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# THE ADULT LEARNER



Journal of the Adult Education Organisers' Association

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# Foreword

WHEN the idea of a journal dealing with topics in Adult Education was first mooted, one would have been forgiven for cynically sitting back and listening for discussion which would see the grandiose notion of a journal being whittled down to an occasional duplicated page via a sporadic out of date newsletter. But then casual listeners would not have known the identity of those most interested in this project nor could they have been aware of the resolve and track records of those who were coming together on our behalf to make the proposal a reality.

The Adult Education Organisers' Association warmly welcomes this production. It is fortunate that from the varied background and broad experience of its own membership there has emerged an editorial group which has co-operated to produce a publication for which there is a real need.

It is our hope that this journal will be found relevant, topical and practical and that it may help its readers towards a fuller understanding and appreciation of current problems, activities and developments in adult education. In thanking its editors, contributors and subscribers it is our wish to awaken a greater interest and awareness in this area so that the cause of adult education may benefit accordingly.

**MARTIN F. O'GRADY,**  
Chairman,  
Adult Education Organisers' Association,  
May 1985.

# Editorial

It may well be that in all branches of education in Ireland today there is none that can point to more exciting or innovative developments than the area of adult and community education — and this, somewhat paradoxically, in an area which is least favoured in terms of resources and facilities. It is this consideration, mainly, which has led to the publication of this first issue of **The Adult Learner**. It is our purpose in producing this journal to highlight some of these developments and to comment on and debate the more important issues arising. We want to spread the good news.

This journal, too, aims at being representative rather than sectional and so, for this first edition, we have elicited contributions from a broad spectrum of agencies involved in the promotion of adult and community education. We have chosen as our title **The Adult Learner**, and that is a declaration of our intention to make space available for the views of those whom we consider to be of primary importance — the adult learners. Therefore, we are especially pleased to include in our pages contributions from people who have taken that brave and rewarding decision to return — or perhaps to turn — to learning.

Finally, we are indebted in a particular way to our subscribers. There has been a most enthusiastic response to our appeal, which is clear evidence of support for this venture and appreciation of the need for such a journal. We hope that you will find this first issue satisfying and stimulating and that we can count on your continued support.

## **EDITORIAL BOARD:**

**Liam Bane — Editor**

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# Adult Education — A Prisoner of Tradition

K. D. BRENNAN

EVERY nation honours its Founding Fathers, Adult educators in Ireland owe an eternal debt of gratitude to the pioneers of the service who provided adult education on the proverbial shoestring for decades. On hard-worked bicycles and in battered old cars, they travelled from centre to centre providing night classes for those whose formal education had ceased at Sixth Class in the local primary school. Many were vocational school teachers who taught their school classes by day but managed to maintain the momentum and enthusiasm to take an eager adult education class at night. Most of their students look back to those classes with happy memories and gratitude as it often gave them a new social outlet and sparked an ambition to develop their talents further. It is probably true to say the mere fact of having the class to attend was as important as the subject matter learned.

## UNHEEDED VOICES

In the intervening years, especially since the 1960's, Irish society has been transformed. Most people have a much longer span of formal education, the range of interest has considerably broadened, the isolation of rural communities has been bridged by television and there is much greater mobility in the population. It must be acknowledged that adult education provision was very slow in reacting to these changes. A few, virtually unheeded "voices in the wilderness" were raised, advising response to the changing situation but, for the most part, demographic and social changes were ignored. Providers of adult education continued to offer the same choice of courses which has succeeded so well in the past. The loose, informal arrangements which operated as a structure for adult education continued virtually unchanged.

## BRAVE NEW WORLD

The 'Seventies, however, brought a whole new influx of ideas;

developments and innovations from abroad were studied and suggestions made for their integration into the Irish scene. AONTAS provided a national forum for the exchange of ideas, an agency for publicity and a lobby for the advancement of adult education. Community schools, established with a brief for adult education, brought a spirit of enterprise into the scene. There was, indeed, significant progress. However, it must now be acknowledged, many of the principles espoused at discussion level were never realised on the ground: the "brave new world" in adult education, which seemed about to appear, never quite came.

Too much lip-service was paid at national and local level and too little determination to put innovation into practice was evident. Though the absence of adequate funding was a major contributory factor for this relative failure, it was by no means the sole reason. Practice lagged behind theory because most of those responsible for the provision of adult education continued to see it as a subsidiary function which would be serviced when, and if, their main functions allowed the time and resources. The interconnection between second-level schooling and adult education, particularly, which historically had been a source of strength, had, by now, become a constraining influence. Personnel whose paramount role was second-level schooling could devote only a part of their energies to adult education and, however well-intentioned, it was just not enough!

## **ADULT EDUCATION ORGANISERS**

The advent of Adult Education Organisers in the late 'Seventies should have rectified the problem and revolutionised the scene. At last, a professional cadre was available which could advance theory and practice simultaneously, identifying and servicing the needs of the new Ireland. Most of the appointees were people of real potential, knowledgeable in their area and committed to making adult education a flourishing entity in its own right. Unfortunately, only a minority were to find the opportunity to develop their role : too many found themselves in an ill-defined position, lacking scope for any real initiative. Perhaps in some cases this was because they were inadequate or unsuited to the role but that is not the reason why the impact of the Organisers as a body has been less than expected and fallen far short of their own visions.

The fact is that Vocational Education Committees, Chief Executive Officers and principals of vocational, community and comprehensive schools have been too conscious of their historical roles as providers of adult education and were not sufficiently far sighted to give the A.E.O.'s the freedom of action and co-operation they need to fulfill their designated brief. V.E.C.'s and C.E.O.'s too often

perceived the Organisers as relatively minor functionaries to whom they delegated such functions as they saw fit, and not as adult education demanded; principals of community and comprehensive schools saw them as V.E.C. officials largely irrelevant to their schools. As a result, the A.E.O.'s lacked status, authority and control over funding, without which it was well nigh impossible to perform effectively. (The fact that a few, by sheer force of personality, have emerged to carve a meaningful niche for themselves, does not invalidate this reading of the prevailing situation).

Let it be clearly understood, there were no sinister motives behind the reluctance of V.E.C.'s, C.E.O.'s and Principals to hand over authority and responsibility to A.E.O.'s. Having laboured through the heat of the day, and through their efforts having been providers of most adult education throughout the country, they were locked in a position whereby any diminution of their influence in the field might result in a collapse of provision. They found it very difficult to envisage a scene where these new and largely unproven functionaries, the A.E.O.'s, could assume the major role and direct the provision of a service. For the A.E.O.'s it represented a classical "hen or egg" situation — they could not prove themselves until they were given status, authority and independence to do so : they would not be given the required status until they had proven themselves. What was, and is, required of C.E.O.'s and Principals is not a withdrawal from adult education or a reduction of their authority, it is clear acceptance that adult education is the *raison d'être* of A.E.O.'s and, though their support and goodwill will always be vital, the future direction should lie with the A.E.O.'s.

The recent Adult Education Commission saw clearly the dilemma of the A.E.O.'s and recommended an enhanced status, a role of power and responsibility and direct access to funding through the V.E.C.'s. Equally the Commission expected from the new Directors (as they are termed) a much higher profile and professional commitment than existing A.E.O.'s. The Commission was obviously anxious to give adult education an independent place in the educational scene but, as yet, history, tradition and a natural reluctance to change are prevailing and little significant action has been taken.

