homework, active citizenship etc. This new 'themed literacy' approach proved very popular with learners.

However, practitioners were concerned that the new group model would remain true to the 'learner-centred' focus that had been the basis for literacy work in the previous decade. This presented a new challenge because, although aiming for a shared goal, the learners were not necessarily at the same starting point. Also, there remained the need to expand the perspective on literacy and introduce new strategies underpinned by the growing field of literacy research. To meet these key challenges, the CABES Framework was developed.

The CABES Framework

In addition to the influence of New Literacy studies, the Framework is interwoven with ideas from social and constructivist learning theory and the guiding principles of adult learning. Constructivist theory itself is looked at from a number of different perspectives which have informed adult literacy work, e.g. Dewey's inquiry based learning, Bartlett's schema theory, Rosenblatt's transactional/reader response theory, Flavell's metacognitive awareness (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). At the same time, constructivists share the view that learning is an active process in which learners use what they know already to engage with, reflect on and make sense of new understandings and skills.

Social constructivism, a branch of constructivism, proposes that the learner's active construction of knowledge is mediated by socio-cultural experience. A strong voice for socially constructed knowledge is that of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978). Though his research focussed on children, Vygotsky's key

point is that learning happens through social interaction, an idea that readily fits with the interactive environments of adult learning (e.g. group work, project based learning, peer learning etc.)

In Vygotsky's theory, the ideal space for socially interactive learning to take place is in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This space provides the right balance between challenge and support. It marks a reasonable distance between what a learner knows and can do now and the goal that they desire.

It could be said that the ZPD establishes the space where learners can be active participants (not passive recipients) in the learning experience, a guiding principle of adult learning. A course within the learner's ZPD is one that:

- recognises and builds on the learner's prior knowledge and experience;

- takes place in a learning environment in which the learner can actively participate;

- provides a safe and attractive distance between what the learner knows and can do and where he/she wants to go.

Another key principle of adult learning is that learners are 'goal oriented'. The Framework helps learners to be goal-oriented by focussing attention on the learning destination and what is needed to get there. Overall, the CABES Framework reflects good adult education practice by placing the learner at the centre of their own learning experience, recognising and valuing their experience, involving them directly in planning and assessment, and, in doing so, helping to empower them as adult learners (NALA, 2005).

The Framework's Design
The CABES Framework encourages consideration of five distinct yet interlinked factors that impact on the learning experience:

- Background knowledge

- Familiarity with texts and technologies (and other learning tools)

- Language practice (verbal and mathematical)

- Social experience

- Self-awareness

The five factors in the CABES Framework provide a bridge between theory and practice because they are rooted in theory, yet visible in everyday practice.

Background Knowledge

Research has shown that reading comprehension is a constructive process that draws on previous knowledge and experience which is organised, stored and retrieved in the brain through the use of mental models or 'schemata'(Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980 cited in Tracey and Morrow, 2006). Schemata can reflect shared cultural experience as well as individual experience. They can be formed and reformed without conscious awareness. New information and experiences can be added to, accommodated in existing schema, or if too different, may result in the formation of a new schema (Tracey and Morrow, 2006).

In literacy practices, learners 'construct meaning' by linking what they already know to new ideas and experiences (Hughes and Schwab, 2010). Learners' background knowledge can include, for example:

- general knowledge (e.g. about family, community, culture, work practices etc.),

- subject/topical knowledge (e.g. terms, concepts, factual information),

- 'how to' knowledge and problem solving experience,

- attitudes and beliefs about learning and life.

Choosing texts and pacing learning activities to take account of a learner's prior knowledge is one way to locate learning within the learner's ZPD. Occasionally, tutors find that learners are operating from some misconceptions which can inhibit learning. Moreover, identifying and reflecting on background knowledge also raises tutor's awareness that, especially in literacy classes, sometimes even basic knowledge about a topic cannot be assumed.

Familiarity with texts and technologies (and other learning tools)

The word 'text' here refers to written or visual communication with a purpose. Texts today use different media, come in different forms, shapes, and styles, and incorporate a variety of communication modes, often within a single text. They are produced using different technologies for a multitude of purposes. Increasingly, texts are becoming multi-modal contexts, using written, spoken and visual information from various combinations of printed material, digital

interfaces, telephone conversations and face-to-face discussions (Barton and Tusting, 2005; Kalantzis and Cope, 2012).

Text meaning is constructed not only in the language of the text but in text form, structure, design, use of visuals, graphs, logos, focal points, directional indicators, use of space, even the text's materiality. Identifying and understanding meanings embedded in these textual elements requires strategies additional to traditional text 'decoding' (Kalantzis and Cope, 2012; Kress, 2003).

Different text genres have commonly identifiable characteristics of language, structure and conventions. Recognising different kinds of texts and knowing their text conventions helps the reader to distinguish text purposes and select appropriate strategies for navigating and finding meaning. Individuals are always most comfortable with those texts that they use regularly in circumstances with which they are most familiar. In these texts, learners know what to look for (purpose) and how to do it (strategy) (Barton, 2007).

Learners with limited text experience will need to spend more time learning about different text forms, features and conventions, developing strategies for that text (e.g. navigational clues, use of graphic organisers, changing direction) and making connections between texts. This will help to gradually build up a text repertoire. The process is not static, but ongoing. Literacy practices change as life experiences change, so engaging with new types of texts and text purposes, whether independently or with support, is a lifelong process.

Language Practice
One longstanding recommendation in adult literacy teaching has been to use the learner's own language experience to create texts for the learner to read. The advantage to using self-generated texts was that the learner was engaged in the creation of the text and that the language and context would be familiar. However, in everyday social practice multiple forms of language are used; some are colloquial and familiar, many others are more formal and distant from the learner's experience. The more formal language structures are often connected with institutional or 'imposed' literacy practices which language experience texts do not prepare the learner for using (Barton, 2007).

There is immense variation in the use of language (verbal and mathematical) for different social purposes and within different text formats, e.g. choice of vocabulary, use of grammatical forms, sentence complexity, formulas and rou-

tine phrases, use of social and cultural conventions. Learners need to be able to identify not simply the elements of language (vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and punctuation), but how these elements work in specific contexts (Hughes and Schwab, 2010).

Social Experience

There is now a 'shared recognition that learners need to develop a range of literacy capabilities that allow them to engage effectively within educational, workplace, leisure and community settings' (Wyatt-Smith and Elkins, 2008 p 901). In other words, literacy is now recognised as encompassing knowledge, skills **and** processes of 'socialisation' into literacy practices. All individuals and communities are 'socialised' into some literacy practices and not others. Wider opportunities to engage in literacy practices, and particularly to engage in practices that are highly valued in a society, promotes confidence as well as 'literacy mobility'.

Moreover, adult education courses typically place a high emphasis on learning through social interaction. Learners may be given case studies or problems to solve that engage learners both inside and outside the classroom. Group work may involve both face-to-face class discussion and the use of social media. Some learners may find this type of interaction a distinct mismatch from previous learning experiences and so struggle to 'fit in'.

There are also social and vocational contexts outside the classroom to consider. For deeper learning to be consolidated, learners need to have opportunities to apply and adapt learning to complete tasks and solve problems in real situations. Learners who are anxious about social interactions within the classroom are probably less likely to engage in corresponding 'real life' activities where they could apply their learning in the wider world. Without 'real life' application, learning is unlikely to be sustained over time (Oates, 2002).

Self-awareness

Thirty years ago, literacy practitioners observed that progress for literacy learners was as much about self-confidence and self-efficacy in learning as it was about gaining particular skills (Charnley and Jones, 1987; Street, 1995). Significant research has since demonstrated the importance of learners developing greater awareness of both their own ways of knowing (meta-cognitive awareness) and how their emotions can affect learning (Krathwohl, 2002; Dirkx, 2011). Moreover, 'learning to learn', that is understanding and develop-

ing appropriate learning strategies, is essential for enhancing and supporting skill transfer and adaptability (Oates, 2002).

Metacognitive awareness means that a learner understands his or her own thinking processes and recognises that there are different pathways to learning (Tracey and Morrow, 2006). This includes being able to identify prior knowledge relevant to a task and utilise effective strategies for learning and problem solving. It also means that learners can reflect on their learning, revise strategies and monitor their progress, identify weaknesses and ask for help.

Learners with self-awareness also know that attitudes and emotions impact on learning both positively and negatively. They know that strong motives and desires can stimulate and energise their learning, while learner anxiety (as result of low confidence, previous negative experiences, e.g. fear of failure) inhibits learning (concentration, memory, willingness to take risks, attitudes) (Dirkx, 2011). This self-knowledge helps them to be more aware of their own 'learning issues' and also to be more understanding about the needs of fellow learners.

Considering these five factors together builds a picture of the learner's starting point or learning readiness, gives an indication of ZPD and reachable goals. This information is essential for a tutor to be able to plan effectively for learner needs and differences, including embedding relevant 'soft skills' and can also provide a template for evaluating learning progress.

How the CABES Framework is used in practice
The Framework adopts a goal-oriented or 'backwards planning' model widely used in adult literacy work. Each of the five key factors outlined in the CABES Framework are considered first in the context of an identified learning destination (What is needed to get where I want to go?) (see Table below). These are filled in the column on the right.

The learner can then consider his or her own resources with a good understanding of what is needed to achieve a goal. The tutor and learner explore the learner's current experience (Where am I starting out from? What resources do I have already?) These are filled in the column on the left.

The two reflections are then compared. The tutor and learner identify where the gaps are and what needs to be worked on (What more do I need to get there?). These are filled in the middle column. They will form the basis of the Individual Learning Plan. If the gap between where the learner wants to go and where he

or she is starting out from is too great, the tutor may advise revising a goal into smaller, more achievable steps.

Alternatively, a tutor working with groups towards Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) accreditation might first develop a Group Learning Plan in consultation with the learners and then customise for individual learners over the first few weeks of the course. For example, five ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education) learners may share a common goal, such as working towards QQI accreditation, but the contents of their individual learning plans, based on the information from the Framework, will show individual differences.

When the plan is complete, the learner will be able to see that by taking what he or she knows and can do already and adding to that store of knowledge, skills and competences through learning, the goal can be achieved. The CABES framework can be used in initial assessment and planning and then revisited to guide formative and summative assessment.

Table 1: Sample CABES Framework Template using a goal-focussed backwards planning model

	Step 2: Identify learner resources	Step 3: Identify gaps and make a plan	Step 1: Describe the destination
Learner Name:			
Learner Goal: Where do I want to go?			
Framework Headings	*Where am I starting out from?*	*What do I need?*	*What does reaching this goal look like?*
Background knowledge	*What relevant information, observations and experiences does the learner bring to the learning?*		*Factual or conceptual knowledge, e.g. terms, concepts, facts and other information*
Familiarity with texts, tools, technologies	*What equipment, tools and materials can the learner already use that will help him/her?*		*Texts, technologies and other tools that will be used.*
Language practice (verbal and mathematical)	*What kinds of language practices does the learner use every day or in the past?*		*Examples of the kinds of language tasks involved e.g. reading, interpreting and expressing information and ideas.*
Social experience	*What experience has the learner of interacting social situations similar to classroom experience and those associated with achieving the learning goal?*		*Social contexts and social interactions involved.*
Self-awareness	*How does this goal link to the learner's motivation? Can the learner identify/reflect on previous learning experiences and identify personal strengths or weaknesses?*		*Learning skills and problem solving strategies, organisational skills, applications of learning, sense of well-being and success.*

Key strengths of the Framework

The Framework uses a 'wealth model' in its approach to teaching and learning. The CABES Framework is designed to place the learner at the centre of their own learning experience. By including a focus on the resources the learner has already, as well as naming learning needs, the CABES Framework identifies the learner as an essential resource for their own learning. Tutors are then encouraged to plan learning experiences that will maximise learner opportunities to utilise their resources.

The CABES Framework emphasises a holistic view of learning.
Using a goal-oriented or 'backwards planning' approach in the framework helps tutors and learners to connect knowledge, skills and competences to a meaningful whole, an identified learning purpose. Moreover, the five factors in the Framework draw on and encourage tutors and learners to activate Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 2011) as they learn. In addition, an explicit focus on inter- and intra-personal elements highlights the role that emotions can play in learning, both positively and negatively (Dirkx, 2011).

The Framework is versatile.
Tutors and learners outside the literacy services can use the Framework for thinking about and planning learning. For example, tutors could use the Framework to help identify key learner resources needed to participate effectively in a course; these can then inform initial assessment.

The Framework can also be used in conjunction with other assessment strategies. For example, in Clare it has been integrated with initial interview practices in a Department of Education and Skills programme, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and with initial assessment in ITABE.

The Framework can aid planning learning to accommodate learning difference. As stated above, learners may have a common goal, but do not have common starting points. The framework helps tutors and learners to identify individual starting points and learner needs within the context of the group goal. This can then help tutors and learners to customise a Group Learning Plan to meet individual learner needs. Tutors can help meet these needs by making adjustments to content, activities or assessment and/or providing additional help (within the module, parallel to the module or sometimes outside the module).

The Framework can help raise tutor's awareness of the risk of 'cognitive overload'.

Learners use their working memory to temporarily store and manage the information required to carry out complex cognitive tasks such as learning, reasoning, and comprehension. However, working memory has a limited store supply. When too many new learning elements are introduced at once, learners can experience what John Sweller (1998) described as 'cognitive overload', making it difficult to process information and complete tasks. Learners can experience stress, anxiety and frustration with a resultant negative impact on learning. Each of the five factors outlined in the CABES Framework can put pressure on working memory. When too many of these elements are new to the learner, cognitive overload is likely. The Framework can remind tutors to be aware of and limit the number of new learning elements introduce in a learning episode and so reduce the risk of 'cognitive overload'.

The Framework identifies 'soft skills' as fundamental to the learning process.

The Framework raises the visibility of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (including emotional and meta-cognitive awareness) necessary not only for learning but for competency outside of learning. The knowledge sub-strands on the NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications) highlight competences in role, context, learning to learn and insight at all levels of learning, but these are often seen as 'soft skills' informally acquired as a bonus to the more substantial content knowledge and skills.

In the CABES Framework 'soft skills' are integral to learning. They are what enable a learner to act on their learning outside the classroom. Planning for and building enabling outcomes into a learning plan means that their achievement by learners can then be recorded as part of learner progress. Moreover, this increased learning competence will result not only in better learner outcomes but also strengthen learner resilience and increase likelihood of further progression. Using the Framework can help learners to demonstrate that, while at times literacy and numeracy gains may at times be slight, significant progress has been made in other areas.

Final Thoughts

The Framework was designed to meet two key challenges: the first was to expand tutors' and learners' perspectives on 'literacies' and what this means for teaching and learning. The second challenge was to try to ensure that, in an era of rapid change, the service would not lose the 'learner-centred' focus that is at the heart of not alone literacy, but all good learning.

These challenges are ongoing. Tutors joining the service come from a variety of backgrounds, some former volunteers, some with teaching experience in the formal sector, some with particular technical expertise. They all bring their own conceptions of what literacy is and what it means to teach and learn. The Framework may reinforce or it may challenge long held views. Tutors are really only convinced of the Framework's value when they find it useful in their own practice. Also, in recent times, adult education has come under pressure to perform in a way that may force 'old principles' to give way to more pragmatic concerns, e.g. meeting demands for standardisation and coping with reduced resources. The Framework therefore is presented not so much as providing a fixed solution, but rather a way of keeping a much needed dialogue open between tutors and learners as well as adult educators and key stakeholders.

The CABES Framework is a versatile and holistic framework that can be used with individuals and groups to plan and assess learning. Underpinned by theories of literacy as social practice, social and constructivist learning theory and principles of adult learning, the Framework guides tutors and learners through a learning dialogue. Most important, using the CABES Framework helps to ensure that a genuine adult learning experience, with an holistic focus on learning (i.e.one that integrates personal and social development with curricular knowledge and skills), is maintained across programme strands and throughout curriculum design and delivery

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Second chances: Want to meet the needs of early school-leavers? Focus on their mental health

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of research carried out with early school-leavers in four Youthreach centres in the West of Ireland[1]. It offers progressive perspectives on links between early school leaving and mental health related issues. In particular the participants' stories reveal that their mainstream schooling experiences had a damaging effect on their mental health. The findings highlight the necessity for the creation of educational provisions that have 'care' and 'respect' as central concepts, and for Youthreach centres to be recognised as a viable and valid alternative to mainstream schooling.

Introduction

The dynamics of society have altered; mental health awareness has become more prevalent, with issues emerging for the education sector. This article examines issues using a fresh lens which provides new concepts, from which our current education system could be developed for all students. Findings are also relevant for those working with adult learners in further education and students within mainstream schooling. The successful educational progression of many learners will be dependent upon how effectively both academic and personal needs are met by those working within the sector. Educationalists need to be mindful of the necessity of forming caring and supportive environments to enable learners to successfully progress through the educational process.