## **LOCAL ADULT EDUCATION OFFICERS**

Local adult education officers — teachers in vocational, community and comprehensive schools with posts of responsibility for adult education — have been the lynchpin of provision at local level. Such a person is vital in each catchment area. As their remuneration is through the second-level schooling system, at present only wholetime permanent second-level teachers are

eligible for appointment. Where no such teacher is interested in the position, the role goes unfilled, by default. There is no reason, other than tradition, why the local officer need be a second-level teacher. The Adult Education Commission has recommended the post should be open to all suitable candidates. There should be a number of people in any community with the time, interest, and commitment to act as local officers — the perpetuation of the second-level teacher monopoly is now getting in the way of progress. At the same time, the system of remuneration should be disconnected from the second-level post of responsibility system entirely and appointment and funding should be through the new Adult Education Boards.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

The provision of accommodation for adult education is another area where tradition may hamper development. The appointed custodians of public buildings, including hundreds of schools, have always taken their responsibilities seriously and sought to safeguard the property as if it were their own. This is an admirable attitude but it can result in wasteful under-utilisation of public facilities. If adult education is accepted as a national priority, public buildings should be made available nationally. The attitude of custodians when approached for facilities should be one of welcome and eagerness to accommodate rather than grudging reluctance and emphasis on the difficulties involved. In fairness, most public institutions are fully supportive of adult education but some custodians, perhaps over-conscious of their managerial role or to avoid additional "hassle" are less than forthcoming.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE**

It is essential, in the national interest, that adult education should prosper in the coming decade. We appear to be about mid-way through the technological revolution, a development at least as significant in human history as the first industrial revolution and, if we are to make a successful transition into the new world being created, education must provide the key. As young people have not the disadvantage of being pre-conditioned and adjust much more readily (witness the alacrity with which they familiarise with computers), it is adults who will require the educational input to assimilate in tomorrow's world. The task facing adult educators is immense, the challenge is daunting but enormously exciting.

Despite the current financial constraints, adult education in Ireland can prosper in the 'Eighties and realise many of the high hopes expressed by the Adult Education Commission. National debate should, and will, continue but it is implementation at local

level which matters. All people currently involved, should examine their role honestly and if they see their traditional rights and duties possibly hampering the advance of adult education at this stage, make a further contribution by standing gracefully aside.

#### **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:**

*K. D. Brennan is Principal of Millstreet Community School in County Cork. He had been involved, directly and indirectly, in adult education for eleven years, as a student, tutor and organiser, as well as principal of a school providing an adult education programme. He was a member of the Adult Education Commission.*

# Community Education: Reflections

TED FLEMING

## A BED FOR THE NIGHT

*I hear that in New York  
At the corner of 26th. Street and Broadway  
A man stands every evening during the winter months  
And gets beds for the homeless there  
By appealing to passers-by*

*It won't change the world  
It won't improve the relations among men  
It will not shorten the age of exploitation  
But a few men have a bed for the night  
For a night the wind is kept from them  
The snow meant for them falls on the roadway.*

*Don't put down the book on reading this, man.*

*A few people have a bed for the night  
For a night the wind is kept from them  
The snow meant for them falls on the roadway  
But it won't change the world  
It won't improve the relations among men  
It will not shorten the age of exploitation.<sup>1</sup>*

In these few lines from Brecht written in 1931 there are two different ways of making sense of the problem of homelessness. Firstly, there is the view usually associated with the Simon Community which provides shelter and food. Secondly there is the view of the radical and Marxist activist who wants to change the political, social and economic conditions which cause homelessness.

The same two paradigms or ways of making sense of the world are found in adult education. Indeed, there may be more than two if we add to these liberal and radical paradigms the conservative and reformist models. But more about these later. The existence of different paradigms is obvious for example in literacy work. Some will teach the reading and writing skills that are necessary to function in society. Others will attempt to change the institutions in society which produce people who cannot function. It is not sur-

prising then that community education will have different paradigms in operation giving very different perspectives on the problems to be addressed and the appropriate strategies.

1 Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913 - 1956*, (London: Methuen, 1976), p. 181.

### **A LIBERAL PARADIGM**

To generalise, in this model the individual adult is seen as capable of identifying their own needs and is free to pursue them without interference from the state and with the support of the adult education system as a resource. Liberals will see their aim as delivering educational, recreational, social and cultural services to all the members of the community. The interest is in communities identifying and satisfying the needs of all its members through cooperative activities.

### **A REFORMIST PARADIGM**

The individual according to this model is only partially free due to constraints from the social structures. Because of the dominant interests of the more powerful groups in society real interests of other groups may be hidden. Therefore, according to this tradition, the Government must step in and support the individual — especially those likely to be forgotten or who live in deprived areas. One disadvantage of this is the real possibility that community education will be perceived as social welfare and educators the instruments of social policy. The change that is intended comes from above where the State recognises and responds to needs in the community.

### **A RADICAL PARADIGM**

The radical will see things differently. Driven by a Marxist perspective usually, they will see the individual as moulded by social forces and structures so that real needs will be totally unrecognisable. If power is in the hands of the elite who control the institutions of society, then the changes intended by community education involve the restructuring of society. Community educators who operate in this paradigm say that only within the framework of a different social structure will the individual be free to pursue needs and interests unconstrained by society.

All these models of community education are in operation and to make these distinctions is important for this reason. Each of these paradigms has its own methods and strategies. For instance the liberal educator will of necessity go about finding out needs in a way that is very different to the radical educator. It is also true of

teaching methods, target groups, availability of funding, evaluation and so on.

## **COMMUNITY EDUCATION: CRITICAL THOUGHTS**

Community education as a concept, as practiced in various settings and now as Government policy (it is suggested as a priority area of attention for the Adult Education Boards) hides many assumptions and values. Paradigms have been identified as one hidden dimension. It is the aim of this paper to point toward the need for further reflection on what is being done and proposed under the title of community education.

It could be argued that developments are taking place too fast in adult education to allow time for reflection and debate but the speed of change makes this activity more important and not less.

Some approach community education as a preacher seeking converts and encourage all to move in that direction. Others will approach it descriptively and describe examples of good practice. All necessary. But a critical and analytical eye needs to be cast on the concept, practice and the taken for granted assumptions of advocates of community education.

One example of what is taken for granted is provided by the word community itself. It is a good word. Like democracy it is difficult to be against it. How could one be against community care, community police, community health, indeed anything with the prefix community. Yet this is exactly the problem, especially if one sees adult education as a critical investigation of reality. Conventional wisdom and such received knowledge needs a critical glance.

## **UNCRITICAL REFLECTION**

Two dangers inherent in an uncritical approach come to mind. Firstly, to simply call an activity community education might and frequently is simply a way of repackaging the traditional offerings of night classes. The same courses but in a different setting. This leaves unexamined the reasons for the course and leaves unexplored the kinds of issues just hinted at in the discussion on paradigms.

Home economics is one of the courses frequently offered in community education programmes. This can be an activity unaware of the kinds of issues Brecht raised in "A Bed for the Night." Or try this question. Will a course in computer programming give people access to information technology or will the wealthy institutions of society continue to own and exclusively use this technology? It is this growth of a modern form of private property that might be addressed in community education that considers itself critical.

A second danger suggests itself. Too often by attempting to address the problems of a community and avail of the resources of all the members in an attempt to satisfy all the needs of that community a broader picture can get lost. I mean by this that community education can become a new form of individualism. Problems in society are frequently stated in individualistic terms. Drug abuse, lack of skilled training, illiteracy and many other problems are seen as the failure of the individual to take advantage of opportunities for education or work. But others see these as social problems caused by the economic system. Community education by tending to emphasise the self-reliance of a group of people in a particular area may not see the global dimension of the issues which influence their lives.

## **A PROPOSAL**

So what then? What about a proposal for community education and community educators? That one of the most important aspects of any activity is the reflection brought to bear on that action. Time spent clarifying these issues is worthwhile and vital — and at the risk of losing the readers who have stayed this far, I am proposing that community educators **do** philosophy.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

*Ted Fleming is Adult Education Organiser for County Louth. He studied adult education at Columbia University, New York, where he did his Doctorate. He has spent a number of years as Lecturer in Adult Education at the Institute of Religious Education, Dundalk.*

# Reach for the Sky

ALICE BLOOD

THE all embracing term "Adult Education" means different things to different people, and initially I was of the misguided opinion that it was solely for the benefit of adults who had gone through the 'system' without acquiring the basics of reading and writing. Thankfully, about three years ago, the Radio Programme "Women Today" quashed this notion, and enlightened me as to what was available to those wishing to further their education. Since then my whole way of life has been dramatically transformed, and through effort and encouragement, application and assistance, I can hold my head high and meet the world with a confidence I would not have believed possible as I listened to that Radio Programme.

## SECOND CHANCE

I learned that adults, particularly mothers with young children, could attend morning classes with a view to obtaining a Leaving Certificate, and that inexpensive creche facilities were available. My heart fluttered, as for many years I had passively promised myself I would attend night classes and study for the Leaving Certificate, but due to domestic commitments, I kept putting it on the long finger. You see, my education finished in the early sixties with a Group Certificate. Although I achieved a very respectable result and at the time thought I was highly educated, it didn't take long for me to realise that there were far too many gaps in my store of knowledge for comfort. This feeling of inadequacy persisted and intensified, which deeply affected my self-confidence and I became almost incapable of speaking in company for fear of revealing my educational shortcomings. Hence my resolve to attend classes and educate myself.

## GETTING STARTED

Now suddenly, purely by chance, news was beaming into my kitchen that Colaiste Dhulaigh in Coolock was offering a unique opportunity of morning classes to people in my exact position, and from that moment on I can honestly say "I have never looked back" despite some hitches and shedding of pounds. Having chosen English Literature and History, I enrolled promptly, I don't think I ever parted so eagerly with money, and some days later it was time for my first morning 'Back to school'. The eagerness in the intervening

few days had turned to apprehension and almost terror. Perhaps, I thought to myself, I should have waited for just another little while, perhaps I wasn't quite ready for such a large leap into the unknown. After spending ten years inside my home minding my four children with virtually no life outside, I was about to become part of a group of strangers and reveal my mammoth ignorance. (It had magnified during that week.) It never dawned on me that they too might feel uncomfortable, or that the teachers might not be at ease with a class of adults from different backgrounds and all at different levels of attainment and ability.

## NEW LIFE STYLE

Anyway, I deposited my disgruntled three year old son in the creche and made my way to the appropriate classroom. There we were, a room full of strangers nodding furtively at each other. The Adult Education Officer greeted us, and by her warm, light hearted manner, put us at our ease. She made us feel special for taking the first step towards a new lifestyle.

The Principal of the school very kindly took the time to introduce himself to us. He pointed out some of the pitfalls, e.g. how easy it would be to give up the whole idea once the morning got chilly and oh how right he was. He also mentioned that it might be difficult to resume classes after each break for holidays and again how accurate he was. He wished us luck and then introduced us to our first teacher, our English teacher and she was absolutely wonderful. She immediately made us all feel welcome and capable and our first lesson got under way without any trauma. Our new school career was well and truly launched. Mind you, it came as quite a shock to learn that we would have to do homework. After so many years writing nothing more taxing than shopping lists and occasional notes to the childrens teachers, the prospect of having to cover pages of blank paper with thoughts and opinions which would have to be corrected, left us all distinctly uncomfortable. (A quick glance around the room revealed this.) It certainly brought the feeling of inadequacy back to the fore. By the end of that first class although I felt pleased that I had come, I felt twice as pleased that I was going home, and that's how I felt for the first few weeks until both myself and my little son settled down. After that, we all got to know each other and became friends and the feeling of isolation disappeared as we all integrated and built up a rapport which still survives. The homework proved the most difficult task to come to terms with. The motivation and necessary application had to be built up, but it turned out to be most beneficial and rewarding. The individual encouragement and assistance we received helped in no small way to alleviate our self-consciousness. I should, however, stress that we

were never pressurised into doing homework. As adults it was entirely up to ourselves.

## EARLY YEARS

During our first year, which was really an introductory one, and was designed to ease us back into the educational system, we had many enjoyable outings which were both educational and social and the feeling of "belonging" was a new experience. In fact, the benefits derived from my first year in Colaiste Dhulaigh were enormous, and had I given up there and then I would still have come away with a much richer, more philosophical and confident attitude to life. Household matters lost their "unnaturally" high status, and problems with neighbours and children paled into insignificance as my main preoccupation became an absorption in Shakespeare and Irish and European history. My children benefited also, as I was now better equipped to understand their learning difficulties and so I became far more tolerant with them. By the end of that year, which was both enjoyable and fulfilling, I was happy with my modest achievements and quite determined to return.

At the end of my first summer holidays, it was time to get down to the business of achieving my ambition, so my little son and myself were again a familiar sight dashing for the bus and there was much excitement as we all met up again. A rhetorical question sprang to mind, "Could it have been only a year ago since I had shed a half a stone worrying about how I would cope?" Since then, a mountain of knowledge has been trapped between my ears, okay so I can't recall it all, and I make mistakes. But it's there, and that's what makes all the difference. I can now stand over the well worn cliché that education broadens ones horizons.

Many of us have experienced the trauma of examinations, and experienced the pleasure of achieving satisfying results, which provided the impetus to continue, while some have changed directions and opted for the newer and more attractive courses which have since been introduced. However, the Leaving Certificate classes are still very popular and for those, like myself, with a hang-up about education, nothing could be more beneficial. This coming June, I intend sitting the Exam. in two more subjects, making six altogether, at which stage I will have a much coveted Leaving Certificate, which I shall cherish forever. All the sacrifices and rearranging will have been well worth it.

## REACTIONS

The attitude of friends, neighbours and relations throughout has been amusing and mostly fell into two categories. I was asked:

(a) What I intended to do afterwards and was it my intention to take a job on some poor school leaver,

or

(b) Would I not be better off getting myself a little job, at my age.

Very few could understand why I felt it necessary to go back to school, and fewer still could understand my ambition to achieve a Leaving Certificate. In fairness, I did get quite a bit of support and encouragement, especially from my husband who helped in every practical way possible, especially at the outset, when the need was greatest. He could appreciate that my lack of self-confidence stemmed from an educational inferiority complex and has always been enthusiastically in favour of my "Back to School" exploits.

### **Alice Blood**

**Alice Blood** originally comes from Ballyboughal in North County Dublin, but presently lives in Donaghmede, a suburb on the north side of Dublin City. She is a full-time wife and mother with four children aged between 6-12 and has a very keen interest in the position of "Women in the Home". As a result of participating in the adult classes, "I have, thankfully, emerged from my shell, where I intend to stay, and I am now enjoying a much fuller and more satisfying life."

# Life Begins Anew

MAURA SMITH

“EVERY day is a new beginning. Every morning makes the start of a fresh and thrilling chapter for the brave and hopeful heart.”

So writes the poet, Patience Strong, and I must have been injected with some of the same spirit as I am forever making fresh starts in my search for enlightenment. It is as if my brain were an ever fruitful womb creating a need for knowledge and being frustrated at never quite reaching fulfillment.

## BACKGROUND

I had to leave school at fifteen in order to take over management of the family home. My mother had died a couple of years previously and I became next in line for the dubious honour of housekeeper. Cut off as it were in mid-stream, my brain was still churning out far more questions than it could answer, leaving a burning hunger for knowledge.

This need for brain stimulation manifested itself over the years by my addiction to courses of various kinds. Public speaking, acting, the art of drama production, history of the theatre . . . I enrolled in them all, gaining a knowledge of sorts but never full mastery. To this day, my favourite programme on television are not the escape variety of the American canned material but features which tell me about people, places or historical events; the quest for knowledge is uppermost.

My creative urges were fulfilled by my marriage and bearing of children, leaving me with very little time to read anything but the daily paper. Still, when I did have time to spare, I searched for books which would impart knowledge of some kind to me and I would bore the life out of anyone who would listen as I passed on my acquired learning.