Overview of the Youthreach programme

Youthreach is a recognised second chance, national response education programme, particularly targeted at young people aged between 15–20 years of age,

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1   This qualitative investigative study was undertaken for a Doctorate in Education Degree in NUIM (McHugh, 2014).

who have left mainstream schooling early. The programme has been in existence since 1988. It is funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and managed by the local Education and Training Boards (ETBs). There are 103 ETB Youthreach centres located around the country, mostly in disadvantaged areas (DES, 2010). In 2004, Youthreach centres became designated as 'Centres for Education' under the Education Act, 1998 (DES, 2004a), and as such are recognised in terms of the current legislation, such as the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004. In 2006, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) piloted a SEN Initiative (SENI), based on a mentoring process, in twenty Youthreach centres nationally (Gordon, 2007). Presently, these are the only centres that receive the SENI funding on an annual basis.

Each centre is unique as it reflects the social, economic and cultural environment from which it operates. The pedagogical approach of Youthreach is more closely aligned to adult education than mainstream schooling. The focus is on the young person with an emphasis on recognising and rewarding achievement rather than reinforcing failure (Stokes, 2003). The process used is both learner-centred and learner-led and the programmes reflect the learners' needs, as is visible in adult education programmes. The learners-to-tutor ratio in centres is generally not greater than 9:1 and seven is the average number of teaching staff in a centre that caters for twenty-five students (DES, 2010). Students attending Youthreach are entitled to an age-related weekly training allowance. Their allowances are linked to attendance and in order for students to receive full payment they are required to be in attendance for 35 hours each week. In recent times there has been a sharp increase in students who are presenting to the centres with varying amounts of personal problems that they find difficult to cope with on a daily basis. This has become an ever increasing issue in the day-to-day operations of centres.

The centres offer a wide variety of nationally certified programmes to cater for the needs of the individual learners. The main objectives of Youthreach programmes are to prepare the young people for working life, with an emphasis on core skills and the ability to transfer these skills into a variety of work and life situations (DES, 1995). The emphasis is placed on personal development, such as improving self confidence and self-esteem. Based on recent figures by the Department of Education and Skills (2013a), there were 3,313 students enrolled in the national Youthreach programme in 2012. Originally, the Youthreach programme was designed around a two year programme, with two distinct phases:

the foundation phase and the progression phase. In 2010, new draft guidelines for Youthreach centres were issued by the DES which specified an extended four-phase plan and did not stipulate a two-year timeframe for a participant enrolling on the programme (DES, 2010).

The Youthreach programme is positioned within the Further Education (FE) sector of the educational system. The DES (2004b, p.21) states that FE embraces education and training which occurs after second level schooling but which is not part of the third level system. The most current presentation of the Irish Education System DES (2004b) visibly positions the FE sector between these two levels, but the sector is not clearly defined and the range of programmes on offer are not evident. In particular, the Youthreach programme is invisible in the overall context of our Irish education system. In Youthreach the students gain accreditations that are on par with the levels achievable in mainstream schooling. However, Youthreach is not considered as a core element of the education system and is not identified as an alternative education programme for students who leave post-primary school early. This is a major problem for Youthreach centres, there are limited progression opportunities available to Youthreach learners and thus it has inferior recognition as a result. The positive development work that is being done with the students in Youthreach is short-lived as there is no continuity of provision in place for those who leave the centres. These students can for a second time, feel marginalised and isolated within education. At present Youthreach students are competing with Leaving Certificate students for limited places on Post Leaving Certificate (PLCs) courses and some students are not eligible to apply to Vocational Training Opportunities Schemes (VTOS)[2] as they are under the age requirement of twenty-one. It is imperative that the FE sector has mechanisms in place to enable harmonious transitions between the various sections.

Mental Health and Young People

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2012) predicts that by 2030 depression will be the main global health problem, with 20% of children and teenagers experiencing a disabling mental illness. Similarly, according to a European Commission report (2012b) mental health difficulties are considered to be one of the predominant health related problems among school children in the European Union. In today's society where young people are dealing with eco-

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2 VTOS is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. The Scheme is operated through the Education and Training Boards and provides a special range of courses designed to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people.

nomic deprivation, family difficulties, bullying, academic struggles and other stressors in their lives, it is more important than ever to consider mental health issues. Within the education sector the question must be asked as to whether there are enough resources dedicated to those who are experiencing difficult challenges in their lives. Governments have been slow to respond to the issues and nine years after the publication of the Department of Health and Children (DOHC) report (2006) *A Vision for Change* policy framework for mental health services, few provisions have been implemented. This is particularly significant in terms of early school-leavers as the risk factors for mental disorders are exacerbated by social exclusion, peer rejection, poverty, isolation and low levels of family support (WHO, 2003). Mental health issues have not to date been identified in research as a possible basis for early school-leaving. The term 'mental health' has only started to appear in educational research in the past six years.

Anecdotal evidence from the Youthreach sector would suggest that there has been a significant increase in recent years in the number of students enrolling on programmes who display symptoms of mental health related problems. The problems highlighted by various Youthreach coordinators include varying levels of depression; self-esteem and body image issues; aggression and anger management issues; anxiety; substance abuse; self-harm; relationship difficulty; lack of personal care and coping skills for dealing with life events. Students who leave mainstream schooling early have a difficult choice to make; they become detached from their peers and societal norms, their sense of identity is diminished and their mental health perturbed. These issues have significant implications for their mental health, both how they are judged by others and by themselves.

In society, discussions surrounding mental health are invariably considered in the negative and the term mental health is used to stigmatise people. However, mental health is a vital factor in every person's health and should be considered as important as their physical health. Mental wellness is not a consistent factor in any person's life and some issues can have a negative impact on their overall well-being. Many effects are hard to overcome, especially in the absence of support. This can be especially true for young students, who may not have a deep understanding of mental health or how to deal with particular issues that impact upon it. O'Brien's (2008) research on well-being and post-primary schooling clearly illustrates that the challenges faced by young people are ever increasing, and school systems need to respond to these issues as a matter of priority. She contends that emotional dimensions of education are equally as

important as academic elements and schools are prime settings for nurturing students' self-esteem and mental health. It is imperative that mental health issues become a key focus of education and training. A recent report by the HSE (2014) indicates that the current services that are available nationally for children and adolescents are not meeting the demand levels. Students who are currently waiting for over a year for professional help need to feel supported.

The emphasis on mental health is essential to understanding the phenomenon of early school-leaving and should be considered through a broader lens than a sociological approach, a lens that incorporates a psychological perspective. This is crucial now more than ever as market-driven ideals come to dominate the field of education. We cannot develop healthy and well-rounded young people if we solely focus on the outputs of education and forget about the processes involved.

Care as a core concept within education

A contemporary notion of care in education is evident in the recent publication *'New Managerialism in Education'* by Lynch, Grummell and Devine (2012). This book presents the changing landscape of the Irish education system. It highlights that education is now more readily defined by a business model than that of a caring profession and is strongly propelled by neo-liberalism. The education system has adopted a market driven ideology where education has become a measurable commodity that is based on performance indicators and management. The impact of such marketisation of education is clearly illustrated by Lynch *et al.* (2012, p. 199) as they describe the issue of "a conflict of values regarding the governance and purpose of education and the role of relational beings within this process". The focus on measurable outputs means that there is limited focus on inputs or process and the student gets lost in the system; they are not regarded as important and only the measurable outputs are of significance. This type of education system breeds competitiveness and breaks down solidarity as students and schools are continually measured and appraised against each other. In essence, it is simple economics, education is becoming a commodity that can be bought and sold and those with the ability to pay will inevitably succeed, which will lead to rising inequality. This is a foremost concern, particularly for students with limited financial means: what will become of them if they do not have the resources to progress? Presently, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who have succeeded in mainstream education have been posed with new obstacles that hinder their progression, by the removal of free third level tuition fees. This book provides a clear view as to

why the voices of those on the margins need to be presented and heard, as currently they are being drowned out by an economic-driven education system. Lynch *et al.* (2012) strongly contends that a focus on love, care and solidarity, as opposed to competition and self-interest, is vital for the well-being of society. The research of Lynch *et al.* (2012) delivers a compelling theory on the importance of care within education, highlighting that students are relational beings who need to learn to care and be part of a caring society that recognises and respects them.

The notion of care in education is also imbued in the works of Noddings (1995). She emphasises that caring "is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling that makes people kind and likable" nor does she consider it to be "anti-intellectual" but rather an ideal of education that would "demonstrate respect for the full range of human talents" (Noddings, 1995, p. 676). Noddings' approach to care in education is 'organic' in form; she implies that good mental health arises when the overall conditions are right. If a school has an overall ethos and practice that respects the full array of human talents, good mental health is only one of the beneficial outcomes. The importance of being cared for also resonates with the work of Lynch and Baker (2005): focusing on the affective domain, the work discusses the significance of love, care and solidarity becoming an integrated part of the educational experience. The authors consider the importance of creating caring environments and teaching young people to become more caring and relational beings. Additionally, Lynch (2008) asserts that it is vitally important to recognise all human potential in education, not just academic, and acknowledge the diversity of human capabilities. In an ideal scenario all human capabilities would be respected and education would be much more than economic prosperity, it would involve social inclusion, personal fulfilment and better health. This idea should encompass the concept of recognising Youthreach programmes and FE in general as a viable alternative to mainstream. A system where a student's path is based on their requirements, and not just viewed as a second best alternative to the mainstream schooling structure, all of which would have a more positive effect on student well-being.

Early school-leavers becoming somebody without school
The school setting is the main outlet for students to form their identity. Reay (2004) indicates that students from lower socio-economic groupings have to lose a part of 'who they are' if they want to be academically successful as they have to conform to the ideals of the dominant group. Although their identity formation may be affected in school, their decision to leave will have a criti-

cal impact on their identity. Early school-leaving creates a crisis in relation to a young person's identity. They will be looked upon differently in the eyes of their peers and by society in general. They will be removed from the main route to occupational prospects. Even if school was particularly difficult for the student, or if they felt they could not succeed, they are suddenly alone without a future plan or daily structure. Depending on what has led to their decision to leave school they will no doubt be dealing with mental distress in terms of their identity, both who are they now and who they will become. Much of the distress can lead to various mental health related issues. Their issue as an early school-leaver will be trying to form a different identity, ultimately an identity which will deliver acceptance. Smyth and Hattam (2004) define this as 'becoming somebody without school'. They utilise Wexler's (1992) 'becoming somebody' as a means of presenting the process of identity formation that young people go through when they leave school early. Wexler (1992) suggests that the struggle of the young person to form an identity is not that they become nobody, but is a struggle in order to be 'somebody'. If this is the case, there can be greater pressure on an early school-leaver to succeed and this can be difficult as they have left the main route to both identity and prosperity. Struggling with trying to become someone and having limited options can impact negatively on the young person. Those who join Youthreach programmes struggle with identity issues as they continue their education without the sense of normality that is associated with mainstream schooling.

Ireland is lagging behind in its approach to identifying mental health as a major determining factor of early school-leaving. Currently, the government budget spending on mental health is 3% less than the recommended 8.2% (Oireachtas, 2012). Although in the DOHC report (2006) *A Vision for Change,* schools were recognised as the ideal setting for the promotion of mental health, there are still no specific compulsory measures in place. However, O'Brien's (2008) study on wellbeing and capabilities gives useful theoretical insight for understanding the issues of mental health and the importance of inclusion within educational discourse. The works of O'Brien, Noddings, Lynch and Baker are examples of the type of progressive research and approaches that is needed within education and is a move towards creating a more integrated caring environment. Also, in 2013 the DES launched guidelines for post-primary schools for mental health promotion and suicide prevention (DES, 2013b). These guidelines offer schools a method of approaching mental health through a whole school process. However, it may be difficult for schools to fit these methods into their programmes. At senior level the programmes would be additional to the exam-

inable subjects and time constraints may give health promotion less importance than the compulsory subjects. Reports by the HSE (2014) indicate that the current services that are available nationally for children and adolescents are not meeting the demand levels. There needs to be a community-wide, integrated approach to dealing with mental health issues and schools and centres need to become part of the response plan. Curriculum reform and school system structures need to change in order to deal effectively with mental health issues. Students who are currently waiting for over a year for professional help need to feel supported and schools and centres are ideal spaces for providing such needed assistance.

The research findings

This research was a small-scale, qualitative investigation used to explore the participants' educational experience and perspectives of early school leaving. In 2013, forty participants partook in an arts-based method of participant collage creation and eleven of those participated in extended individual interviews. The findings in this research are powerful expressions by the participants and provide rich insights into the experiences of early school-leavers as they endeavour to progress their education through the Youthreach programme. The key findings are based on the themes of care, respect and recognition. Overviews of the research findings are presented using three significant categories.

Mainstream unrest

All of the participants had difficulty in second level school and many had challenging primary school experiences. Bullying was highlighted as a major feature of the participants' everyday experiences of school. The bullying contained physical, psychological and racial elements which had a detrimental impact on the participants' well-being. Sandra said that "it makes you a different person… you are just so vulnerable" and Jodie claimed that it has made her aggressive. It is evident from the findings that being bullied created many knock-on effects of absenteeism, skipping classes, missing out on schoolwork to ultimately deciding to leave school.

The participants stated that they did not receive enough attention in school, equating this with an absence of care in schools. They were often 'bored' as a result and ended up getting into trouble as they did not have their work completed. Jodie maintained that teachers were not interested in her, "they have a schedule, and they know what they have to do, and they do that to get their money out of the day and like they don't care if you understand or not". Jodie

identified this as her reason for leaving school early. Sandra felt that teachers should have had more compassion and understanding for students, "teachers should ask them the reasons…they are in a certain mood or why they didn't do something…instead of saying you are on detention, you didn't do your homework". Sandra maintained that if the schools had a more caring environment she may have been able to stay on at school. Brian, felt constantly stressed about school and stated that he was not cared for in school or given the chance to show his true self.

The participants highlighted that their own personal issues and mental health problems made school life difficult. Jodie and Sandra claimed that the stress at home was one of the main reasons they couldn't deal with school life and the everyday turmoil of having teachers give out to them. Many of the participants stated that they found it difficult to mix their schoolwork with their home environment and were unable to keep up with homework. Similarly, Cian stated that his past attributes to his current state of mind "it would sort of screw you up…I have a really short temper…" Three participants disclosed that they considered suicide as a means of escaping their unrest. The findings clearly showed that the participants did not feel supported within mainstream school, their issues were not prioritised or understood and a result they were unable to form any meaningful attachment to the school environment.

Last chance – Youthreach as an alternative
There is a sense that mainstream school was too strict and standardised for the participants, they found the rules and regulations stifling and that everyone had to conform and be the same. Cian referred to this as being 'treated like robots' and being 'forced to do work'. Youthreach became an inviting option that was more tailored to their individual needs. Many of the participants revealed that the positive relationships between the students and the tutors were fundamental to their sense of ease within the Youthreach setting. Neven identified "the fact that you are able to go to class and call the teacher by their first name" as of notable importance to him, as he "can relate to them on a one to one level" and that "everyone is treated the same" in Youthreach. Similarly, many other participants provided notable accounts of how they felt accepted and respected within Youthreach and did not feel that they were being judged or compared to others within the centres. Laura claimed that it was 'nice and homely'. All of the participants felt that they were supported within the programme, for Sandra "it is nice to know that someone cares…" and for Jodie, Neven and Elaine it was important to know that the staff "don't judge" and "just help you".

Missing out on being 'normal'

All of the participants in this study have left mainstream education: no longer following the standard educational route. For many, there is a sense of regret about not feeling able to stay on in school; depicting how they have lost some normality as a result and no longer feel affiliated to their school going peers. The consistent use of the term 'normal' school is interesting as it implies that in some way that Youthreach is 'abnormal'. The participants revealed that their own positive impression of Youthreach was undermined by the perceived negative view from the general public about the programme. The participants painted a rather grim picture in describing how they believed that the general public portrayed the centres, they used words like: "gangsters", "junkies", "down and outs", "gobshites", "pure wasters" "hooligans", and a place for "stupid people or where Travellers go". It appears that the participants' contentment with the Youthreach programme is rather notional and contained within a cocoon. This creates a major life contradiction for the participants which intensifies their mental health issues and makes it more difficult for them to progress.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Mental health issues lead to negative effects for the individual and society. Understanding the causes of mental ill health in young people is therefore essential in developing effective preventive systems and programmes. Foremost, this research demonstrates the importance of investigating mental health issues as a possible link to early school-leaving. Also, it highlights that the decision to leave school can exacerbate mental health problems as the students become isolated from their peers and socially disadvantaged (Smyth and Hattam, 2004). This research assists in the development of the current literature in relation to reasons for early school-leaving. It incorporates mental health into the educational conversation in order to express the critical need to wholly integrate mental health policies (DES, 2013b) into the education system. Young people need to be informed about mental health; they need to know how to deal with problems, what supports are available and that they should not feel afraid or stigmatised about seeking help. The negative culture surrounding mental health needs to be changed.