## OPPORTUNITY

At last the opportunity I had been waiting for arrived and now I had the freedom to avail of it. The announcer on the lunchtime radio programme was the herald of a new chapter in life for me. “Adult Education morning classes are starting in Colaiste Dhulaigh” he announced, “for further information contact Kathleen Forde, Adult Education Organiser.” There was a certain magic in that word ‘morning’. For one thing morning is the time of the day when one can

feel more lonely and depressed than at any other time. When the door closes on the family and silence reigns supreme, it is then that one's thoughts turn inwards, as the idea of morning courses readily appealed to me. Still it was with some trepidation I set out to meet Kathleen.

I need not have worried, not only did she make me feel very welcome, but she also convinced me I was not too old to start on the courses. So convinced of my ability did she make me feel that not only did I enrol for the English course, but I also took on a French for Beginners although I had never had a French lesson before.

## NEW VENTURES

When I started the classes a couple of weeks later, I was imbued with a simultaneous awe and smug exhilaration; awe for the new learning and smug exhilaration for the things I remembered from my childhood school days. Getting to know the other students was helped greatly by the tea-break at 11.00 a.m., when we would all gather around the tea urn and make inane remarks like 'we must be mad' or 'what are we trying to prove'; while in our hearts we knew we were enjoying every minute of it.

Our English teacher, Isobel, had that indefinable quality which makes a good teacher, the ability to make each student feel she is getting individual attention, while at the same time imparting knowledge to the rest of the class without losing their attention. The pace was leisurely but we still completed all the work planned for each class. It is difficult to describe how I felt on those early mornings at English class. It was like being in a garden on a dull cloudy day when suddenly the sun broke through and everything in the garden seemed to come alive with the finest colour and texture, and one discovered new plants in spots previously overlooked. I think I enjoyed the poetry most of all. Being a romantic soul, I got lost in the weavings of the poet and was only brought back to reality when the students would discuss what the poem meant for them. These discussions were very enlightening causing me to gaze in amazement at the person in the next seat, as she uncovered meanings and symbols totally hidden from me. "And I thought she was a Philistine with no soul," I muttered to myself on many occasions.

On the other hand, the French classes presented a different aspect of learning altogether. Anne, our teacher, addressed us in French from the very start; this was slightly disconcerting at first but paid dividends in the end because our ears became attuned to the proper pronunciation from the start. It was difficult to grasp the verbs and phrases and my daughter helped me with my homework. I would have liked to continue but unfortunately the classes were not repeated after the first year due to lack of students. However, I will

always be grateful to Anne for the few French phrases I mastered. "Merci beaucoup Anne."

## TAKING THE EXAM PLUNGE

A little learning may be a dangerous thing but it is great for building one's confidence. So, armed with this confidence, we students decided we would like to do an exam. We felt it would be good for us to experience just what our teenagers were going through, so Kathleen searched until she found an exam which she thought would be suitable for us. This three hour exam, which brought a Certificate in Commerce, consisted of a piece of comprehension, an essay, a piece of poetry and the writing of some business letters. This may not seem much to the seasoned student but to us who had left school so long ago it was a monumental task. On the evening of the exam we stood in a line outside the exam room in a state of high tension, fully equipped with a new ruler, pencil, a number of biros and tippex.

Our first glance at the exam paper caused consternation, and ejaculations calling on the Holy Family, various members of the recognised band of saints and even a few who had been denigrated, not to mention parents who had gone to their heavenly reward. Recalling the maxim that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread", we started writing and completed the exam. The fact that after the exam we adjourned to the nearest hostelry and 'downed' brandies neat, without realising it, gives one some indication of our mental state.

The very good results received by most in that examination provided the courage to tackle the Leaving Cert, at least two subjects in one year. I enjoyed the preparation for this immensely, especially the poetry. Being introduced to Shakespeare on a grand scale was the highlight of the year. Because we went into such depth with his play "Macbeth", I understood for the first time why most people regard him as a genius. His inventiveness, his wisdom, his prophetic powers so impressed me that I became eager to know more about him as a playwright.

History was the other subject I took and I can honestly say that each class was an adventure, as it brought new insights of feats and undertakings sometimes under very primitive conditions. I marvelled at those pioneers of long ago, and the romantic spirit they possessed. Sitting with younger students during the exam was no problem as we all shared the same hopes and fears.

It was a great thrill when my Leaving Cert results came by post and I saw that I had done well. The following year some of our group went on to do the Leaving Cert once again while the rest went for an Extra Mural Diploma in Social Studies which was run in Colaiste

Dhulaigh in conjunction with Maynooth College. This course gave us a great insight into social problems both here and in England. The project we were obliged to do on Marital Breakdown gave us some idea of the problems facing couples whose marriages are in difficulties and also changed our views on a lot of theories we had previously held.

## **LEARNERS' GROUP**

It was then we decided to form a committee to encourage others into adult learning as we realised how much we had gained from our venture into it. The Coolock Adult Learners' Group came into being, and as most of the students were housewives, our first priority was to have a creche that mothers could afford. We held dinners and a fashion show and arranged for profits from the morning coffee and tea break to go towards payment for a child-minder. As we had a room for the creche in the school, this meant the mothers had only a reasonable amount to pay for their children while they attended classes. We also mounted a publicity campaign on radio and in the newspapers, but our most successful method was by visiting different Ladies Clubs and giving a little talk on our experience in adult learning. We also held an open-day and we were amazed at the results it brought. We had an increase of 66% in student enrolment when the term started last October.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

We are now in the process of negotiating for a degree course for adult learners outside of the universities and although we know we have a difficult task ahead in breaking down traditions and prejudices, not to mention our need for money to launch such a scheme, we feel we are the pioneers in this field here in Ireland and must continue our efforts.

We have been motivated, stimulated and helped in every way possible by our Adult Education Organiser and our teachers. The Principal of Colaiste Dhulaigh is to be congratulated for his patience and co-operation with us. If we are to believe our Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey, that learning is a life-long process, then we must be allowed to develop, expand and conquer new territories. Like Columbus, our ship has set sail and we will not return until we have discovered the new world.

**MAURA SMYTH.**

*MAURA SMYTH, a native Dubliner, is also the mother of three children: two married daughters and one son. Her main preoc-*

cupation at present is encouraging others to enter the field of education as adult learners, since she herself had derived such enjoyment from her venture into this field. She has successfully written and produced several one-act plays and sketches. From being a reader in her parish church, she has produced Passion Plays in mime form at Eastertime for the past four years, as well as being editor of the parish magazine.

# Adult Basic Education: Choice, Control, Creativity

JENNY DERBYSHIRE

THE term Adult Basic Education is being used more and more widely, without any clear definitions. In this article I hope to initiate debate by suggesting some elements important to Adult Basic Education, pointing out some of the inadequacies of present structures and recommending priorities for development.

When speaking of Adult Basic Education, I am referring to education which involves adults who left school early (or perhaps never went to school) and feel that they have not had the opportunity to explore and develop their interests in many areas of education; that they were never given the chance to discover much of their potential, and would now like to develop this aspect of their lives. Adult Basic Education merges into more general adult education, but it needs special emphasis, as it is often the starting point for people who have felt that education was not for them.

## THE CONTEXT OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

One of the main areas of work in Adult Basic Education is literacy and numeracy. It has been estimated that approximately 100,000 people in the Republic have difficulty with reading and writing. It can be assumed that this is a conservative estimate and that many more people would take part in literacy and/or numeracy programmes if they were widely available and easily accessible. Limited basic skills can affect all areas of a person's life, especially in our society where it is assumed that everyone can read and write. In addition, many people with literacy difficulties also have a deep sense of failure created by their school experience and this, together with embarrassment about the reading problem, can make it difficult to come out and look for tuition. Many who want to improve their spelling or handwriting; whose understanding of basic numbers is restricted; or who just had to leave school early for financial reasons, carry with them feelings of inferiority in relation to 'educated' people, fear of possible repeated failure, negative feelings towards schools and educators. Our school system is much at fault here in that it creates failure and in effect rejects the majority

of the population, who do not meet the academic demands at the required stage of their lives. Many adults in this situation have a great desire to learn and enthusiasm for adult education once the right conditions exist. These feelings can be seen as a common bond between people involved in various aspects of Adult Basic Education, as opposed to more general adult education or leisure classes. Given this context, I would argue that the central issues in Adult Basic Education are:—

- (a) that the learning should take place in a social setting;
- (b) that there should be open access; basic education is a right;
- (c) that students should control the learning process and the development and organisation of projects;
- (d) that courses and projects should include a range of themes, subjects and activities within the context of basic education.

### **(a) Social Setting**

As stated above, a central element of Adult Basic Education is adult literacy work. At present literacy work here usually takes place in 1 : 1 home-based tuition. It is argued that literacy schemes must be based on these isolated units because of the embarrassment felt by people with limited reading and writing skills. While the embarrassment and need for confidentiality must be recognised, the context in which voluntary literacy schemes have developed seems to have as much to do with unwillingness to fund basic education programmes adequately as with concern for the feelings of the learners. If the embarrassment of the learners were the main issue, education authorities would provide back-up for home-based tuition in the form of payment for organisers to keep close personal contact with students and tutors; to advise and help with the tuition and to make sure there are adequate training, materials, continuity and development. In many places where a committed volunteer organiser had to give up the job, the scheme has collapsed.

More importantly, it is increasingly apparent that people learn better in a more social setting where feelings of failure and embarrassment together with the excitement and problems of learning can be shared. This may involve several student - tutor pairs working in the same building or the same room, meeting for coffee breaks or occasional discussions; or work in small groups (3 - 6 students with a paid group tutor or possibly a larger group with some volunteer tutor assistant).<sup>2</sup> A major study of the literacy campaign in England<sup>3</sup> pointed out that the main success expressed by most students was an increase in confidence, gained largely from meeting other people in a similar position and developing a feeling of

solidarity and shared purpose. Success through improvement in reading and writing skills was also discussed, but not put so high on the list by the students interviewed. Some literacy projects in the Republic do emphasise this social context, notably the 'Write Together Group' in Cork<sup>4</sup> and the Coolock Reading and Writing Centre in Dublin, and find it a very important aspect of the work.

If there is no social context for learning, it is very difficult for other developments to take place in basic education projects. I have concentrated here on adult literacy because it is an important aspect of Basic Education and also because it is the only starting point that does not automatically involve a group. For those starting through a parent and toddler group, a basic woodwork class or a personal awareness course, the first element — that of meeting people — is already established.

### **(b) Access**

Alongside the need for social settings for Adult Basic Education I would emphasise the importance of easy access. I have outlined above some of the feelings associated with education by many people who would take part in basic education programmes if encouraged. These feelings are strong enough to keep people away, unless some positive action is taken to make places, people and courses very easily accessible; to break down the barriers. Recent meetings of I.D.E.A. (Improvement in Day-time Education for Adults)<sup>5</sup> have been considering the question of access and many groups have urged that fees must be abolished or kept very low if basic education is to be available to people who most need or want it. At present fees vary throughout the country and even between local areas. In some places a 10 hour Basic English course costs £10; in others £12 covers 25 hours. In a few areas, there are concessions for unemployed people; in most there are none.

Many young unemployed people and women at home have no personal income at all. Older unemployed people and those on limited incomes have many calls on their wages and a decision to spend on education will often have to be shelved as other demands are more pressing. If the idea of education is daunting; if school was a bad experience, the step to start again is a very big one to take and a further barrier, such as fees that are hard to meet, may well provide the final push away from the door. Many adults take years to pluck up courage to join a basic education group. If people are to be encouraged to take a second or first chance at education as adults, it is important to make it as easy as possible. Fees can make it difficult. Basic education courses should therefore have no fees. Basic education is a right. It should not depend on the ability to pay.

Establishing ease of access must also involve taking a look at

**where** classes and meetings take place. The local tech. may not be the easiest place to enter, especially if you could not wait to leave it only 2, 5 or 10 years ago. Some groups use spare rooms in primary schools, which may be a little less daunting. Groups in Churchfield in Cork and in Limerick are based in houses in the community which are much more accessible. Other groups have space in community buildings, health clinics or libraries. It is important to have a range of venues and to discuss with interested groups where they would like to meet. It is also important to leave rooms that can be left as they are, where there is space for notice boards and freedom to leave books and pin items on walls. Rooms that have other, perhaps very different uses, are not so good, though it is helpful to be part of a building that is used for a variety of classes and meetings; for daytime education it is also important to have a room available for a creche.

Given a social setting for all basic education and easy access, the other elements vital to lively and effective basic education groups are more likely to develop.

### **(c) Student Control**

Many people feel that large areas of their lives are outside their control. Education can help people to feel they have the right to take greater control of aspects of their lives, and group support can help them to take steps in this direction. The first step is that the learner should control the process of study itself. Thus in adult literacy work, it is the learner rather than the tutor or helper who should decide, through discussion, what direction the work should take. This can be developed on a larger scale: a literacy group may decide to spend a few weeks working on a particular topic together; they may decide to branch out into a personal development course; several literacy groups meeting in the same building or the same area may decide to come together to plan other courses or social gatherings or to produce a magazine. In conjunction with local Adult Education Organisers, students can be encouraged to design courses, to interview their own teachers, to choose creche workers, to lobby politicians and raise awareness of their own needs and needs within the local communities. In this way an individual's control over her / his own study can broaden into initiatives in the wider spheres of education and community development. But this can only happen in a setting where there is a commitment to a social context for study and easy access, together with an awareness by the professionals involved that the most lively education projects are those where the people to whom the classes are most important take the decision, and the professionals give support and assistance.

#### **(d) Range of Activities**

I have started to indicate above the range of activities that can develop within a basic education context, once the conditions allow for this to occur. Once they have begun to develop their reading, and their confidence, many people involved in literacy tuition express interest in a very wide range of issues and topics for study, related both to current events and to subjects areas where they felt deprived in school, owing to reading problems. In addition groups which began working as individuals on specific aspects of reading may decide to spend a few weeks devoting one of their twice weekly sessions to a particular subject, such as 'Politics in Ireland today'; the development of the State since 1922; women and health. Materials can be adapted to the needs of the particular group and in this way, many possibilities for study can be opened up within the scope of basic education. On such courses reading and writing are still being developed, but within a different framework. Numeracy can also be included, thus bringing together different groups.

Such courses need committed and properly paid teachers, able to spend time on finding and adapting material and planning courses in conjunction with students. In the Republic at present, very few places employ teachers in such a way as to make these developments possible. In the prisons, where full-time teachers are able to spend time on the necessary work, study of specific topics is very much a part of work with groups of basic readers.

Basic education work in the prisons also places a lot of emphasis on creative aspects such as drama, art and writing. Among other groups also, even with the limited resources available to them, many developments are taking place. In the North Dublin suburb KLEAR (Kilbarrack Local Education for Adult Renewal) has a strong student-run management committee which is the focus for basic education initiatives in many areas, such as personal development, assertiveness and sexuality courses; writing and publishing groups; art; drama; basic psychology. In more central areas of Dublin, groups have combined literacy and photography and there are active drama and writing groups involving old and young people & In Limerick, practical courses such as woodwork and cookery bring people together and establish groups able to initiate further developments.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF PRESENT STRUCTURES**

In such projects, Adult Basic Education and more general Adult Education merge. This is because the groups are concerned to develop the first three key elements: social setting, open access and student control. However, the developments are limited because the

groups are struggling with structures which work against the progress of full Adult Basic Education programmes, especially fee structures and physical limitations. Many people will accept, but many will be put off by, child-size chairs and rooms in a primary school. Often, even committed tutors and teachers leave when worn down by lack of even basic photocopying facilities, books and equipment, and this creates lack of continuity for students who feel at the bottom of the educational heap yet again.