Youthreach coordinators in the Western Area Network indicated that they have witnessed a considerable shift in the nature of their duties; with a large proportion of each day being spent on mental health related issues. This has been particularly challenging for many of them who claim that they are trained as teachers and do not have expertise in the area of mental health, and especially

to the level that is now required within centres. Many indicated that they have taken the initiative to up-skill in the areas of suicide prevention and frontline counselling. It is clear that specific training is needed by all staff members working in centres. There is a need for a holistic approach to dealing with mental health issues and it cannot be achieved by a select few who carry out the mandatory social development programmes. There needs to be a community-wide, integrated approach to dealing with mental health issues, and education centres and schools are ideal spaces to form part of the response plan. An evaluation of the SENI mentoring process, operational in twenty centres for the past nine years, suggests that it is very successful. The research (Gordon, 2013) indicates that the learners are more self-aware and better able to manage emotions and to seek help. This highlights the need for the implementation of the SENI initiative across all centres as those students not attending these particular centres are at a discernible disadvantage. Mental health promotion should be regarded as one of the core functions and priorities of all education programmes. NEPS have responded to this by piloting a soft-skills framework in six centres in County Meath (Gordon, 2011). This type of holistic approach is what is needed to help focus on key concerns of low self-esteem, depression, anger management and suicidal ideation.

These elements need to become an integral part of the daily timetables and be recognised as such; by granting dedicated teaching hours to these areas. Although, the aim of the programme is to prepare students for working life and certification, it seems pointless focusing on credentials and priming students for assessment and participation in the workforce when they are trying to deal with such challenging life situations. As Lynch (2008) indicates, there is need to focus on the core issues first before we can start thinking about academic content. This would be in keeping with the vision and ethos of FE, where the development of the person as a whole, is paramount. There is an urgent need for greater funding to be dedicated to soft-skills development within centres.

Currently, student cases are primarily dealt with in an ad-hoc manner and that there are no precise guidelines in place. Although each student's case is different, it would be beneficial for staff to have clear guidelines and procedures in place. The development of a mental health policy and procedural guidelines may go some way toward creating a consistent approach that could be adopted across all education programmes. This would help to ensure that no errors are made in dealing with the mental health of the vulnerable students who attend the programmes. It would also be particularly important for the staff members'

own sense of wellbeing, by being able to feel reassured that they followed the best course of action available and that they have helped the students to the best of their ability. The mental wellbeing of those who are dealing with mental health related problems is also an important consideration. There is a need for adequate supports to be in place, not only for the programme participants, but also for those who are dealing with the mental health related issues on a daily basis.

As presented by Noddings (1995) and Lynch (2008) care needs to become an essential element within education. Care must be enabled in education so that students can form attachments, and feel like they belong. We need to care for those who could be regarded as some of society's most vulnerable people. They need support, resources and progression opportunities. Overall, we should be striving for what is best for the young people so that they can participate fully in society and that they can reach their full potential. We as educators need to reconsider the purpose of schooling, and provide a more holistic educational experience, in order that students can become more caring individuals within society and have a sense of solidarity (Lynch and Baker, 2005). There is an urgent need for adequate tracking systems to be put in place, where young people can be monitored and supported after leaving school or other programmes. Currently, there is no way of knowing whether the young people that join the Youthreach centres have the greatest needs in relation to mental health and social development or if there are others who are left on the margins who are similar or in greater need of care and support. We should be greatly concerned for those who leave school and do not take part in any employment or training programmes. These young people are our adults of tomorrow, they need continually support and guidance. It is clear that policy makers, government and educationalists need to move forward and create learning environments that will make a real difference to society's most vulnerable groups. Finally, no learner should feel like a failure or have diminished well-being because the school system did not suit their needs. The Youthreach programmes deserve to be recognised as viable alternative to mainstream education.

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A poem points, a thesis explains: pedagogic epiphany and liminal disposition in adult education

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Abstract

In this paper I reflect on epiphany moments in teaching and learning and the ways in which writing such moments can serve both to refresh and revitalise what Palmer calls the inner landscape of the educator, while also offering opportunities to enliven pedagogy. I use the notion of the liminal disposition to position such writing as an agentic act in the face of bureaucratic and other professional pressures and drifts. I also use the work of Cixous to provide a theoretical framework for writing and for its place in transformative adult learning. I then present the epiphany moment itself in story form together with an account of its impact on groups of learners and discuss its status as good practice in adult education.

Key words: (Epiphany moments; Writing as inquiry; Cixous; Liminal disposition)

Context

I have been teaching in some capacity now for three decades and involved in the field of adult education for the past 28 years. It is a privileged role indeed but it is a challenge to any educator, as Palmer (2007) has shown, to stay alive to its possibilities, to stay fresh and optimistic in the face of changing personal, social and political discourses and landscapes. In particular the encroaching of managerialist, bureaucratic demands I often experience as inimical to the kind of spaces for learning that I seek to create. Transformative learning can sometimes seems pie in the pedagogical and ideological skies, when seen in the light of institutional and bureaucratic demands as well as economic and political constraints.

And so I need to reconnect over and over again what it is I truly believe is possible in adult learning? How can I create spaces for living engagement? What hope can it provide for transformative learning?

Conroy (2004, p. 4) talks of the "technicist onslaught" in educational discourse, characterised by the language of "competence/benchmarks/outputs/targets", a "performative calculus" inimical to "inventiveness, creativity and excitement". A liminal disposition on the other hand, Conroy says, helps us to think about "ontological possibilities [which] are created outside the structuring intentionalities of teaching" (2004, p. 234) and creates space characterised by "the willingness to take chances, the capacity to let things take their own course, the patience to hang back" (2004, p. 65). Todd says that this disposition involves a vigilance for "small transformative moments" that can "shift the borders of our self-understanding" (2014, p. 232). Such change "can occur in a mixture of disturbance and delight" (2014, p. 233) in those "small moments of grace, those instants of living transformation" which can offer "texture and depth to our everyday engagement" and "make a difference to who we, as students and teachers, become in the process" (2014, p. 243).

These experiences emerge for me in epiphany moments, moments of significance that serve to refresh and reenliven my practice. Epiphany moments are moments of revelation that emerge often from challenging or troubling experience. I take the term from Denzin who sees epiphanies as "ruptures in the structure of daily life" (2014, p. 53). Epiphanies may be of several types but for my purposes the "minor" or "illuminative" epiphany is of most importance, that is, a moment where "underlying tensions or problems in a situation or relationship are revealed" (2001, p. 37). For Denzin epiphany moments are revelatory for the person in terms of their own meaning making in the world, "something new is always coming into sight, displacing what was previously certain and seen" (2014, p. 1).

Writing as Inquiry

I position this story as an example of auto ethnographic writing as a method of inquiry, an approach associated with Narrative Inquiry as a methodological stance in which personal narratives make possible a witnessing "for readers to observe and, consequently, better testify on behalf of an event, problem, or experience" (Ellis et al 2011, para. 27). A number of theorists have engaged with, and commented on, this method (Ellis et al, 2011; Neilsen et al, 2001; Muncey, 2010; Pelias, 2004, 2011; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Speedy, 2005, 2008; Spry, 2011). However, the work of Cixous (1993, 1997, 1998, 2002; Sellers, 1994) in my view offers an approach to writing as inquiry that is of distinct value and relevance to adult education.

Cixous' work offers a method of inquiry, "of writing one's way through knowledge to a state of unknowing insight. The very purpose of such writing is to depart from the familiar, logocentric understanding of the world and to find new ways of knowing" (Hoult 2012a, p. 17), an epistemology that has particular relevance and resonance in the context of transformative adult education (Hoult 2012a, 2012b).

Writing is a place of "learning and maturing" (Cixous 1993, p. 156) where, by inquiring into and with embodied and felt experience, we can learn from our lives. In this space, as educators and as learners we can engage with our experiences, particularly those experiences that cause us to stop in our tracks and that leave us vulnerable (Cixous, 1997, p. 9), so that we can learn and grow.

For Hoult (2012a; 2012b) the work of Cixous presents a vision for writing that offers us a vibrant, dynamic method of inquiry into adult education practice. Traditional academic genres of writing are bound up with power games and hidden authority. Hoult calls a "sham" the translation of moving and vivid personal accounts of transformative adult learning into the "dry register" of the "one-dimensional, monochromatic text expected by the academy" (2012b, p. 1). This genre of writing "characterized by certainty, logical linearity, and authority moves in a realm characterized by uncertainty and unknowing is.... problematic" (2012b, p. 4). Writing about transformative learning requires "a commitment to a different kind of scholarly practice" (2012b, p. 1), one that includes "the symbolic as a way of attempting to express what cannot be contained in rational, logocentric order" (2012b, p. 2).

A Lonely Seal: A Story about teaching and learning
Warren notes that teaching as an activity tends to be kept private, as are our attempts to be critically reflexive about our teaching (2011, p. 139). He calls passionately for a reflexive pedagogy to "complicate the silence of the classroom space" (2011, p. 141) and proposes that autoethnographic writing as a method of inquiry allows us to take "our labor in the classroom as a vital site for investigation" (2011, p. 140).

This story I present here attempts to take up Warren's challenge to "create educational experiences that are rich, textured, and varied" (2011, p. 141) by depicting a moment of epiphany in my teaching life, where my identities as writer, teacher and parent enter into a generative collision. The encounter between my son and I represented here happened to coincide with a particularly frustrating

day in my academic life and uncomfortably prefigured a class on writing skills I had to prepare for the next day.

Wednesday night. A cold snap leaving orange traces in the sky. I am tired out from being back at work after a long Christmas break. I had spent the day resentfully rewriting a badly written report that was past its deadline and should have been finished by someone else. Angry and tired I make in the early evening to the bedroom for some space before the kids' bedtime routine would start.

Dara[1] arrives tearful. "I have to write this poem for school and I can't do it. I'm stuck," he says, "Martha [who is 4 years old] could do better."

"That's not true at all, Dara, but sure I will help," I said, gritting my teeth against the resentment at my space being so easily lost. "What's the poem about?"

"Water," he says. "Mammy says I should write about our walk from St. Helen's to Carne at Christmas, but that's about a walk, not about water." "She's right. They were lovely walks," I said remembering that timeless break so recently lost. "Let's begin by writing down everything you can think of about the walks."

"I can't think of anything." I feel my anger rising – I feel stressed and tired. I've spent the day bloody well writing that report; the only break was over lunch when I was talking about the damn chapter of my thesis I'm so stuck on. Why am I so stuck? I have plenty of desire, any number of ideas but nothing on the page. Just a horrible dry writing retch.

"Course you can. Come on. Let's have a go. Can you remember that your eye balls were cold, your ears were paining you and you were all itch from the layers of clothes we made you wear?"

"That's stupid though, that's not a poem."

I could feel the fetch of anger inside me as I listen to him, the sense of block he is putting in front of himself.

"Yes it is. You are just being negative," I said, silently harbouring my own

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1   I am grateful to my son Dara (at this point aged 10) for permission to reproduce this story and poem here.

secret writer self who cannot get going. "Let's just have a go. Close your eyes and see can you remember the walk, the sound of the sea, the feel of the cold, the sound of the gulls, the way Tuskar Lighthouse follows you all the way back to Rosslare." The English teacher, so long dormant, begins to stir in me. So too the poet who walked those stretches for years and longed for the words to catch it exactly, when the sheer ineffability of the day would coalesce into a moment.

Dara, compliant as I was when I was his age, writes the list: cormorants, sea, sea air, fish, rocks ….

"Great. Now we need a first line." Silence. The English teacher in me quells the impatient parent and waits a moment. "Imagine you are trying to tell someone who has never been on a beach on such a cold day exactly what it was like."

Nothing.

"Ok, so what would you call it, this poem?"

"Walking by water in the winter," he says, "that's too many w's."

"That's a great first line, Dara", I say, relieved to get started. "All those w's in a poem is called alliteration. What else can you think of? Anything else happen?"

"Daisy was chasing seagulls."

"Great, there's your second line!"

"That's stupid, dad. That's only a load of random sentences."

"Great, Dara, there's your third line." I look at him, his red face incredulous, and I know I've made a mistake – he now feels that I haven't a clue what his teacher requires of him.

"That's definitely stupid," he says, the distress rising in him again.

Martha arrives for her bedtime story, so I leave him to stew for a while. "Think of any other lines you can think of," I say uselessly. "It's getting late now and we have wasted the whole night on this." The minute I had said it I knew it was

a bigger mistake. Brushing Martha's teeth and reading her story I was hardly there at all. "What can I do to shift this bloody poem," I thought, "and what about the class I've to prepare for tomorrow."

Back in the room now Dara has made no progress and my impatience is at an intense pitch. Exasperated, torn between tired parent, enthusiastic teacher and blocked writer, I blurt out.

> *"You've done nothing since, Dara," I say before I see his tears, and then "You're just getting distressed about it now so I'm writing a note to your teacher."*

> *"No. No, dad. I'm going to finish it."*

We start again. He closes his eyes, as he had done on the day, but cannot hear the rush of the water, cannot feel the cold of the day.

> *"What was it like, can you remember?"*

> *"It was relaxing."*

Stumped again.

> *"Right. What else can you tell this person who has never been there?"*

> *"The cold sea breeze was hurting my eyes walking to Carne from Bing Bay."*

> *"Great, you have another two lines." He writes them down. "Now what else?" I begin to remember it now myself, the wonder of the moment, the ineffable joy, the piping of the oyster catchers, the suck and lap of the water.*

> *"A lonely seal was slowly making its way down to the rocks," he writes and I can feel an end in sight. "We could see windmills in the distance." True, true, I think, feeling the relief of the penultimate line. "And we walk back leaving the sparkling sea behind us."*

> *"Well done, Dara, well done. You've done a great job. Go down now and write it out into your English copy."*

> *"Thanks dad," he says. "You're a great dad, dad." We hug and he runs off and I sit in the space left behind. Later, much later and calmer, I begin to see just*

how those moments, both of them – the walk and the writing about the walk,
speak directly to my own writing project, my thesis, and to the class I've to
give the next day. Only then do I run downstairs, in child haste, and hope
that his precious little page is not in the bin.

Narrative Pedagogy: Learning to write: a dialogical analysis[2]

I was to conduct a session on "Writing Skills for Qualitative Research" with a group of students on a Masters programme the following day. Indeed I retrieved Dara's little page[3] from the bin and wrote this story for the class. Later, both after the class and again after the group had graduated, theses all written, I used e-mail conversations, positioned here as interactive interviews (David and Ellis, 2008) to engage in a dialogue with the participants in order to make sense of the story, and its relevance to writing qualitative research and good practice in facilitating learning. In what follows I consider the feedback in the light of some of the conceptual material regarding writing offered during these presentations. Interactive interviewing is a process by which we "closely examine interactive events and at the same time deal with the issue of reflexivity, subjectivity, emotional expression, modes of description and narrativity" (Davis and Ellis, 2008, p. 289).

Reader Feedback

Mike saw the writing story as an "exciting and provocative way to go about learning". He found the story "touching" because of "the paralleling of the struggles between yourself and your son in how to go about fulfilling a task that also meant something to each of you as individuals and as people". Mike resonated with this because of his own struggle with academic writing.

> At the time I was struggling to come to terms with the demands of academic writing while trying to explore a theme that was important to me as a person and as a practitioner of adult and community education. To tell you the truth this remained a struggle for me right up until I handed in my thesis, therefore I did not learn to reconcile the competing demands of creative writing and writing a thesis.

The session brought into relief the binary he experienced between creative

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2   I am indebted to the participants, all practicing adult educators working in a variety of settings, who participated in the sessions where this narrative was performed and for their permission to use their feedback in my reflections. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their identities. E mail correspondence was used both after the session and after the course had ended to gather responses and reactions.

3   See Appendix 1 for the page with the original poem and notes

and academic modes of writing and served to alert him to how this binary was uncomfortably operative within his own writing. For Mike the academic mode is "more about argument and knowledge", while "creative" is shorthand for writing that incorporates "feeling and instinct". He says

This was a constant struggle for me when I was writing in that I often alluded to themes and ideas rather than discussing them – which in a creative piece might have been more acceptable. For me a poem points, a thesis explains.

For Mike writing that honours both the feeling dimension and theoretical discourse allowed him to see that "there is something powerful in the honesty of the particular experience." He saw the account of the session as articulating a pattern of experience common to myself in the positions of father and teacher, to Dara as son, student and poetry writer and to himself as participant in the session and later as thesis writer:

> The writing seems to relate a story of you making your way out of the mists of uncertainty as the session went on, which might be mirroring the process that your son went through in writing his poem, that you went through in doing your own writing and that I possibly went through in writing my thesis.

Belinda also talks of the struggle of writing, describing herself vividly as "sitting back in the room in Maynooth with that huge pain in my tummy which screams 'am I able to do this piece of writing that I have to do?'" The story allows Belinda to identify different positions she takes up that are active in her own struggles with writing. The story acts as an objective correlative for these internal states. She identifies with the child in the story who cannot write, but she also sees herself in terms of the confused, demanding and impatient parent. She realises that both of these subject positions are active in her anxiety and this helped her "to look at what the blocks were that I was putting in my path".

> Then the story of Dara, writing his poem for school, in my head I am thinking I am in the exact same place as Dara. The inability to attach the head to the body in order to make logic of what I want to say. It also feels like I am the confused parent to myself as I am the one that feels annoyed and angry with being unable to put the words down the way that seems right to do a thesis.

Mary sees this in terms of "the multiplicity of roles" that as adults we occupy and that we try to separate out and compartmentalise. She comments on, and resonates with, the depiction of the "impatience with yourself and the masked

impatience with your son" as parent in the story. She identifies with the sense in which I "could offer guidance to him to get started but you couldn't hear it yourself".

She heard echoes of her own stories and the way they are imbued with introjected voices of powerful others (Cixous, 1997) and that "it captured for me many of my own difficulties of just writing and not over-thinking, pre-empting judgement of what the teacher will want and if it is good enough."

Catherine enters the struggle of the story from the viewpoint of expectant mother. On hearing about the young boy in the story, she says:

> Straight away i [sic] am enthusiastic and emotional all at the same time – the joys of being in the third trimester!! I was suddenly drawn to Dara – the way you pronounced his name and how you've spelt it. I had literally spent the evening before with my husband finalising our boy's names choices and Dara/ Daragh was top of the list for a boy. I listened with intrigue at the little school – going boy's story of his poem that he had to write, his woes, his fears of being judged, thinking to myself, this could be my little Daragh and then I got so emotional!!

She empathises hugely with Dara, expressing annoyance at times with myself as demanding father ("I was annoyed that you were getting so annoyed with him and then i copped on – he is mirroring you"), experiencing herself as nurturing mother. She notes how as father at times I am striating Dara's experience: "i see the person who still complies with rules – straight away you're thinking of the system". She, as mother sees the need for nurturing and facilitating instead: "I was reaching out hugging Dara at this stage!!! I just wanted to give him reassurance that he was doing great and he didn't have to follow any particular rules for this to work. The mother to be in me was crying out with wanting to nurture him."

Catherine describes her embodied response to the story and in so doing she summarises the identity issues at work in the story:

> At this stage I'm practically crippled trying to hide my tears. I remember S. [co-participant on the course] giggling at me. I was overcome with emotion. This little lost boy – needing direction which was given to him with such energy (good or bad) by a father/teacher/poet who was so frustrated in his own stuff that nearly lost sight of his focus but then realises his wrongs and comes back to nurture his son – his priority.

Autoethnography as pedagogy

Mike commented on the pedagogical style with which the story was used. He refers to the "light touch" with which a group will "come up with gold". Belinda talks of how the story positioned myself as a learner alongside the group allowing them "to see you are not perfect, you too have feelings…in relation to a piece of writing, being tired, frustrated, and unable to find a small space for ourselves in the busy life". Recognising the vulnerability of the educator significantly shifted Belinda's perspective of herself as a learner:

> This helped me as I think prior to this I had considered myself to be a weak student who was striving to achieve. It helped me to grow in confidence and feel it's normal. As a result of this exercise I wrote and wrote and it was through the many changes and writing that I was eventually set free.

Catherine on hearing the story says "I begin to see you more like a peer now." Melissa says "to me, when I had experienced difficulties when trying to complete assignments I had put it down to personal inadequacies, however now I was aware that others also experienced these problems. I was not alone in this. It is in fact very much part of the process." Lara says that the story was "an ideal pedagogical approach in illustrating 'blocks' in the writing process, whether these blocks are a lack of time, other demands or even a fear of actually writing. Perhaps sometimes we need a story to tell ourselves that we cannot write just now – maybe the timing is off somewhat."

Mary felt encouraged after the session that "writing should flow from feeling as much as from head and to quell the voices of teachers past." Melissa indicates likewise, that she had put her own difficulties with writing down to "personal inadequacies" and that this is so far "embedded" that she didn't "even realise that they were at work." She talks of how the process of reading and responding to the story triggered a realisation of "just how much of an impact the class had on me."

> Afterwards I put finger to keyboard and began to write. [This] really freed up, or unblocked a part of me that possibly became too proceduralised or disciplined within an academic from of writing, which I had developed from my experiences as an undergraduate. It helped me to allay my fears and anxieties which were so heavily ingrained in the process of writing.

Catherine was "completely surprised" at my pedagogical doubts and sees the story as revealing of my own vulnerability as a writer allowing her to "begin to

see you as a peer." She experiences the story with relief and sees its pedagogical purpose as one of encouragement "to see ourselves in our own writing or we won't be able to write. It was so empowering."

The catalytic effect of story

Each of the participants talks of how they have incorporated some of the methods and ideas from the session and the account of it into their work. Peter uses the ideas for his own classes. Mike indicates that he didn't manage fully to take on board the ideas about writing that underpin the session but that "I am trying to encourage my partner who is now doing a Master's to learn from you through me." Belinda refers to the writing exercise I used on the day which she says "I use with students all the time because I feel that it helps to release the fear of writing."

Melissa says that "for me personally this learning has had a major impact on me and now forms a key component in my own practices of teaching."

Armed with this new knowledge of the value which can be gained from understanding the process of writing, I wanted to share this new insight, and so used your very story of Dara and yourself to speak to my class about essay writing skills. The class received the story well, and felt somewhat relieved that they too were not alone with their fears and insecurities about writing the essay.

Presenting writing, as the narrative does, in a state of undress (Colyar, 2009), where the vulnerability of the writer is, in Cixous' phrase, written "nude" (1997, p. 3), allows qualitative thesis writers to encounter and process their own vulnerabilities as writers. They begin to understand how they govern their own tongues and recover some of their own capacities to engage with language that is received from culture and begin to make it their own. This insight into our subjectivities as writers seems to be what has worked for people. It demystifies for them the subjective complexities of writing processes, allowing them to relate differently to their own vulnerabilities as researchers.

Pedagogic Epiphany

Cole and Throssel apply the term epiphany to the field of teaching and learning and see that these moments provide an "escape route from any perceived educational drudgery" (2008, p. 181). They suggest that pedagogic epiphanies of this kind are moments in a teacher's life "when everything seems to come together" when "one's knowledge area, the purpose of teaching and learning and student responses seem to blend and unify" (2008, p. 175). They propose that integrat-

ing and aligning such moments into curriculum enlivens teaching and learning for all involved. For Goodson (cited in Andrews, 2014, p. 71) these pedagogic moments are those where "the rupture between teachers and taught is healed and a dialectic, an exchange, takes place which affects not just beliefs but the very heart of the matter of living and experience".

It seems to me that the act of vigilantly watching for epiphany moments in our own lives as adult educators, allied with a capacity to render such moments in writing, creating space for a sensitive, appropriate and deft use of these moments in the adult learning classroom, allows for good pedagogical practice in adult learning to be honoured and exemplified. The purchase such moments and stories offer us as educators and learners, allows for a full emotional and intellectual engagement in a very real and living way that allows for quality of insight to be shared and re-experienced, over and over again.

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Transformative learning and Christian spirituality: Towards a model for pedagogical and theological clarity?

COLIN MENEELY

Abstract

Ever since Jack Mezirow introduced the incipient, and then more developed idea, of transformative learning to the discussion on adult education more than thirty years ago, the parameters of its theory and practice have been pushed out further and further. The introduction of spirituality and learning to this discussion is not a new one, but this paper explores further the possibilities of the inter-connectedness and inter-dependency of pedagogy and theology, when part of the pedagogical approach of transformative learning is viewed alongside the theology of Christian spirituality in a church based adult learning programme. The quest for pedagogical (and theological) clarity is pursued through attempts to forge learning in both the cognitive and affective domain, through clear and accessible biblical teaching in the local church.

Introduction

Tisdell (2012) believes something is missing from the discourses of adult education and transformative learning and suggests what it is: '…thus far in the field there's been limited attention to the Big Questions of life…what gives life meaning, why we're here, and the meaning of the universe…'(p.27). These are important questions, for behind them is the quest for learning transformation of sometimes epochal proportions defined by Mezirow (2000) partly as "a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight" (p.21) thus indicating a person's being and identity undergoing a paradigmatic transformative shift in habit of mind, leading to a new identity and accompanying actions. Questions such as these have occupied much new ground in pushing out the knowledge parameters of transformative learning, ever since Mezirow (1978) first introduced the idea initially through the concept 'perspective transformation' – "a structural reorganisation in the way that a person looks at himself and his relationships" (p.162) to adult

learning, and they continue to be important questions for all who would aspire to teach to transform in adult learning. Within this context this paper will briefly consider part of the connection between transformative learning and Christian spirituality, with a particular interest in the integration of pedagogy and theology and the idea of personal transformative steps as part of, or a prelude to, what might later become in pedagogical terms: '…structural…and conscious shifts that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world' (O'Sullivan 2002:11), and viewed in biblical terms as: '…be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans Chapter 12, verse 2). Pedagogically and theologically these could be considered as leading to, or becoming, epochal. Might this integration of Christian theological spirituality and pedagogy be a way of addressing some of the ongoing questions concerning missing knowledge around transformative learning and adult education from a theoretical and practical perspective, as well as advancing new knowledge on the subject? And, perhaps more importantly for adult learning in the church, could this be a continuing reminder that a serious engagement with the pedagogical perspectives, along with the theological perspectives, be a means for developing new interest in church teaching and learning experiences, by encouraging a participatory, active involvement rather than a passive, spectator, involvement where very little learning and change takes place, and where there is often a polarisation between teaching and learning? Whilst a significant amount of work into the various theory, research, and practice of transformative learning have been presented (Taylor, Cranton & Associates, 2012), the idea of Christian spirituality as part of a transformative pedagogy, with significant incremental and sometimes instantaneous epochal dimensions, is still relatively new and developing and is the one considered by this paper.

Methodology

Located in a theoretical framework of theology and pedagogy, the purpose of this paper is to explore further some of the 'missing issues,' as well as continuing the discussion by considering the very close connection between spirituality (Christian) and learning and the potential of church based teaching and learning that can lead to personal and corporate transformative acts. The paper will do so in the following ways: firstly, by suggesting through a work-based and short-term programme how clear and accessible biblical teaching and learning in the church might still be utilised as a 'model of pedagogical clarity' (McGrath, 2007:93), commending and commanding ideas that forge learning in both the affective and cognitive domain; secondly, by looking at recent evidence from some learning in the church that contributes to the process of

transforming the lives of adults with Christian spirituality as a major organising principle; and thirdly, arising from this considering theological spirituality and pedagogy as inter-connected and inter-dependent components, contributing towards transformative learning experiences that sustain significant, and at times deep structural shifts in thought, feelings and action. The paper is a current approach to, and a modest development of, a partial aspect of elements of my previous research into a biographical evidence based case study into transformative learning and Christian spirituality (Meneely, 2010). In a recent work-based setting I wanted to take the opportunity to briefly consider particularly the ideas of pedagogical clarity through clear and accessible biblical teaching, and transformative learning outcomes, through a specific short term church community programme. This would be supplementary to, and corroborative of, my previous research into church based learning, with the aim of comparing some of my previous conclusions with newer research, as well as assessing how this area of study is being furthered. The methodological approach to this was to use a biblical teaching and learning programme for adults, delivered in a current work-based setting (outlined below) to look at the very close connection between spirituality (Christian) and learning and the potential of church based teaching and learning for transformation. The participants, whose comments are indicated in the study, were chosen on the criteria of attending at least seventy-five percent of the course sessions, and who had indicated that Christian spirituality was or had been a strong influence in their life. The data collection strategy involved the participants completing a brief questionnaire focusing on how the course was presented and had helped them. There were also a number of personal, one to one open-ended conversations with the participants where their observations and comments were noted in relation to the study questions. The analysis was narrowed down to how the course had helped them in one particular and specific perspective changing or developmental way. Their own words were used in the findings in relation to two things: how clear and accessible the teaching was, and how learning brought some transformational aspect to their lives. The participants' written contributions are without names and with permission granted.

Christian spirituality and learning

Before proceeding further we might want to ask how Christian spirituality and learning that transforms should be understood when viewed together? In terms of Christian spirituality and learning there is a very close link between what is taught in the church (or anywhere for that matter) and how it is taught in the church. The juxtaposition of biblical and theological content, for example,

an account of the basics of Christian doctrine – "both the process of handing on the teaching about Christian belief, and the content that is handed on" (Clutterbuck, 2009:vii), and pedagogy, "the purposeful creation of learning experiences" (Jarvis, 2002:139), are of great importance. Christian spirituality is of a relational and existential nature, involving the affective and the emotional, necessitating a deep personal trust in the living God and involving a heartfelt assent of understanding of the Christian faith (McGrath, 2012). It also requires the cognitive, intellectual assent to Christian teaching of spirituality. Knowing and how we know are part of learning that is informed and transforming. It is this that can lead to the church becoming a place where doctrine is taught and learned as part of becoming a Christian, as well as continuing as a Christian in a faith community (Cooling, 2005; Green and Cottrell, 2006). Clutterbuck (2009:44) has helpfully argued for Christianity as a discipline of the heart and the mind and has rightly highlighted the important elements of doctrine as, the 'properly directed and well-grounded belief' (orthodoxy), 'doing the right thing' (orthopraxis), and 'a sense of feeling the right thing' (orthopathy). Transformative learning and these important elements of Christian spirituality, when viewed together, are really all about methods for communicating theological ideas with pedagogical clarity that might lead to a deep structural shift in thought, feelings and action, dramatically altering one's view of self and the surrounding world, within a meaningful integrated life path.

Pedagogical clarity: clear and accessible biblical teaching

From a theoretical perspective, a model of pedagogical clarity for this kind of teaching and learning usually requires a number of key elements. First, it needs to eliminate as much as possible what could be described as the traditional model where the teacher/minister/leader etc. is the owner of knowledge working on the causal conceptualisation assumption – I teach, therefore you learn! This approach can, and often does, lead to the traditional polarisation of teaching and learning where teaching may take place but learning infrequently happens. Secondly, it requires the teacher/instructor focusing on getting the learner to want to learn, followed by helping them take ownership of the need to learn and providing learning activities that make sense of what they are doing with constructive feedback (Race, 2006). Thirdly, it helps when there is a democratisation of the learning process, a letting go of the reins and giving ownership to learners. With this the learner becomes a positive contributor in a creative setting, generating, evaluating and prioritising ideas. Knowledge is then mediated/facilitated/coordinated by more than one person. With such constructivism in the learning process teaching begins where the learner is (what he/she

already knows, or doesn't know), new knowledge is constructed and existing knowledge, as well as past experiences of knowing, are duly recognised. This model for pedagogical clarity empowers the learner, is inclusive of all learners, and is collegiate, communal, active and experimental. It builds learner self-confidence, develops verbal communication skills, stimulates freedom of thought and aims for the 'deep' transformative learning described by O'Sullivan et al., (2002:11). These theoretical underpinnings were put to the test in the ten week teaching and learning programme I led in my own church (October 2014 – January 2015). It was also a programme I was fully acquainted with, having used it extensively before with very positive learning outcomes. The course (*'Christianity Explored:* One Life. What's it all About') is based on the Gospel of St. Mark, explaining who Jesus is, why he came, and what it means to follow him. It seeks to address some of the key questions of the meaning of life from a biblical based perspective and provide the opportunity for adult participants to make responses that could become life changing and life defining. An average of twenty eight adult learners participated weekly in an interactive multi-media presentation of teaching from ten 'blocks' of biblical material ranging from 'Who is Jesus?' to 'What is a Christian?' The structure of the course facilitated theoretically and practically the experiential learning described above, with each learner being directly involved in a learning event by engaging with the biblical text in a reflective way along with others in multiple group and single group discussion. Learning was based on past and present life experiences and was highly inter-active, communal, collegiate, democratic and constructive. This teaching and learning was also characteristic of Willis's (1993) description of Christian teaching as 'the whole evangelical agenda comprising *kerygma* or proclamation of the good news calling for a faith response, and catechesis or instruction about Christian beliefs and practices calling for a deepening of that faith' (p.67), while the learning outcomes showed some clear evidence of a learning that has the potential to reorient one's life course enlisting the entire personality and engaging all of one's faculties towards transformative depth learning processes (Cohen, 1986). In terms of pedagogical clarity it became clear that the course communicated and commended biblical ideas with pedagogical clarity, as was indicated by some of the participants' comments:

"I found the course really helpful. I learned so many new things and I enjoyed the group discussion afterwards when I was able to ask questions that helped me understand better".