When given the opportunity, some literacy students point out that they feel unable to make demands of their volunteer tutors because they are volunteers. They feel they are in receipt of charity and they therefore cannot say "Please do this, not that," or "Can we meet four times a week?" Again, their right to learn to read is not being met. In other places, creche fees are so high that many parents cannot pay them, especially on top of class fees, and have to leave. Many organising bodies say that if people cannot pay they must say so. This puts the burden on a person already perhaps embarrassed about their educational need, to be open about another source of embarrassment. In addition, these places are usually only available if there are already 12 in the group who can pay. Suppose all 12 are unable to pay? Suppose it is a basic reading group and there should only be 4 people in it? Some places allow flexibility here; others do not. There needs to be an overall policy for Adult Basic Education.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR A POLICY**

Such a policy should be based on the key elements set out above: social setting, open access (courses free to participants, in a variety of venues), student control of content and organisation of groups, the development of a range of themes and activities within the basic education framework.

For these features to come about, there is a need for properly trained and paid teachers and organisers, both full-time and part time, and an adequate budget. Further, in addition to the development of Adult Basic Education in community settings, there should be full-time basic education courses, with pay for participants, funded through organisations such as AnCO and the YEA.

Adult Basic Education is an exciting and challenging area of education which involves both personal and community development. It is vital not to limit it to the teaching of functional skills, but to recognise that through choice and control learners can discover their creative energies to do, make, communicate and to grow, both in the personal and the wider context.

## FOOTNOTES

1. See the NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) publicity leaflet 'Learning for Living'.
2. The NALA document "Principles and Guidelines for Good Literacy Provision" discusses this issue in more detail and gives suggestions for putting the ideas into practice.
3. "The Concept of Success in Adult Literacy": A. H. Chamley and H. A. Jones. Published (1979) by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit.
4. An article explaining how this group works can be found in the Winter 1984 issue of the NALA newsletter.
5. Information about IDEA is available from Eilish McDonnell, (01) 333358.
6. The Noah City Centre Community Action Project (Summerhill Parade, Dublin 1) has organised literacy and photography courses. It has also been involved with the development of writing and drama in basic education.  
In Drimnagh, "Moving Theatre" has developed an interesting drama project with elderly people.

*JENNY DERBYSHIRE* began work in Adult Basic Education in 1976 in Manchester where she taught adult literacy groups in a Community College. She was part of the team set up at the Gatehouse Project to publish writings by literacy students and run writing workshops with basic education projects. In 1979 she moved to Dublin and became involved in literacy work with various groups in the Inner City. Since 1981 she has worked mainly with KLEAR (Kilbarrack Local Education for Adult Renewal), and has been particularly concerned with the development of writing and publishing in Adult Basic Education.

# What Time is 7.30?

A. D. HOCK

IT IS that time of year again. Leaves are falling, numbers are dropping and throughout the land, A.E.O.s now abed sleep fitfully or do not sleep at all. It is enrolling time. Autumn ogres are at large and the familiar dream-pattern recurs — the cards, the forms, the phones, the voices.

## ON THE CARDS

The cards are always the first to show. Pink, green, blue and yellow they come in showers, cascading from the sky, threatening to engulf him. An accusing Pink is claiming Tuesday night and wants to know how it finds itself in the Thursday file. The Yellow card is shown and the AEO cowers beneath the blanket as he reads where an irate woman has written "Mind Your Business" on the line where it states AGE (if under 21). The AEO is wondering (How come they never read the bits between the brackets?). The Green card has seen better days and is sobbing in a corner. Nobody, it appears, is interested in taking Ballet Dancing for Underdeveloped Youth or the Know Your Apostrophes Course!::! But worse is to follow and as the AEO seeks refuge in the furthest corner of the bed, he has the most awful premonition...Someone is about to play the Orange card...

## WHO'S CALLING?

Then the phones start, ringing, ringing, urgent, insistent, demanding an answer. Reluctantly, the AEO lifts the receiver. The caller is just enquiring and quickly the conversation deteriorates:

**CALLER:** What night do I enrol,

**AEO:** The night of the class.

**CALLER:** What night is the class?

**AEO:** Tuesday.

**CALLER:** So I enrol Tuesday?

**AEO:** Yes.

**CALLER:** What time Tuesday?

**AEO:** 7.30.

**CALLER:** Half seven. If I can't come Tuesday, will Monday do?

**AEO:** Can I send you a brochure?

**CALLER:** No, no. I have one here in front of me.

**AEO:** Well, it gives all the details there.

**CALLER:** I know, just checkin.

**Try line 2.** This time the enquiry is about the Upholstery class. Will it be the same teacher as last year? Should I bring my own chair the first night? Will we be doing tworls this year? Doing what? Tworls, you know, the thingies on the arms and legs? Are you sure it's the same teacher? Yes it's upholstery and the AEO is resisting the temptation to tell the caller to GET STUFFED.

**Try line 3.** Do you know where I could do a course in Basic Aviation? The AEO strikes back — You want to learn to fly? Yes. Like a pilot project? Yes. Brrr, Brrr Let it ring. But the assistants are in on the act. Excuse me, there's a lady here who wants to know if she should bring her own bottles for the winemaking....and what do you need to bring for 'Know your Car'....and could you move the Yoga class upstairs, there's a strange man at the window and the blinds don't roll ...and the Super Gas in Room 6 is making a funny noise...and the husband and the wife who were looking for the three refunds last year are here again and...

## **RETURN TO FORM**

The nightmare intensifies. The RR's are coming. First, the heavy menacing drone of the CRI's, returns by Friday, returns by Friday. Then the bombers, the RR II's, and as they come fluttering down as welcome as napalm, the terrified AEO takes refuge in his newly-designed nuclear fallout desk, totally insecure in the knowledge that even as he trembles, they are just now planning the monstrous RR IV.

Paranoia is setting in. The AEO slumps, helpless, disheartened, brutalised. He hasn't felt as threatened since the night he was out late and had to drive home on the correct side of the Swords dual carriageway. Commencement forms, receipt books, salary claim forms, LTA forms are piling up around him...

## **THAT SHRINKING FEELING**

He is back on the couch and the teacher from the Psychiatry for Beginners class rushes to the scene. Quickly she assures the AEO that he is not going mad. The AEO is still terribly upset but the part-time teacher reassures him, partly...“You are not going mad — just keep repeating ‘I am not going mad, I am not going mad’”. Fifty times. That's good, that's better. 48, 49, 50. Finally, calm returns. All is well as realisation dawns....I am not going mad, I am mad, I'm an AEO.

## **AD HOCK.**

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The author uses his pen name *Ad Hock* because he does not wish his real name, *Noah Carr*, to be known. This is because he was once arrested and charged with breaking and entering a *Personal Development Course for Women* under false pretences. He was the first recipient of the *Community Service Order* and as a result spent seven years hard labour as an *AEO* for *Rockall*.

# Reflections on “Lifelong Learning”

## THE COMMISSION REPORT ON ADULT EDUCATION

BY  
D.G. IRVINE

IN his foreword to the Report, the Chairman of the Commission epitomises the whole thrust of the Report when he states “this Report is not about night classes, it is about adult learning”. Since the publication of the Murray Report in 1973, there have been very few developments in adult education, with the notable exception of the appointment of Adult Education Organisers, in spite of many significant social changes affecting the general fabric of Irish life.

The Murphy report responded positively to the priority need expressed in the majority of submissions it received, i.e. that the nature and function of adult education be examined in detail. In so doing, it sowed the seeds of future rationalisation and planning in adult education and provided the basis for many of the recommendations put forward by the Kenny Commission.