"I was really helped by being told that my contribution to the discussion was

valued by others. Because my group was relaxed and very informal I had the confidence to say something. It's so much better than just sitting listening and not talking about what I'd just heard".

"The scriptures have really been opened up for me...I have learned so much more, things that I never knew before…"

These responses further corroborate the evidence for pedagogical clarity through clear and accessible biblical teaching as seen in my previous research. Learners in that study had said:

"You were now getting basic teaching, down to earth, level-headed teaching that everybody could understand... You can go home, sit down and read it again and really take it in... and that gives you an opportunity to reflect on what you have actually heard."

"The bible course I attended was a great help to me in understanding…it was very fulfilling, very encouraging ..because of the format used I think I am growing a lot…."

"When we watched that bible presentation I was amazed to learn many new things and also to be part of the later conversation about those things. I just felt if we could learn together about this we could act together…"

Whilst Christian learning does have an individual element when one studies the Bible, reads devotional material or listens to sermons and talks, corporate learning, where the individual is part of a greater number, is equally very important and plays a significant part in clear and accessible bible teaching. The relational experience with other Christians is not only a very effective learning experience, but also a very positive environment for growth. Growth is directly linked to the opportunity to share and listen to other viewpoints in an experiential setting, and both studies have shown this to be true. My previous and much more substantial research findings had concluded 'the importance of relationship support for fostering effective learning…' and to '…critically reflect through discourse with others for a new and revised identity of humanity and spiritual personality.' (Meneely, 2010:292–293). This recent study highlighted the importance of this when learners, when asked to comment on their learning experiences said:

"The teachings and group discussions have been great…"

"Discussing what we heard and studied was really helpful…"

"Through the discussions I realised that we all struggle in our Christian life and can encourage each other…"

My previous and present studies would also indicate that experiential learning through church based settings offer the process of catechesis that gives a holistic and multi-faceted approach to learning (Atkins, 2006) involving self-reflection, decision-making, decision marking and personal development. They also indicate that learners are not just engaged in surface learning – simply hearing or memorising ideas and not reflecting on information with a superficial understanding that was easily forgotten – but depth learning with a more lasting understanding, and the ability to relate new ideas to previous knowledge and relate knowledge to experience by integrating learning to life in a transformative sense. Using the bible as a pedagogical tool of clarity, integrating theology and pedagogy, helped create some of the ideals of learning that creates growth in knowledge and understanding applicable in all areas of life. It was learning in the church that seeks to transform the lives of adults. But what kind of potential transformation is it, and how deep and how wide might it go?

Learning in the church that transforms the lives of adults
Learning in the church that transforms the lives of adults with Christian spirituality as a major organising principle, is my continuing pastoral and professional experience of adult learning from a Christian spirituality perspective. I have observed over many years that in the right conditions there is a very close linkage between Christian learning in the church and the power to transform the lives of adults. Learning that was transformative would often arise from clear biblical teaching that supports strong beliefs, resulting in decisions to act that involved a deep structural shift in thought, feelings and actions that dramatically altered one's view of self, others and God. This learning can be life-changing, whole life and lifelong for Christian discipleship (Killingay, 2006). It is also learning that includes opportunities for self-reflection, decision making and personal development, similar to the early church process of catechesis (Atkins, 2006) leading to life empowerment. Such personal transformative empowerment experiences do often permeate aspects of society, thus bringing a transformative presence for the common good along the micro-macro continuum of individual and social transformation (Campolo & Aeschliman,

2006). Christian spirituality, viewed as an important organising principle in the lives of individuals, is for some at the heart of how we may explore questions about the meaning, value and purpose of life. Transformative and fundamentally paradigmatic changes in understanding and outlook are often determined by informed action. In my previous and much wider qualitative research into church-based transformational learning journeys drawing from biographical case studies, the approach and methods used there (initial exploratory semi-structured interviews, follow-up 'in depth' semi-structured interviews, surveys, and field notes etc.) resulted in a number of personal accounts of life changing experiences that contained, to varying degrees, a number of learning experiences. These included: sudden and cumulative experiences of personal life crisis; the search for new life options and new orientations for action; various kinds of learning relationships for connecting to new options of personal and social transformation; and the consolidation of informed acts of commitment commensurate with a new life outlook (Meneely, 2010). Some of these are indeed epochal and as such advance the idea for the central role of Christian spirituality, evangelical religious conversion, and the inward and outward journey of learning that brings about transformation. Within an experiential community of learning such as that presented in this paper there were a number of individual and shared stories of personal learning, spiritual growth and Christian maturity. These stories reflected some of the important aspects of the transformative nature of church based teaching and learning, as can be seen in the following shared experiences of two individuals exploring what it was to be a different kind of person than before:

> "Everything I do now, I would say to myself, 'what would Jesus do?' It has made me aware of the needs of other people but it has also made me read it in the Bible…that we have to be more like Jesus. We have to try and do more like him every day. I'm not trying to say that 'I'm Jesus', I'm far from it, but I strive to be more like him every day…"

> "This year's teaching in the church has taken my Christian faith to a new level and increased my faith. This has given me confidence to be patient with others, listen to people, deal with problems and be calm, peaceful, positive."

This quiet but noticeable transformation in relational attitudes was similarly expressed in the recent study by one participant who said:

"It has helped me to realise how important it is to remember my every

word and action should reflect my Christian faith. I want people to see God through me so I am setting out to live differently!"

In the same study another learner who was clearly struggling with having an assured Christian identity found what for her was a transformative relief by being able to express confidently her personal faith:

"This course really helped me to overcome some of the serious doubts I had as a Christian – especially that I was a Christian!"

While another who was looking for some kind of spiritual assistance in knowing how to make good life decisions said:

"I have been encouraged to explore the Bible more carefully, this helps me to look more to scripture for guidance in important areas in my life".

These transformative learning characteristics do indicate that significant changes are taking place and that new perspectives are developing as a result of learning from a biblical and Christian spirituality perspective. Such approaches to studying the bible in church create an understanding of the scriptures which can lead to attitudinal and behavioural change. This is consistent with Cohen's belief (1986) that an experiential community learning helps to facilitate the requirements necessary for transformative depth learning processes. It would also appear to suggest that Welton's (1993) argument for the transformative learning community being the entry point into, and environment for, transformative depth learning processes, was valid in a church based experiential learning community. The church can become an important part of the Christian's journey, as it maps out learning for humanisation and transformation. Church based adult learners provide evidence to back up Haight's (1985) assertion that this kind of learning opens a person up to God, and the world, in a way not previously experienced. It becomes part of a transformative revolution. All this would suggest the potential for church based adult learning that could be aimed for by all Christian congregations to bring about Christian transformation: learning that is life-changing, whole life and lifelong for Christian disciple-ship, as well as learning that created growth in knowledge and understanding applicable to all areas of life as (Killingay 2006). It is also important to note that learning that includes opportunities for self-reflection, decision making and personal development suggested by Atkins (2006); learning that empowers Christian disciples to be agents of change for themselves, for others and for the

world, the view of Davie (2006); learning that reflected the good news of God's comprehensive salvation argued by Weaver (2006); and learning that integrated Lawrence's (2006) linear and progressive elements of Christ, call, character, competence and community for the Christian disciple are all deeply transformative. This also corroborates the argument that personal spiritual growth and maturity are all important outcomes of church based teaching and learning and concurs with the historic aims of authentic Christian disciple-making, that reflect what is becoming increasingly clear about the true nature of the church: a church with learners eager to learn all that they can for growth in Christian discipleship and humanity. This argument lends further weight to Haslam's (2006) belief that the Christian's transformational journey is one of God recreating, renewing, imparting saving knowledge, and over time, dramatically transforming thinking, character and living. What is undoubtedly in view is that clear and accessible biblical teaching can bring about learning, personal spiritual growth and maturity arising out of church based teaching, that includes both Christian doctrine and personal experience.

Theology and pedagogy as inter-connected and inter-dependent components for transformative learning experiences

Theology and pedagogy acting as inter-connected and inter-dependent components in an overall transformative learning strategy takes the relationship between spirituality and learning further, and in a different direction than has previously been suggested by others (Dirkx, 1997; English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 2003, 2007; Tolliver and Tisdell, 2006; and English, 2007), as previously pointed out by Tisdell (2010). The idea of spirituality as part of learning is an emerging paradigm, though Yeaxlee's (1926) seminal work on adult learning might well suggest it is a recovery of an earlier paradigm sadly lost long before serious research into adult learning took place. Today, spirituality (including and excluding religion – 'an organised community of faith') and learning has generated much interest in the wider discussion of adult learning and with a variety of perspectives ranging from: English and Gillen's (2000) "an awareness of something greater than ourselves …that moves one outward to others as an expression of one's spiritual experiences" (p. 1); Tisdell's (2003) substantive contribution centered on "how people construct meaning, understand their life purpose, and move toward greater authenticity" (p.xi); English and Tisdell's (2010) view of "an individual's personal experience of making meaning of the sacred" (p.287); and Charananiya's (2012) approach to spirituality (and culture) being participants at the table of transformation contributing to how one sees "the world, how they see their own identities, and how they see

their own role in the world" (p.238). Looking more broadly at this approach to learning, a recent and partly faith-based case study using narrative, questionnaire, interview, participant observation methodology into transformative learning also recognises the part the bible can play. Moyer's (2012) research into learning, faith and sustainability in Kenya in one part has linked faith related learning with the important role that bible studies played in providing opportunity for discourse, participation and encouraging transformative learning through personal development, life changing values and personal empowerment. Whilst Tisdell (2003) is quite correct to point out that not all definitions of spirituality in relation to learning are necessarily religious or faith based, the idea of working from a Christian faith tradition regarding spirituality and learning does open up new vistas of possibilities. It allows for the wider and more holistic exploration of the rational, cognitive and the affective in a relational church based learning context, that presents a faith in God who makes us who we are and who actively seeks with us a transformational identity based on the 'transformational architecture and how we have been designed by God' (Martoia, 2008:12). It also leads to what we can become in achieving our full human potential (Greene and Cottrell, 2006). It might also be a new way of doing theology by allowing it to be presented to the learner through good pedagogical practices. The other emerging possibilities are found in 'story' and can be presented by a pedagogy of learning through the use of biographical methods (Merrill & West 2009). This idea, explained as 'we are aware of the extent to which we use other's stories to make sense of our own biographies, as well as how we use our own to make sense of others' lives and experiences (p.199) introduces an 'auto/biographical' approach to pedagogy. When set alongside Stuckey's (2007) Christian narrative approach of 'being part of other people's stories if we are to be firmly anchored in God's story…the critical impact of God's story and the breaking in of the strange new world of the Bible when our own story and God's story become entwined' (p.11), highlights the importance of 'story' as it relates to learning. This adds a further, spiritual dimension to this pedagogical approach and thus reinforces the idea of theology and pedagogy operating with inter-connectedness and inter-dependence. This too is an important pedagogical position for making meaning of the various transitions and life pathways linked to transformative learning experiences found in adults' life histories. Personal narrative sharing in dialogic encounters can play a part in some of the critical changes of outlook as the past, present and future are given new meaning. New understanding can emerge concerning the possibilities for restructuring human and divine relationships through transformative empow-

erment. Indeed, as some of the evidence briefly described in this paper suggest, some learning and life experiences can become liminal thresholds for entering new life identity to interpret the past, shape the present and determine the future. Whilst more work needs to be done from the perspective of Christian spirituality there are very promising signs for significant transformative teaching and learning experiences to be gained from this theological-pedagogical approach.

Conclusion

My research continues to suggest that church based learning programmes that facilitate experiential, constructivist, democratist, and biographical elements in the learning processes, illustrate theology and pedagogy as inter-connected and inter-dependent components for transformation, with shared patterns of common experience and an ontological foundation for learning experiences of sometimes significant proportions. This not only raises awareness of learning needs and methods for adults in a church based setting that reduces polarisation (and maybe indoctrination) so often characteristic between teaching and learning for adults, but also places great value on learning that is whole life and lifelong. The positioning of Christian spirituality and the correct use of the bible with appropriate critical reflection, can be an effective pedagogical tool that is cognitive, relational and existential in the teaching and learning process. This is also a further reminder that some of the big issues of learning and life such as those facing the church and society in Ireland today can only be answered by the mind and the heart.

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SECTION TWO

Case Studies on Improving Practice

A case study in learning to unlearn

MARTIN DOWNES, BERNIE GRUMMELL, CONOR MURPHY
& ANNE RYAN, MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY

Abstract

In this case study, Irish academics reflect on our involvement in a project – Transformative Engagement Network (TEN). This project aims to transform the nature of the engagement between the various stakeholders impacted by or concerned with climate change and to insert the voice and concerns of the most vulnerable food producers into climate change debates. Throughout the project, the Maynooth University team has become increasingly aware of the complexities of development and of the practical and intellectual challenges to the assumptions and beliefs that underpin our disciplines.

Introduction

In this case study four Irish academics from three disciplines[1] reflect on lessons learned through our partnership between four universities in Ireland, Zambia and Malawi[2]. The Transformative Engagement Network (TEN) aims to transform engagements between stakeholders impacted by or concerned with climate change and to insert the voices of vulnerable food producers into climate change debates. It aims to direct the knowledge, and power of universities to facilitate participative, inclusive engagements between stakeholders. The project includes (i) a Masters programme offered in three African universities to 36 students who work with rural communities vulnerable to food scarcity and (ii) a series of forums at local, national and international levels which guide the project.

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1   Geography, Biology and Adult Education.

2   The four partner universities are Maynooth University (where the authors are based), Mzuzu University in Malawi, the Zambian Open University and Mulungushi University in Zambia. The project is funded under the Irish Aid and Higher Education Authority Programme for Strategic Cooperation.

In this reflection, we position ourselves as learners seeking to know our world differently. Our teachers are our colleagues in the interdisciplinary teams in each partner university, the small-holder farmers in communities where our partner universities work and staff of the NGOs and government ministries who work in these communities and are students on the Masters programme or members of the forums. We focus on the Irish perspective in this paper, with other publications involving collaborations and reflective insights of other team members.

This case study is presented in three parts. Part 1 provides a rationale for the case study. Part 2 presents learning reflections from team members in Maynooth University. Part 3 explores the implications of our learning for on-going work within TEN and beyond.

PART 1: Rationale for the Case study

Two key assumptions underpin TEN. First is that the persistence of social and economic inequalities between and within countries indicates that the underlying thinking and actions sustaining how we promote equality, including development interventions, need to change. Second is that inclusive processes in all aspects of TEN, including how researchers, small-holders and agencies dealing with them, work together and how we create knowledge is crucial to well-developed judgments about the kind of changes that are pertinent to promoting and sustaining equality. Therefore, the 'transformative' agenda of TEN relates to how the different stakeholders involved in food security and climate change engage. The project seeks greater inclusiveness in decision-making and knowledge production. We believe that using participative processes will ensure that the perspectives of different players, in particular those living and working at the local community level, will inform decision-making at national and international levels.

TEN recognises that a major challenge for those based in universities, and in particular those in the global north, is to embrace alternative (and at times competing) ways of knowing the world and to utilise pedagogical and research practices that combine western socio-scientific knowledge of universities with the lived knowledge of small-holder farmers, who are among the world's most disadvantaged. Through individual reflections below, we explore what we, as academics in the global north, have learned and the challenges we have encountered. In this process, we re-evaluate how we think about inequality and development, and the implications for us as academics and as global citizens.

PART 2: Individual reflections on learning from the TEN Project

Martin Downes, Emeritus Professor, Department of Biology, Maynooth University

In Malawi and Zambia, small-holders helped me understand some of their circumstances. Two things in particular startled me: first was how, on a farm stalked by hunger, a parent might abandon the family crop just as it ripens, going to work off-farm for hard currency to pay for schooling. Living on a farm calls for great balancing of conflicting demands. Second was a realisation of the extent to which children of dead parents are being raised by relatives: mortality from disease is very high and the strong bonds binding extended families was beyond my experience. It confirmed to me the Henrich et al. (2010) observation that "Western" populations (a minority to which I belong) are more likely to understand themselves in terms of their personality traits and are less likely to understand themselves in terms of roles and relationships than are non-"Western" peoples.

Focusing on improving crop yields without paying attention to farmers' needs based on their roles, relationships and responsibilities is neither relevant nor realistic. These needs are integrated and resources apportioned to them at one place only: the farm. To me, this situates the farm family at the centre of decision making and makes it the crucial element in all judgements related to local food security: this should not be news to anyone by now, but somehow it still is news. This has and continues to lead to bad and fragmented decision making by well-intentioned but uncomprehending or inflexible agencies whose activities are poorly integrated with the efforts of others. This is a job for agencies to do in support of food production and resilience.

Behind this are two global anxieties: first is whether we can, even under the best conditions, produce enough food reliably to feed the world's population: currently this focuses on an apparently looming shortage of phosphate, without which little crop yield improvement can happen. Phosphate conservation, and limitation of its use, would disrupt intensive Western agriculture: this becomes a job for developed countries to engage with. The second anxiety is about whom is to control our food supplies: governments or transnational companies, or simply free-trade forces? It is an anxiety mainly felt in developed countries, where, oddly enough, it has been delicately ignored by major actors: it has been a powerful influence acting against the proper evaluation of whether for example, technically improved crops could properly contribute to global hun-

ger problems in the agricultural systems in which hunger occurs, or whether food surpluses in the industrialised countries (where the production capacity is) could ever be delivered to poor regions without destructive consequences.

Neither developed nor developing countries can escape the impact of one another on the course of global food production and distribution. If everyone had an equal and equally-informed voice in decision-making, this mutual impact could generate positive outcomes: creating the conditions for this to happen is a job for politicians and universities.

> **Bernie Grummell, Lecturer, Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University, Project Coordinator TEN.**

The values and ways of working developed in TEN involve commitment and solidarity on the part of all to our overall objective of working to support vulnerable communities, to each other as TEN participants, and to the social justice values which underpin our actions. It requires collective human endeavour, critical reflection and a commitment to transformation on several levels which for me is the core function of education. Hence, it encapsulates many of my personal values and learning as an adult educator, as well as providing new perspectives.

My learning in TEN has been with the people involved, especially the team members and students on the masters programme. Students are mediators who translate the valuable knowledge and experiences of communities adapting to climate change.

Involvement in TEN has involved learning about knowledge and working across disciplines. It has enabled me to see and talk about adult and community education through the lens and language of others, especially the experience-based knowledge of communities, the policy lens of agencies and governments, and the scientific lens of climate change and agriculture.

Working with the universities involved in TEN has involved layers of inter- and intra-institutional cooperation as we seek to change practice from within. This collaborative venture requires creativity in adapting processes to fit TEN into what often seem fixed structures and routines, whether that be university practices or community traditions. It has forced me to consider how knowledge and communications are formed and maintained, and in whose interests? It draws my attention to the complex and invasive nature of global injustice between

north and south, between and within institutions and communities, different types of knowledge and communication. Most of all, it has clarified the lens with which I view the world in terms of how our actions impact the lives of the most vulnerable. It has developed a sense of responsibility to act in collaboration and solidarity with others.

Conor Murphy, Lecturer, Department of Geography, Maynooth University, Masters' Coordinator TEN Project.

I came to TEN, perhaps as many (young-ish) western academics do, with a desire to provide services and skills I assumed were missing and needed to increase the ability of communities to adapt to climate change. I quickly reassessed this role. Of the many aspects I could write about here, I have chosen two key lessons. Firstly, I reflect on what TEN has revealed to me about my area of academic interest – climate change. Second and related, I reflect on the kinds of knowledge that are needed in tackling climate change at community level.

Beyond climate exceptionalism

One of the greatest limitations of climate change studies is that we tend to treat it as an exceptional problem and deal with it in isolation. Climate change will not occur in a vacuum but will unfold in tandem and interact with other social, economic and cultural changes that are happening across the world and are often place-specific and historically rooted. For climate change to be relevant to the most vulnerable communities, it needs to be relevant to daily life and the myriad transitions that are happening. This requires understanding the needs of communities in a more nuanced way. Rather than commencing with western-based science as represented by climate models and projections of temperature and rainfall decades, we need to start the process of adaptation by listening to and truly understanding the needs of the most vulnerable. Indeed, this is an inherent justice issue. At a global scale, distributional aspects of climate change are inherently unfair. However, dealing with climate change in a more just fashion demands a greater voice from communities in the procedures and actions taken in adapting to change.

A reappraisal of relevant knowledge

In understanding the voice of communities, research on climate change needs to be more interdisciplinary. Traditional reliance on the 'natural' sciences will not suffice in effectively adapting to climate change. The social sciences and humanities have much to add. Interdisciplinary emphasis is one of the greatest strengths of TEN, bringing together academics and adult learners from across

disciplines, backgrounds (and cultures) as diverse as geography, biology, sociology, and adult and community education. Where this can be done in an environment of mutual respect for the forms of knowledge required, the benefits for all (including communities) can be huge. However, the challenge of working effectively together shouldn't be underestimated – there are ontological and epistemological bridges that need building between academics and communities and vice-versa that require risk-taking beyond the confines of the ivory tower and a willingness to be critiqued. Central to these differences is recognition of the constructed nature and power dynamics of knowledge, especially the privileging of western socio-scientific knowledge and lack of recognition of indigenous knowledge and lived experience. This is allied to the status of university knowledge as well as our individual biographies derived from our socio-cultural and environmental context. One of the great challenges unveiled by TEN is how to reconcile the knowledge that communities hold with western science. The former is often associated with spiritual beliefs and a close association of working with nature in surviving the vagaries of climate. However, traditional ecological knowledge is often qualitative in nature, informally held by community elders and difficult to penetrate. In meeting the challenge of climate change, knowledge in all its forms will be necessary, but will only work if an inclusive and respectful space for learning (by all involved) is negotiated. We have begun to attempt this through the TEN Masters programme which is built on a community of practice approach between university partners and in-post practitioners (as active mediators), policy-makers (as key decision-makers) and local communities.

Anne Ryan, Professor of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University, Principal Investigator TEN Project

I would like to highlight two important areas of learning for me. First is the significance of 'doing something worthwhile' as a factor that influenced staff responses to the challenges posed by building networks of engagement across four universities. Second is the deeply embedded difficulties that have to be addressed in order to access knowledge in communities.

(i) Building networks of engagement

Each of the four universities involved in TEN collaborate with each other, with local communities of small-holder farmers, the local agencies that work with them, and with national and international agencies concerned with climate change and food production. To date, each institution has demonstrated a willingness and capacity to work together and with smallholder communities. The

inter-institutional nature of the Masters programme – a central feature of the TEN project – posed procedural challenges for administrative and academic support departments in the lead institution – Maynooth University. Staff in diverse areas of the university have demonstrated a striking determination to find ways forward. In informal discussion, staff gave two reasons for their support. First was a desire to circumvent technical and administrative constraints to create capacity within the system to support future inter-institutional initiatives. Second was a desire to contribute to a project that they saw as worthwhile because it was concerned with small-holder farmers who are at risk of hunger.

(ii) Accessing the knowledge in communities

Accessing knowledge in small-holder farming communities has proved challenging. The knowledge is not written down, and it is not discussed in an abstract form; instead it tends to be embedded in behaviours, rituals, proverbs, myths, and at times silences. It is expressed and validated within a community among those who 'know' because they are, or have been, community members. For outsiders to engage with this knowledge depends on the willingness of those who already 'know' to act as interpreters. This poses particular challenges. Interpreting generally requires 'repackaging' community knowledge within a western format thereby diluting its essential differences. The hegemonic positioning of western socio-scientific knowledge positions it as modern, forward looking and necessary for development and positions other ways of knowing the world as backward, anti-progress and part of the problem to be overcome. Holders of non-western knowledge are aware of the positionality of these different ways of knowing the world and are consequently cautious in how they locate themselves in relation to non-western knowledge. A substantial challenge for TEN is to find processes of engagement that can identify these barriers and contribute to transcending them.

PART 3: The implications of our learning for on-going work within the TEN project and beyond.

The reflections above emphasise learning that relates to our separate disciplines, our understanding of development and the constellation of values and beliefs underpinning these. The inherent link between each of these spheres is important in generating commitment to explore the learning the project has and can generate. The reflections also highlight how doing something that we value as worthwhile motivates and inspires us to do more than 'just our job'. A challenge for the TEN project is to find processes that allow as wide a range of contributors as possible to participate in the project and to recognise that their contribution is both valuable and necessary for its success.

It is also evident that learning relating to the professional and the personal are inherently interrelated so that learning in one domain impacts the other. There is a realization that because our respective academic knowledge is partial, our understanding of the world, our engagement with others and other systems and what we assume to be priorities must be continuously open to revision. To varying degrees, the reflections refer to how the project has taken us outside our everyday activity and afforded us an opportunity to think afresh. The reflections also note the potential of being open to perspectives that are outside one's everyday encounters as an important aspect of understanding the world from the vantage point of others and point to the significance of learning by 'doing'. This in turn highlights the need to tolerate uncertainty and a level of vigilance to determine changes required as the project proceeds. This is very much in keeping with a Freirean idea of learning as an on-going cyclical process involving knowing, reflecting on knowledge, taking action, reviewing what we think we know, adjusting our actions accordingly etc. (Freire 1970).

In the reflections, there is a realisation that the quality of the engagement between the many players involved in the project determines the adaptive capacity of the project and the quality of learning outcomes. For us in the global north, there is need to ensure that the project seeks to be actively inclusive and recognises the pitfalls inherent in academic preference for western-scientific approaches to knowledge creation.

Revisiting and revising what we know does not require us to renounce what we already know in favour of a new type of dogmatic knowledge. Instead, it requires questioning the hegemonic positioning of western knowledge and to search for processes (in teaching, research and engagements) that include the knowledge and perspectives of those who are excluded. Moving from dogmatic to inclusive knowledge requires an openness to interrogate the values that underpin our world view – especially embedded values. Santos (2014, p. 17) claims that to do this effectively 'calls for repeated exercises of self-reflexivity' so that we can 'untrain' and 'reinvent' ourselves.

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Numeracy into action: Putting numeracy research into practice

DANIEL SELLERS & TINA BYRNE

Abstract

In 2014 the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) published a research report titled What really counts next: action learning project with numeracy tutors (Sellers and Byrne, 2014). The report provided an in-depth insight into the way tutors made changes to their practice, and offered practical tips on how to teach numeracy to adult learners in order to support their numeracy development. This article summarises the main findings from the report and provides two mini case studies showcasing numeracy work in action.

Key words: (Numeracy, Literacy, Research, Practice, Teaching strategies)

Introduction

In 1997 the publication of the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) showed that in Ireland 25% of the population between the ages of 16–64 performed at the lowest level of a five point scale of literacy and numeracy skills (Morgan *et al,* 1997). In 2012 the results of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) showed that just over a quarter of Irish adults score at or below level 1 for numeracy (25.6%) whilst one in six (17.9%) scored at or below level 1 for literacy (CSO, 2012). In 2013 a review of the adult literacy service in Ireland recommended that numeracy should be strongly promoted as an option for adult learners and participation should be increased in both standalone and integrated numeracy programmes (DES, 2013). During 2014 two major publications were launched that focus on the development of further education and training in Ireland. Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future (ESRI, 2014) and the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014–2019 (SOLAS 2014). The ESRI report sets out the historical evolution of further edu-

cation and training provision in Ireland. The FET Strategy contains objectives that promote literacy and numeracy across FET

To date, there is a dearth of research into adult numeracy practice in Ireland. Therefore, we know very little about the teaching methodologies and pedagogical approaches of adult numeracy tutors. Adult literacy and numeracy tutors belong to a distinct community of practice, yet unlike many educators, they get few opportunities to learn from observing each other (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In recent years, NALA embarked on a programme of research that sought to capture teaching in literacy and numeracy practice. The research used a case study methodology to examine the teaching approaches and strategies used by adult literacy and numeracy tutors in their day to day work.

In 2013 NALA published *What really counts: case studies of adult numeracy practice in Ireland* (Byrne and Sellers, 2013). The research recorded the numeracy teaching practice of five tutors working around Ireland. It looked at their 'general teaching approaches' (how they used questioning, problem solving, context and collaborative learning), and their 'topic specific' approaches (for example, how they taught measurement or percentages). All of the 'topic specific' teaching strategies were collated in a practice table at the back of the report. Keen to maximise the impact of the research a follow up Action Learning Project (ALP) based on the case studies was carried out in 2014. The ALP sought to gather information about the immediate impact of the case study research, by trialling the practice described in the report with numeracy tutors. Participation in the ALP provided an opportunity for tutors to develop new knowledge and skills to improve how they teach numeracy, and produce further teaching and learning ideas and resources to share with other practitioners. Thirteen tutors took part in the project and the findings were published in the report *What really counts next: Action learning project with numeracy tutors* (Sellers and Byrne, 2014).

Findings

Tutors reported that they saw the action learning project as an opportunity to become more innovative in their approaches to teaching numeracy to adults. Some used strategies and resources that they identified in *What really counts* (Byrne and Sellers, 2013) to teach topics that they knew their learners struggled with, such as algebra or measuring circles. Others used ideas for games and group activities to motivate learners. Tutors were also keen to challenge themselves to experiment in the classroom.

The reasons tutors gave for their choices revealed that they had reflected on their own practice and their motives for their choices. It also showed that they were genuinely open to develop their professional practice. This commitment to self-challenge is evident in the remarks from a tutor who was keen to write stronger lesson plans:

> The use of questioning, problem-based learning activities, meaningful contexts, technology … other than technology I had not consciously ensured I looked at building these practices into my lesson plans.

The project was designed to stimulate personal and shared reflections, and encouraged tutors to think about making changes to the practice in the longer term. One tutor, reflecting on her use of iPads and apps with the learners reported:

> I would like to try to introduce a topic using the iPads, because up to now I have only used them at the end of a topic to reinforce learning.

Another tutor saw potential for using activities with a bigger group:

> I would split the group into small groups to discuss and come up with the answers as a group instead of struggling on their own. I think if given the opportunity to ponder the questions and discuss as a group they might understanding better.

The tutors concluded that implementing practice from *What really counts* (Byrne and Sellers, 2013) helped generate new ideas in how to teach particular topics, including using innovative or creative strategies and applying strategies to topics other than those they were designed for. They also felt they were more ready to make use of online learning resources and develop new resources themselves, including those for ESOL learners. They felt as well that the project enabled them to change their teaching more fundamentally, for example by using questioning more strategically.

Teaching strategies and resources

The tutors considered their use of teaching strategies and resources and made commitments to utilise these more effectively to improve their practice. For example, they committed to incorporate more technology into classes and to bring more variation into the classes in terms of teaching strategies. Others planned to use more probing questions to encourage critical thinking by the

learners – and to allow time for learners to answer. Another committed to encourage group discussion so that learners might solve problems for themselves.

Reflective practice

The tutors reflected on assumptions they made about what learners already know, understand and can do – and how this impacted on their practice. One tutor reflected on assumptions she made when teaching ESOL learners:

> Although I was aware of needing not to make assumptions, I still made assumptions about how money is represented in numbers … I had not thought about how different countries in Africa might have different numbering systems. I also assumed that because the learners could recognise the numbers easily that they would be able to form the numbers easily too.

Tutors also reflected on their perceptions of themselves as tutors and identified where their strengths, interests, enthusiasm and enjoyment lay and how these informed their approach to teaching. For example one tutor explained how she believes she teaches numeracy using a constructivist approach, encouraging learners to ask questions and work in a collaborative way with each other. She reported that this way of teaching numeracy was very different to how she was taught mathematics in formal education.

When reflecting on their approach to teaching numeracy to adult learners many of the tutors realised that while they had 'enjoyed learning maths', their experience might not necessarily tally with the experiences of their learners.

Continuing professional development

Some of the tutors reported that they were more confident teaching literacy then numeracy. They said that they had less experience as numeracy tutors and would like to take part in more professional development to increase their confidence and competence in this area. According to the tutors the areas they gained the most from in terms of professional development were the use of 'teachable moments', the use of questioning, the importance of meaningful contexts, and the specific teaching strategies relating to individual numeracy topics. They also cited the importance of taking time to read relevant up to date materials such as the *What really counts* (Byrne and Sellers, 2013) case studies published by NALA. One tutor commented that she felt that, for her, the real value of the *What really counts* (Byrne and Sellers, 2013) case studies was not so much the

practice table at the back of the report, but the in-depth case studies themselves, which enabled her to understand the practice in context.