‘Lifelong Learning’ is a welcome assessment of the role of adult education in the Ireland of the mid-eighties and subsequently, coupled with an examination of the context (social, economic and educational) within which that role is to be exercised. It outlines what is being done, what is not being done and what ought to be done regarding the development of adults in this country. A concept of adult development, more comprehensive than those previously advocated, is outlined, which takes into account a diversity of content, forms of provision, methods and clientele. Numerous defects in the present system are outlined and, based on an overview of the major trends in Irish society, a plan for the development of adult education is presented. Throughout the Report, the urgency of institutional commitment to such provision is also highlighted.

There are, however, some imperfections in the Report. One might have expected a more thorough analysis of the major inequalities in Irish society together with a clear definition of the role of adult education regarding such issues as poverty and unemployment. Neither does the Commission set any real priorities other than listing a large number of recommendations. This is in sharp contrast to the Murphy Report where

we find statements like—"the greatest single need of adult education in Ireland to-day, is a definite system, framework or organisation within which it can function, develop and give satisfaction" (4.1.4.). Other short-comings in the Commission's Report centre on the lack of any appraisal or critique of the agencies of adult education; the timing of the main survey (mid-Summer); the small number of participants (current or past) identified by the survey (only over 200) on which to base findings; the 'leading' nature and possible ambiguity of some of the questions contained in the main survey, e.g. the request to respond to the statement that "education is important for its own sake" (5.2.).

## **ACHIEVING LIFELONG LEARNING**

It is interesting to note that, even though the title of the Report is 'Lifelong Learning', all of the main headings in the Report refer to 'adult education'. Lifelong learning/education is a much more comprehensive concept than that of 'adult education' and much more in tune with the Commission's thinking on the very complex and diverse nature of adult development. In theory, lifelong learning/education is most appealing, questioning as it does the foolishness and indeed the impossibility of attempting to compress the education one needs throughout life into the few early years. The Commission is well aware that lifelong learning/education as a process is far from being realised in practice.

The recommendation, that approaches and methods which can be used by adults, be developed at all levels of education, is possibly one of the most significant points made in the whole Report. It suggests that the problems associated with the marginality and the low status of adult education can only be tackled adequately if all agencies of socialisation are geared to co-operate in the development of persons throughout the life-span. Almost all of the impediments to the development of adult education (11.4.) result either directly or indirectly from the status ascribed by society to adult education.

For the process of lifelong learning/education to become more attainable in reality, the seeds must be sown in the home and in the school. Emphasis must be placed on the fact that only initial learning, which is quite inadequate for life, takes place in the school. Guidance and counselling about education after school must become part of the curriculum at all levels of full-time education so that no person will leave school with the idea that learning has now ceased.

Education about learning after school should also form an integral part of all teacher-training programmes (Recommendation 23), if teachers are to play their parts in moving towards the goal of

lifelong learning for everyone. Many schools to-day invite members of the various professions and trades to talk to their students. How many schools invite the Adult Education Organiser to address the students concerning their learning needs in adult life and the services available to them?

The rather haphazard and piece-meal development of adult education in Ireland is highlighted in Section II. No coherent policy or plan for adult education exists, in spite of the recommendations of the Murphy Report in 1973. Granted, some developments have occurred in recent years (11.3) but these are not part of any overall or cohesive policy. Major impediments to the development of adult education, based on submissions received by the Commission, are seen as related to this lack of any long-term policy, to the absence of cohesiveness in the various approaches to the education of adults and to the apparent disinterestedness of Government in adult education. Adult education may not be seen as a priority sector in education to-day, but it seems very likely that it will become one in the very near future.

## **ORGANISERS**

The findings of the Commission regarding attitudes to and involvement in adult education have much to tell us about aspects of the provision of educational facilities for adults. In spite of the emphasis on needs and their assessment (I, III.6), it is true to say, that in this country, programmes in adult education often fit the administrator's pattern more closely than they do the learner's need. Tutor availability and the existence of suitable accommodation more often determine the type of programme which is offered, than any assessment of needs in a locality. The status and role of the Adult Education Organisers are relevant in this context. The Report mentions the status and remuneration of these Organisers, the contrast between their wide-ranging brief and the resources available to them, and the lack of independence and uncertainty of role on the part of adult-education sub-committees, as constituting major impediments to the development of adult education (11.4). It would seem that even though little is given to the Organisers, much is expected of them. It would also seem that the perception which Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees have of adult education is of significance. Where reasonable support in both professional and financial terms, is forthcoming from higher officers, the provision of educational facilities for adults is improved and extended. Sometimes, it is not only the general public which ascribes a low status to adult education, such ascription is also true of officialdom.

The spirit and practice of community education in the true sense

of this term is much more in evidence in the work of the Adult Education Organisers than it is in the provision of general educational facilities. Unlike full-time education, adult education is regarded and treated as a real two-way process between the providers and the recipients of the service. Through the Adult Education Organisers, the community, which is more often than not left on the periphery regarding general education, is able to shape and mould the service to be provided. Despite limited resources and the non existence of a facilitating structure, the Adult Education Organiser is a mediator, who strives to match the expressed needs of people "out there" with the services which are available. The professionalism demanded by such a role requires that opportunities for development and in-service training be made available immediately to all Organisers.

The survey findings regarding knowledge and awareness of adult education on the part of the general population (11.5.7 and 5.8) contain a very clear message about the hiddenness or the lack of visibility of adult education for a very large number of people. When so many of those questioned thought that courses cost about three times more than they actually do; when 16% thought that no courses were available in their area; when nearly a quarter of those questioned would not know where to get information about courses, further serious questions must be asked about our communication procedures in adult education. If only about 8 per cent of the sample relied on newspapers for information about courses, are we over-reliant on this medium for advertising and promotion? Better marketing, which would include all the necessary information about courses, must be part of our professionalism in adult education. How many of us have heard the comment from an adult member of a particular course—"Had I known what I was letting myself in for, I would not have enrolled"? Adults have a right to know beforehand, not just curricular details but also entry requirements and general course demands. So too, some flexibility must be built into courses for adults, whereby they may participate in decisions about course format and content. Adult education must always remain a process, something dynamic and evolving and not become like formal full-time education provision which is, more often than not, something static.

## **FUNDING**

The resources which the Report recommends for adult education are too meagre. Four million pounds are spent annually by the V.E.C.'s on adult education and the Commission suggests that this should be increased initially by less than two million pounds. Out of total national expenditure on education (nearly £1,000m), this

represents less than one-half of one per cent (0.5%) spent annually on adult education. This imbalance between the 99.95% spent on less than one-third of the population and the 0.5% allocated to more than one-third of the population, who are potential consumers of adult education, is very striking. The priority or estimate on value placed on one sector at the expense of another can also be illustrated by the fact that approximately £20 per annum is the average spent on literacy tuition for an adult (N.A.L.A. 1982) while the cost for certain third level students is estimated in thousands of pounds. Hardpressed financially the Government may be, but surely the allocation of one-half penny to adult education for every pound spent on education is not merely an indication of where adult education is placed on the hierarchy of values, but an indictment of the lack of real concern for the development of the adult population.

Trends in participation identified by the Commission highlight the consequences of imposing a policy of self-financing programmes on statutory providers of adult education. Some courses can be self-financing without any question of discrimination. Special group needs, however, often dictate that subsidization is necessary if people are not to be deprived of what is their due because of inability to pay market prices. Fees on a graded scale, even courses rated at zero fees, ought to be part and parcel of any programme in adult education, if discrimination or inequality of access are to be avoided. Another related question, is whether elements of discrimination exist for the quarter of a million Irish adults who are unemployed and for whom penalties are applicable to the benefit received, if they participate in education. Surely this is a short-sighted policy, if not discriminatory, in the sense that the majority are not voluntarily unemployed and participation in education could be the means whereby they would again be employed. The allocation of separate funds within the V.E.C. budget or distinct from it, to be used at the discretion of the adult education board, would reduce many of the barriers to participation and improve and make more relevant, provision at local level.