The importance of networking

The tutors commented repeatedly on the importance and value of networking with other tutors. They said that they would welcome more opportunities to meet other tutors, share ideas and resources, ask for advice and support one another in their practice.

In order to facilitate 'networking' among the group of tutors the project team set up a Facebook 'closed group', which is a private online social media group. Six of the tutors joined up but the majority of the tutors felt uncomfortable setting up a profile on Facebook. They said they would have preferred an online group away from Facebook; for example, a dedicated Moodle page, or a forum on NALA's Tutors' Corner webpage.

Two examples of tutors' project work[1]

1. Teaching basic number principles to ESOL learners
Tutor: Clare Hatcher, Cork Education and Training Board.

Clare worked with ESOL learners with little mathematics education. She realised that some learners had difficulty carrying out tasks such as drawing a triangle and dealing with basic numbers.

She was keen to find out how useful 'manipulatives' might be in building understanding of basic concepts, such as adding whole numbers and place value. She says, 'I began thinking about how manipulatives might really help basic learners with maths in the same way that cutting writing into phrases, sentences and words helps with literacy.'

Clare used the manipulatives with her learners for four weeks, for two hours a weeks. She began with a needs assessment. Her two learners could recognise numbers and could do simple addition, but were unsure about signs.

Number line and dice
Clare used a number line to check whether the learners could add up two numbers. She then introduced dice. Both learners had seen dice before but were not

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1   With thanks to the tutors for their permission to include reference to their work.

familiar with them. One of the learners had been tricked out of money with dice and avoided them since. The learners initially struggled to read the dots as numbers. They used the dice for addition up to 12. Clare asked the learners to think of a number between 2 and 12 and roll the dice to see if they could match the number. This ways she could check the learners understood the dots on the dice and could add them successfully. She gave the learners dice to play with at home with their children.

She then brought out a cardboard place value chart with cardboard numbers to put the dice numbers on. The learners could place the cardboard numbers from 2–12 on the chart correctly but there was conceptual difficulty with placing 1.

Clare wanted to consolidate the learners' ability to recognise dots as numbers, and to write and draw numbers. She used a sheet from *The Numeracy Pack* (Coben and Black, 2005) to help with this. From the same pack Clare gave both learners a tracing worksheet to practice writing numerals and the numbers as words.

Language of mathematics
Clare introduced the 'language of maths' so that the learners could understand and use the same language as their children learned in school.

Using money to build understanding of numbers
Clare gave the learners 5c, 2c and 1c coins and asked them to see how many ways they could make the coins add up to 7. The learners worked easily with the coins. Progress was slower when the tutor asked them to complete a worksheet based on 7. They appeared to have difficulty noticing the emerging pattern that each calculation resulted in 7.

Clare built on the place value chart by asking the learners to place two-digit and then three-digit numbers on the chart. She then gave them three numbers and asked them to make the biggest number possible. She asked them to explain their choice by using the basic place value chart.

The place value chart led one learner to ask about money and specifically what 'the dot' (decimal point) meant and why 'it moved'. The second learner had not heard of the decimal point, but had noticed it.

A misconception arose when the learner told Clare that her son's favourite crisps cost 99. She had asked an assistant who told her that meant €1. When

Clare looked at the signs in the supermarket advertising booklets which the learner had brought in, she realised that it would be possible to misunderstand 99c without the cultural context of understanding what that means. Clare realised that goods are priced at, for example, 49c and €6 and so are frequently written without using the decimal point. She struggled to explain this very well. She worked with the learners and reached an understanding about coins (cents) being part of the whole (euro). Clare encouraged the learners to look for the difference in the way amounts under €1 and over €1 are displayed in the shops.

2. Using reflective discussion with learners
Tutor: Angela Cahill, Louth & Meath Education and Training Board

Angela applied the 'spaced learning' idea from *What really counts* (Byrne and Sellers, 2013). She had already covered circumference and area of a circle with her group and three learners in the group were struggling with these principles and calculations. She hoped this exercise would make the theory more tangible. On this occasion she asked her learners to measure the diameter of car tyres. She split the group into three pairs and left out three different measuring 'tapes' – a sewing tape, a piece of string and a paper tape from 'Safefood', which measured only in inches.

Angela then asked the learners to go outside to the car park. The learners brought the measurements back and used them to work out each wheel's circumference. They then went back outside and measured the circumference and came back to the classroom and compared the measured circumference to the calculated circumference.

Angela led a discussion following the class and recorded it. The learners made several very interesting comments and lots of questions arose, around the accuracy of the measuring tape (and whether it measured in centimetres or only inches), and the reliability of calculators.

Angela believes that for learners who had already grasped the concepts, there had not been any new learning in this exercise. However, the subsequent discussion opened up ideas that were useful for all the learners, particularly on sources of error when measuring and the fallibility of the calculator. She says, 'Using the Safefood tape I initially thought was a bad idea given it only did inches but it resulted in some interesting insights.' In future Angela says that she would use the exercise earlier in her unit on measurement.

Angela believes that this idea could be extended to other 2D shapes and also volume (for example, by asking learners to measure the dimensions of a milk carton and work out how much milk it held). She also suggests not using measuring tapes with the tyres and asking the group to work out how to measure a curved surface.

As a further exercise, Angela gave each learner a map with a scale and asked them to work out the distance from one place to another. The learners struggled as the scale given resulted in an awkward calculation. Angela decided to change the exercise to plan furniture in a living room. This was to make the concept of scale more real-life-based and authentic. She gave the group 1cm2 paper and explained to them that they had a living room, 6m by 5m in size. She gave them an Argos catalogue and asked them to draw the room and to furnish it.

The group of five learners worked in two sub-groups and had to choose a scale themselves. At first they had difficulty, so Angela asked them to think about what size the drawing would be if they chose a 1cm = 1m scale. Someone suggested a 1cm = 3m scale which would have resulted in an even smaller room. By showing what these scales looked like one person realised that they needed to go to fractions of metres, for example 1cm = 0.5m. After some thought and discussion the group decided to use a scale where 1cm = 0.25m. As they chose furniture the learners realised that they had to scale the measurements for the furniture as well. The learners collaborated and the two sub-groups became mildly competitive as they compared who had chosen the best quality furniture, or the best positioning of the furniture.

Following the session, the learners told Angela that they would have felt lost if they'd had to work on their own, and that they had learned from working together.

The learners also made suggestions for other ways in which the tutor might use this task to teach numeracy. They offered ideas such as: asking the learners to price all the furniture, asking the group to design the room within a budget, and adding in sale reductions (%) and furniture delivery charges

Conclusions
Overall, the action learning project was a success. The tutors reported that taking part in the action learning project had inspired them to integrate numeracy as part of their literacy programmes and provided them with creative ideas

to use in the classroom. It had made them question their assumptions about learners and their learning needs, enabled them to 'rediscover' their learning philosophies and encouraged them to reflect on aspects of their practice and on their perception of themselves as professionals. Ultimately they said they had benefited from an unexpected opportunity to take part in continuing professional development and to network with other tutors.

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SECTION THREE

Book Reviews

Learning Care Lessons: Literacy, Love, Care and Solidarity

MAGGIE FEELEY

TUFFNELL PRESS, LONDON 2014

ISBN: 1872767 982

This book is an ethnographic exploration of the literacy learning experiences of adult survivors of institutional abuse in the Irish industrial schools. Its underpinning assumption is that being excluded from literacy use is a 'gross inequality that effects not only individuals but also generations of families and communities' (p. 5). The focus is on the affective aspects of equality and Maggie Feeley uses the framework of 'learning care' to explore the attitudes and actions that can support individuals and groups on their learning journeys.

The book begins by outlining the process of the ethnographic study, from a literacy practitioner position, and then explores the educational context within an equality perspective. Readers are reminded that, unless we look at the wider implications of the relationship between literacy and inequalities of resources, power, culture and care, we are unwittingly contributing to the inequalities that are rooted in social structures. Chapter 3 looks at how care interconnects with other aspects of equality in the learning of literacy. A model of the dynamic cycle of learning care is built that shows how these affective inequalities interface with other dimensions of inequality leading to curtailments of social involvement and resources that might otherwise be deployed 'in relationships of solidarity and intimacy' (p. 83).

Having set up the equality framework Maggie Feeley then moves onto three findings chapters in which the words of the research participants illustrate the different contexts of inequality that they have experienced. The first of these (chapter 4) is focused on the interface between resources and care and is explored through the data on participants' early and adult literacy learning experiences. The participants describe their lack of affective support and the role that the denial of 'bodily nourishment, security and kindness' (p 107)

played in their lack of energy, motivation, or peace of mind to be able to engage in literacy learning. This chapter also shows how lack of resources is not just a historic matter but continues to emerge in resource-impoverished communities. In these communities parents are often held culpable for their children's failure rather than the focus being on the structural inequalities that prevent them from engaging in education.

The next chapter is concerned with the cultural aspects of learning and how the status-related inequalities of lack of respect and recognition impacted on literacy outcomes. It shows how harsh and judgemental attitudes in the industrial schools led to discrimination against learners on the grounds of family status, class, race, ethnicity and other individual differences. Maggie points out how this already 'care-less environment doubly stigmatised [the learners] in adult life by having been in state care and by having unmet literacy needs' (p. 131).

Chapter 6 focuses on empowering learning care and draws together the interconnections between the aspects of inequality that were discussed in the previous two chapters and shows how they were all shaped by abuses of power. It also discusses the role of the state in their failure to monitor, evaluate and adapt the quality of care and education within industrial schools. These data show how people were traumatised in many ways by the excessively authoritarian regime they experienced. Where 'harm totally eclipsed care' (p. 156).

The final chapter (7) provides an overview of the learning care lessons that will enable us to understand the interwoven strands of power, status and resources in learning relationships. She sets out her model of learning care in terms of four types of learning relationships: primary learning care (loving relationships experienced within the family or an alternative primary care centre); secondary learning care (caring relationships in schools, colleges and other places of adult learning); solidary learning care (experienced informally in solidarity with peer learners and communities of interest); state learning care ((attentiveness given by the state to ensuring structural equality across all contexts) (p. 164–5). All these four aspects are exemplified to enable the reader to clearly understand how they would work in practice in these different fields. Finally, in conclusion, we are reminded of the importance of understanding inequalities in the affective domain in order to deliver equality and justice for all learners.

This is a wonderful book, beautifully and movingly written, that pays homage to the stories of the learners whilst also providing a strong theoretical frame-

work in which to place these. Reading about the way these survivors were treated in the 'care-less' environment of the industrial schools made me feel both angry and sad but also full of energy to try to make changes to provision in ways that puts learning care at its centre. As such I heartily recommend it to everyone engaged in learning and teaching.

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University of Huddersfield, UK

A Feast of Learning: International Perspectives on Adult Learning and Change

ROGER HIEMSTRA & PHILLIPPE CARRE.
(EDITORS)INFORMATION AGE PUBLISHING

This book sets out to draw from an international context, the mindsets and practices that contribute to the core principles of life-long learning being much more than an educational bound package, that can be dipped in to like a pic n mix sweet stand. It highlights the importance of placing life-long learning at the centre stage of an individual's life experiences, and begins to address the challenges this brings within life-wide learning spaces.

The introduction draws our attention to the need for a paradigm shift in perceptions of learning. That is, if we are to take seriously the notion of life long learning, being what it says on the tin, life-long. The journey may begin with education, but flourishes in all experiences throughout life, and should be unshackled from the traditional view that education is the preparation for life.

The aim of the book is to provide an international platform for interested colleagues to contribute to. The idea begins with a meeting of the editors at a symposium in France 2012, and snowballs into a collection of contributions from an international community of academic contributors,(nine authors from six different countries). One of the most exciting attributes of the book is the call for the reader to become active participants in the discourse presented. This actually brings the book to life, and will contribute to the lifelong learning agenda in academic communities, and engage individuals in a process of lifelong learning.

Each of the contributors have been drawn to a specific learning phenomenality; either the micro-psychological sphere; the socio-economic/political sphere or the delivery system and media sphere. These are adequately brought together in the conclusions made by the editors, and further grouped by chapters.

The introductory chapter adequately explains of the aim of this book is to give context to learning as a radical priority. It seeks to encourage global learning spaces to find commonalities by pursuing a diffusion of ethnocentric biases that have previously been limited by culturally-bound visions. The premise then is to build coherency to the study of learning that recognises that, one can learn outside formal learning, one can participate in a course and not learn, and one can learn in a teaching context.

In the second chapter, Carres explores in depth the notion of experiential learning, learning first, and autonomous learning habits. He calls for a radical reshaping of top down education. He describes this as 'educating adults upside down'. This is a familiar concept to those, like me, who are engaged in teaching community development that is primarily underpinned by a 'bottom up approach'. He presents eight very helpful heuristics that clearly underpins the eight other models. This, I suspect, is an unintentional added value of the collaborative nature of the book, and should in my opinion, be mapped out further.

The third chapter focuses on processes for facilitating self-directed learning. Hiestra describes his personal responsibility orientation (PRO) model as a methodology that promotes the individual, taking responsibility for his/own learning within an 'individual instructional approach'. He includes within this process, 'six steps for instructors'. I believe that whilst this provides a framework that is aimed at supporting self-directed learning, it does assume all 'learners' are at an equal starting point. The idea is to promote the centrality of the learner in their learning, and this, I believe, requires a more relationship-based approach between learner and tutor, to help increase self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Roussel leads the way in chapter four to promote the notion that workplaces are 'authentic enabling communities of learning'. He points out the expectations of employers is often that individuals will take responsibility for their own learning and that the learning transfer needs to be visible. He suggests this is the space where informal learning / non-formal learning, and experiential learning can take place in this space.

Schneider in chapter five, has used the research method of life story interviews to discover how individuals can map their personality development, and set their individual stall for future scripting that can help individuals to determine their learning trajectory. This could be further explored within a context of transactional analysis scripting.

In chapter six, King explores the opportunities that abound in distance learning routes. She cautions that these require careful instructional design, in order to ensure there is clarity of content and structure, assessment, feedback and adequate support structures in place to aid the learner. This she believes this will ultimately result in the learner taking back responsibility for his/her own learning. She further supports the idea that if the instructional design is robust, it can be utilised as a universal tool that will be easily accessible to non-able individuals. I am keenly interested in this as we are increasingly challenged in Higher Education to provide adequate support to non-able students who rely on effective online communication systems.

Las Vergnas explains the often debated, science v's non-scientists in the self-directed learning arena. He has been involved in developing what appears to be highly a successful project, namely, 'Cité des métiers Villetté', that explores cultural knowledge in science and technology. He proposes this needs further discussion around inclusivity of non-scientists. This is an interesting chapter that begins to open new avenues of shared learning spaces.

In chapter eight, Arrave explains how an Entertainment Education (EE) strategy can often create opportunities to tap into learning, by individuals capturing learning from situational presentations in sitcoms and soaps. This is very interesting and broadens the scope of education from cloistered learning spaces into media forums.

The ninth contributor, Singhal, provides a refreshing radical Positive Deviance (PD) model that flips the dominant paradigm. He explains this occurs when some individuals deviate form the normal experiences that enables them to overcome problems. This provides some interesting insights into non-formal approaches to learning. However, it does require further investigation into finding innovative methods of discover and capturing learner experiences.

In chapter ten, Evans takes a closer look at workplace learning and discusses the benefits of this model, stating that it will help improve employability, it brings opportunities for changing work roles and shifting life positions. Evans also looks at some of the barriers that prevent these. This provides a platform for further discussion with all stakeholders.

As the chapters unfolded I was drawn into a deeper conclusion, that the ideas contained have all the hallmarks of transformational learning. It presents dilemma, it places the academic center-stage of critically reflecting on the

threshold concepts of life-long learning. It most certainly brings a risk of academics falling into uncomfortable disturbing liminal spaces, and brings into sharper focus the barriers, that can often restrict the process of engaging in paradigm shifting journeys that liberate new meaning perspectives. The process then, helps reshape our thinking that ultimately will bring positive transformational change to our communities of learning.

The call to begin discussions at International level is important. Although I believe greater thought needs to go in to how to draw upon a wider audience, one that is not restricted only to academics, but would include those in community spaces of life-long learning and the learners. This would enrich exploration of diversity and range of typologies of learning spaces, processes, perceptions, and identified needs. This would also create a much richer collaborative forum, to begin discourse towards defining the epistemological base of understanding.

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Adult Education in Changing Times: Policies, Philosophies and Professionalism

MARION BOWL

This book will resonate with many in the adult education sector in Ireland. Although based on policy and practice in England and New Zealand, many of the matters explored are live issues here.

The introduction opens with two UNESCO quotes which juxtapose the all-promising nature of adult education, contributing and problem solving on multiple levels, with the precarious nature of funding and low status of adult educators. The book proceeds to elaborate on these tensions, offering policy and personal analysis.

The book is organised in two sections, with section one setting out the historical and political contexts for adult education in England and New Zealand. The three chapters here are dense in detail, and provide a whistle stop tour through developments, legacies and current issues. They provide a good go-to reference for a quick update or refresher on policy issues. The definitional challenges around adult education and matters of 'diversity of purpose and context' (p. 8) are deliberated. What activities are included in the sector? Are we tutors, lecturers, or facilitators? Do we identify with our place of work or institution rather than with a broader adult education sector? Who should fund adult education, who should it benefit, how should it be organised? How does adult education react to the increasing commodification of education when the logic of the market dictates what can be offered to those who can afford to pay. How is a sector, which is typified by job insecurity and part-time, casual employment, subject to growing regulation, standards and performative regimes?

These tensions are returned to again in section two, which is based on the perspectives of sixty-two adult educators in England and New Zealand. Here,

we see how the historical and policy issues play out and how they impact on careers, professional identity and practice. Bowl notes that 'the gendered nature of adult education work' (p. 73) means that the interviewees where predominantly female, so hence the book is 'largely a book about women's working lives' (p.74).

The personal narratives highlight how people fell into work in the field, or see it as a 'non-career' or fall back career. The notion of a contingent career, working with a variety of employers with limited and/or unpredictable contracts, is threaded throughout the stories. Readers may relate to issues around qualifications pathways, career progression, and a growing tendency towards commitments and obligations beyond the employment contract.

While many of those interviewed express anxieties about their personal and/or professional futures, they are also worried about the direction of the sector. Some of the accounts make for sobering reading, particularly given the current upheavals, restructuring and agendas in Ireland. The acknowledgment that 'many adult educators in England have been re-designated, dispersed or displaced' (p.73) is not exactly uplifting!

As well as the logistics and pragmatics of working in adult education today, the personal accounts explore what values adult educators bring to their work, and how these are challenged by increasing levels of bureaucratisation and neo-liberal ideologies. The quotations and biographical snapshots highlight how many adult educators have a belief in education for personal development and the common good, and recognise the value of learning for its own sake. However, such values, and concerns for social justice, are under threat as the economic focus of lifelong learning policy has become paramount, and routes into education are increasingly linked to, or limited to vocational study. For example, a manifestation of this tension is evident where dialogic and participative questioning approaches are restricted by prescribed learning outcomes and accreditation mechanisms.

Consequently, humanist ideals are at odds with instrumental policy goals as a 'dominant orientation towards liberalism/humanism and values of equality of opportunity and fairness does not sit well with current national policies in either England or New Zealand' (p. 13). This clash is fully explored in chapter seven where the issue of professional agency is discussed and includes examples of how adult educators find ways to manoeuvre within the confines of fund-

ing and policy regimes to do the work they believe in and value. Although it is argued that resisting and subverting current policy is arguably easier for long serving educators, Bowl contends that this is a difficult space to negotiate as the 'line between passive resistance and collusion is a difficult one to tread' (p. 130). Despite the less than ideal professional environment, the narratives display a conviction about the value of adult learning and show practitioners' dedication to their work. This strong commitment of practitioners to social purposes is heartening.

Acknowledging the limited agency of adult educators within current policy constraints, Bowl is critical of adult education that does not engage with theory, and that persists in parochialism. She notes that, although well intentioned, some/much adult education voids Freire's work of its political meaning (p.159) and suggests that in some instances ideas of learner centeredness and empowerment have been co-opted for neo-liberal purposes. She calls for adult educators to scrutinise their language and consider how particular discourses conceptualise learners and learning.

The final chapter notes that the 'ideological tide' (p. 151) requires a collaborative response in partnership with others who are arguing for maintaining public services and advocating for the public and social purposes of education. As adult education is 'particularly prone to buffeting by political and economic winds' (p.4), the sector cannot work in isolation but needs to link with wider debates and connect to other advocacy and campaign initiatives.

This book is clearly written, and well organised. It provides many useful summaries of complex information. One element that jarred a little was the backwards and forwards between English and New Zealand examples, with context and policy explanations. This aside, the book should be of interest to a number of audiences, including those from education, social science, and equality. It has appeal for both policy makers and practitioners. It is worthwhile for those interested in understanding the nuances of how adult education arrived at this point in time and the interplay of various issues. The personal vignettes, career profiles and reflections make the issues real and are probably familiar to those involved in the sector in Ireland. How much or little the stories resonate is likely to depend on an individual's own professional setting and context.

DR. RHONDA WYNNE
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Community Education and the Labour Activation Challenge

CEFA, COMMUNITY EDUCATION FACILITATORS' ASSOCIATION (2014)

Community Education and the Labour Activation Challenge brings together an impressive range of literature, which addresses the current role of community education in the context of national and EU policies. In particular it shows how those policies have begun to shift our understanding of community education, placing a heavier emphasis on the labour market and the economy.

This report is primarily a literature review and in this regard it delivers. It is structured around three chapters viz. Policy, Research and Practice. There are common themes like labour force activation, citizenship and the role of community education running across all three. An alternative structure based on themes like the push towards activation, benefits of community education, future directions and challenges in community education might have delivered a smoother flow to the reader. It might have also clustered some material that is currently in different chapters. Validation of non-formal and informal learning for instance is discussed in all three chapters.

The policy chapter gives an excellent overview of the development of EU lifelong learning policies including Lisbon Strategy 2000, Europe 2020 and ET2020. These policies have placed strong emphasis on the economy and jobs creation. This presents challenges for community educators. It raises existential questions about the overall role of this sector, which traditionally adopted a more citizen oriented approach, especially in addressing multiple disadvantages. In this chapter the author introduces a very important discussion about the social benefits delivered by community education vis-à-vis goals such as social cohesion, but also towards employability through the accumulation of social capital.

The chapter demonstrates the diversity of objectives inherent in European policy statements. A classic example of this is a quote from the Council of the

European Union resolution on adult learning, which aspires to 'promote personal and professional development, empowerment, adaptability, employability and active participation in society' (10). What is very clear is that the landscape of policies, issues, approaches and proposed solutions is very crowded. For community educators it is virtually impossible to navigate through all of this. A significant aspect of this review is that it extracts and highlights many of the essential points in an accessible way in a relatively short document.

It also highlights challenges for community education in a climate where there is a constant push, not just in education, for validating and measuring outcomes; VNIL (validation of non-formal and informal learning) addresses this to some extent. In terms of policies aimed at increasing employment in Ireland the report gives a good overview, claiming there is 'a level of joined up thinking' (13) in the sector. Though it's impossible to cover everything it would have been useful to more rigorously interrogate this part of the report against literature on activation.

The sections on community education give a succinct and clear overview of the sector, including a reminder that the 'distinctiveness of programmes' (18) is worth preserving. The discussion on civic engagement, citizenship and inclusion is a really important one. Overall the chapter deals with a very wide range of issues from macro-level ones essentially about the future of Europe to more micro-level ones like the meaning of community education in Ireland. Everything in the chapter is essential, but it's all packed into a pretty small document. This means some points could benefit from greater exposition and the links between the different elements could be elaborated more clearly.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of research in the field of community education, with an emphasis on the social, cultural and wellbeing outcomes that also contribute to the economic welfare of society. The Cedefop section is excellent and ideally might have been a little more extensive. The discussion on Net Present Value (NVP), Well-being Valuation (WV), Matrix Knowledge Group, social return on investment and VAST is very important. While these are not methods that can be easily used by community educators, they demonstrate that it's possible to measure the benefits of community education.

Chapter 4 presents a number of short analyses of community education initiatives in Ireland, with some external examples. This is useful in giving a sense of the diversity in terms of approach, goals and context.

A point in common between the research and practice chapters is that the community education sector has not been well researched. Given very limited resources this is not surprising from a community education perspective. However it poses questions about why, in general, scholarship on community education in the higher education sector is not more highly developed. Specifically the review highlights that there is not a huge volume of research on the impacts of community education.

This report will be an important reference point for those engaged in community education, researchers and policy makers.

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Further Education & Training: History, Politics and Practice

In his forward to Further Education & Training: History, Politics and Practice, Tom Collins suggests that the Further Education and Training (FET) sector is managing 'multiple identities simultaneously.' Indeed this truly reflects the dynamics of the sector. The publication's authors have set out to shine light on the dynamics of history, politics and practice to provide an overview that is "easily accessible particularly for new educators entering the FET sector" (Ryan, Murray & Grummell, p. 1). While the publication could have been titled to reflect its focus on community education, its exploration of the sector does enhance understanding of the struggles and tensions therein. Firmly anchored in "Freire's 'practice of freedom' perspective" (Ryan, Murray & Grummell, p. 2), the book espouses 'global citizenship and sustainable communities based on human rights, equality and social justice' (Ryan, Murray & Grummell, p. 2).

The opening chapters focus on the history of the sector. Containing a history of FET within two chapters is quite a task. On the one hand, the field of learning in adulthood is seen as nebulous and resistant to convenient definition. On the other hand, the complex combination of a voluntary ethos and regulated provision across decades of history makes for a challenging mapping of time and activity. Murtagh tackles on the task well. Offering a panoptic landscape of educational provision, Murtagh's account contains a vast reservoir of information about further education and training activities from the late 19th century to the present day. Admittedly, in some parts, the brevity of information reads more like a list of activities rather than a contextual discussion; however the chapters do convey the essence of the constraints, controls, struggles and strategies that characterised the evolution of the sector to its present constitution. I would like to have seen more interpretation of the educational activities to provide a rationale for their construction and implementation. Having said that, both of

these chapters provide a scaffold on which practitioners, students and researchers can usefully build investigative and analytical work.

Issues of equality are convincingly presented and argued across all sections of the book. In explaining the foundations of community education, Connolly's capacity to communicate the conflicting tensions between the emancipatory and resilience building ideals of community education and education as constructing skilled and knowledgeable workers aligned to economic success makes for a compelling analysis and insight into community education as a model of social action. Staying with the equality theme, Hurley delves into the debate on equality and human capital. Hurley draws on a range of influential reports (Investment in Education, Murphy, Kenny, EU Commission) and Ireland's only White Paper on adult education to argue that while there was explicit consideration of education as contributing to equality, nonetheless adult education has been colonised as a means of providing human capital for economic good. This adds to the idea that the dominant message emerging from adult education and adult learning policy is that being a good citizen means educating oneself for work. In highlighting the persistent inequalities in education and the failure of mainstream educational activities for some learners, Ryan argues the need for FET to put learners at 'centre-stage' and to enable learners to see their experiences in a broad social context rather than merely in the narrow instrumental focus of employment.

A further chapter, *Practitioner Reflections on FET*, provides assured discussions of the value of community education as advancing equality. Two practitioners discuss their experiences and ontological positions as they straddle competing perspectives; the neo-liberalism of instrumental education, the bureaucracy of funding mechanisms and awards and education as an advocate for individual and community empowerment. Both of these accounts skilfully combine principles with pragmatism to illustrate a view of practice that is strengthened by discussion of philosophical stances and practical dilemmas. Undoubtedly, this will resonate with many practitioners in the sector.

The debate between the differing purposes of education within the sector continues in Grummell's critique of the dominance of the metrics around tangible outputs and outcomes of education. Underpinned by the need for accountability to stakeholders such as funding bodies and awards, the professionalisation of the sector runs the risk of narrowing pedagogical approaches, curricula and the overall purpose of education. Moreover it poses the question as to what con-

stitutes professionalisation and its practice. Adding to the discussion of the professionalisation of FET, Ryan (p. 176) contends that opportunities lie within the restructuring of FET in which skilled educators can challenge the 'hegemonic dominance of neoliberal thinking.'

Poor definition and ambiguity around terminology in FET (adult, further and community education, training) adds to the confusion around the purpose of its activities. In his chapter, Murray (p. 102) explores the 'differing and clashing understandings' of FET terminology. Analysed through the lens of power, Murray (p. 103) argues that terminology shapes policy and practice and as such resides in 'contesting philosophies' that make it difficult to define. But it is this very variety of philosophy that makes adult education a rich learning endeavour and environment.

In a changing landscape, the publication succeeds in focussing our attention on the continuing tensions between the competing activities and goals of the sector. The outcome immediately confronting the reader is the suggestion that a binary of educational activity exists. At one level, we have activities that seek to promote a sustainable community through active involvement, dialogue, collaboration and inclusion. At another level, we have activity that is intended to respond to employment agenda focussed on facilitating learners to manage the acquisition and updating of employment ready knowledge and skill sets. The strength of the publication lies in its ability to conceptualise FET as having more than an economic rationale, to de-reify the current economic framing of further education and stimulate its ongoing examination. Instead, of being centre stage, the economic rationale is side-lined to reveal adult education that is focused on promoting citizenship, sustainability, equality and human rights.

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The Adult Learner
The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education

The Adult Learner is the Irish journal of adult and community education founded in the mid 1980s. It aims primarily to serve the needs of the adult education community in Ireland by providing a forum for critical reflection on the practices of teaching and learning. The journal aims to continue to make knowledge, research and writing accessible to the widest possible audience and emphasises the implications of critique for practice. The journal has a long established practice of giving priority to subject matter that addresses disadvantage, social exclusion, equality, workplace learning and the study of the teacher/student relationship. Community education, literacy, citizenship and access issues are also of importance in the journal. The journal welcomes papers which are relevant to those working across the broad field of Adult and Community Education and which make a contribution to debates both in Ireland and internationally.

The journal invites contributions as follows:

1. *Papers which* engage in critical debate and analysis of concepts, policies and theories and/or practices in the field. They may include findings from recent research and where this is so, should include a brief outline of any research methodologies used. Papers which initiate dialogue between individuals, groups or sectors in the field of lifelong learning are also welcome. These papers should NOT exceed 5,000 words in length including references.

2. *Practice-based papers or other contributions including case studies* which exchange ideas about what works in various programmes and contexts, which are innovative, and which share examples of good practice. These papers engage in analysis of practical aspects. Papers should NOT exceed 3,000 words in length including references.

3. *Reviews* of books, materials and resources that help identify and evaluate a wide variety of teaching and learning resources that may be of interest to adult and community education participants, providers and anyone interested in adult and community education. (600–1,000 words)

4. *Responses/Critiques.* The journal will consider publishing critiques of articles or responses to topics/articles in the previous issue of the journal. These should be written in academic style and should be backed up by evidence. They should be no more than 1,000 words in length.

Please state clearly on your submission which section you are submitting to. We will not accept papers which exceed the word limits. Please note papers which exceed the word limits will be returned.

All papers submitted undergo a refereeing process which involves at least two referees. Where contributions are accepted this may be on condition that changes recommended by referees are taken into account. We recommend contributors consider the diversity of our readership and ask that articles are written with an international readership in mind. We are very grateful for all contributions submitted and will consider each on its merits and provide feedback.

All papers submitted should conform to the following guidelines:
- *Relate to the broad aims of the journal and relevant to the field of adult and community education.*

- *Provide evidence of a coherent and focused argument and be supported by robust evidence*

- *Outline and explain any methodology used*

- *Be contextualised for an international audience (e.g. explain use of acronyms)*

- *Be submitted in the format outlined (see separate guidance, available online).*

- *Begin with a short abstract (not more than 100 words)*

- *Include a reference section which refers only to articles mentioned in the text*

Papers and responses should be in Microsoft Word document (or compatible) format, 12 pt Times New Roman, double line spaced on one side of A4. Headings should be in bold and in the same format. They should include all references cited in the article in a *reference section*. Only those cited in the article should be included. The papers should begin with a short abstract (maximum 6 lines proceeded by a 'key words' statement.)

All papers should be presented in a style as outlined in the ***Style Guide for Contributors (separate document, available online)***. Only books/articles/web-sites referred to in the text should be included in the references.

The name, address, a short statement and email address of the author, or the corresponding author in case of multiple authorship, should be submitted on a separate attached sheet rather than on the manuscript and where appropriate should include the work-place of the author. A short statement about the author (no more than 60 words in length) should be attached.

The number of words should be included at the end of the article and should conform to the word limit depending on which section you are submitting to. Articles which exceed the length will be returned to the author(s).

Please note we cannot accept papers which do not conform strictly to the guidelines.

The editor welcomes queries from writers who may wish to discuss possible subject matter and approaches.

29th January 2016. <u>Please note that contributions cannot be accepted after this date.</u>

Please mark for the attention of:
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Please send all correspondence to Patricia Hayden, Secretary to the Adult Learner. **phayden@aontas.com**

Notes

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

Its aim is to serve the needs of the adult education and lifelong learning community both in Ireland and internationally 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.

The journal can also be viewed on the AONTAS website, where further details on how individuals can make contributions are made available each year. www.aontas.com

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