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# Adult Education And Secondary Schools

## INNOVATION OR INERTIA?

TONY DOWNES

SCHOOL based adult education provision in this country has been almost totally identified to date with schools in the Vocational and Community / Comprehensive sectors. These schools have been involved in adult education, not necessarily because of an innate commitment to promoting adult learning, but rather because they are mandated, either by statute or by charter to be so committed. No such mandate exists for Secondary 'private' schools, with predictable results vis-a-vis adult education.

The founders of the religious orders which control secondary schools in this country did not derive their pioneering zeal by way of statutory mandate (whatever about their struggles to achieve episcopal sanction for their efforts!) They were, rather, dynamic and often singularly clear-sighted idealists and were certainly not the kind of people to balk at mere economic obstacles to the realisation of their vision. It is surely not naive to assume that their sons and daughters of today are no less visionary, idealistic and dedicated.

It might be asked whether the teaching Orders' present commitment to education confined to early life, is an adequate response to contemporary insights into the concept of Lifelong Learning or Continuing Education. The purpose of this brief paper is to describe one attempt in a secondary school setting to respond to a local community effort to facilitate adult learning opportunities for its members. Perhaps it may be useful in illustrating both the possibility and the essential fragility of such an undertaking.

### THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The community in question — located in the North-Eastern Dublin suburb of Raheny — was typical of many developing communities. Like most newly developing areas, the emerging and daily growing community was characterised by a large influx of newly weds and young parents moving into local authority and private housing estates which manifested the familiar ravages of 'developers' still at work in the area. Community infrastructure was equally inchoate as revealed by pre-fab school buildings, temporary churches, skeletal

(and often mobile) shopping facilities and unsatisfactory transport disservices.

In response to this of affairs, 'Tenants' and Residents' Associations gradually began to form to deal with these matters through the appropriate agencies and authorities. Among other community concerns was the need to ensure an adequate allocation of school sites and so an Educational Development Committee was formed, representing various community groups to negotiate with a major developer in the area. When this objective of the Committee was achieved in 1971, a number of members began to look at other educational needs and decided to establish an Adult Education Committee. The aims of the latter were: to provide a positive alternative outlet to watching T.V. for the community; to offer a hopefully more stimulating and creative opportunity for social and educational development within the community than the various parish bingo sessions could provide. This Committee was formed in 1972, and disbanded in 1980.

## **BEGINNINGS**

Having decided to offer an evening programme of adult education, the Committee's first task was to seek suitable premises. The Principal of the local Secondary School was approached with a proposal to this effect. His response was enthusiastic, supportive and positive. Being anxious to encourage Community use of the school as much as possible, he offered to accommodate the courses in the school free of charge for the first two years to give the project an opportunity to establish itself on a firm footing.

Encouraged by such support, the Committee produced a six page roneoed programme of courses which was distributed to over 5,000 houses through its contacts in local Tenants' and Residents' Associations as well as through local schools and shops. Enrolment details were also publicised in community newsletters and church notices. The first programme offered 10 courses, the last 28! As the Committee gained more experience, the publicity became more professional and extended to meet the ever growing population within and around the catchment area. Nevertheless, the basic networking through local Community Associations remained unchanged. After the first two years the programmes had become such an established feature of life in the community that the Chairperson's phone was frequently hopping before the end of August with enquiries about planned courses before the programmes had been distributed.

Enrolments were carried out entirely by Committee members and some urgently conscripted 'volunteers.' An information desk was manned each enrolment session by a well-briefed Committee

member, fees were collected, receipts given and moneys lodged by other members. After enrolments had ended, the usual hassle of attempting to transfer students whose classes did not form to classes which would form if they agreed to transfer was the responsibility of the Chairperson assisted by at least one other Committee member. At the same time, suitable teachers had to be sought out, interviewed and appointed. In 1972, five classes formed with an average enrolment of 20 students per class.

In 1979, the number of classes formed was seventeen with an average enrolment of 25 per class. Thus, over the seven year lifespan of the Committee, enrolments grew from 100 to approximately 425 — a creditable achievement, by any standards, for an entirely voluntary Committee.

Teachers recruited and employed by the Committee were mainly those employed in local schools or qualified members of the local community. Rates of pay were equivalent to those operating in the Vocational / Community / Comprehensive School sectors and were payable usually monthly by the Treasurer. Over the years, close co-operative links were established with the local Principals of other second-level schools, who were always willing to share their perience and sometimes their resources e.g. teaching hardware and part-time teacher panel — with Committee members. Similar links were also established with other educational agencies, such as Alliance Francaise and the Dublin Institute of Adult Education.

Classes operated from Mondays to Thursdays each term and Committee members were rostered to open and close the school and to ensure that specific facilities for specific teachers were to hand. As the service developed, the Committee was able to purchase teaching aids not available in the school, pay a gratuity to the school caretaker who was then glad to open up the school nightly, set up the classrooms and lock up afterwards. The Committee, in later years, was also able to pay an annually negotiated sum to cover light, heat and room rent costs to the school principal.

In order to ensure that classrooms were left in the same condition and arrangement suitable for the day school teachers and thus head off any complaints in this matter, the Committee established a mechanism of communication with the principal from the outset to ensure that any complaints from teachers would be dealt with promptly. The Committee at the beginning of each term sought and received the co-operation of both part-time teachers and adult students in leaving the classrooms in the condition in which they were received before the evening classes commenced. As a result, only one complaint was received from one teacher in the day school during seven years. It is also interesting to note that vandalism to the school was minimal while it was continually open to community use.

## FINALE

The committee's endeavours and achievements came to an abrupt end in 1980 — exactly one year after the school principal was transferred to duties elsewhere by his superiors. His successor showed little interest or enthusiasm for opening his school at night to provide adult education opportunities for the community at large. Having agreed with committee representatives before the summer holidays in 1980 to continue facilitating its work — the committee prepared its programme for printing as usual and in mid-August returned to discuss its details with him. Apparently during the summer months, he had changed his mind, indicating his preference for adult education directed at parents of school students only.

He pointed to increased fuel costs and the impending opening of a community school in the next parish as the reasons for withdrawing access to his school from the Committee, which he then declared as his decision. The Committee — having no prospect of alternative accommodation for such numbers in the general area and faced with its essential powerlessness in the matter — set its affair in order and disbanded.

From the foregoing, it is clear that even in the absence of a statutory mandate and the supports this implies, it is possible for secondary schools to become involved in promoting adult learning. It is equally clear that if such a possibility is to be actualised the pivotal role of secondary school principals is the determining factor. Whether secondary schools are to become significantly involved in adult education or not will be determined by the contrasting leadership styles outlined above. If there are principals who are open to and interested in promoting adult learning opportunities in their communities — principals who perceive their schools as a community resource not confined exclusively to the day time education of adolescents, then such initiatives can and will happen. Evidence to date would seem to indicate that most secondary school principals are locked into and perpetuate the more traditional and closed concept of 'private' secondary school — hence nothing much is happening. Whether this latter approach will and should continue to dominate is both the challenge and opportunity confronting adult educators and secondary school principals.

### TONY DOWNES.

*TONY DOWNES is an Adult Education Organiser in Co. Dublin and Director of the Blanchardstown Resource and Continuing Education Centre.*

# Self Directed Learning

BRID SPAIN

THE METHOD of Self-Directed Learning as used by Leixlip Women's Studies Group evolved from — 1. A realisation of how learning can take place in a group without teacher/pupil structure. 2. A dissatisfaction with the formal schooling system being currently offered to adult students. Our beginnings in Leixlip were in a small reading group. A few enthusiastic booklovers began to meet regularly to discuss what we had read or were reading. For the first two years, the format was very simple. One member would choose an author or a particular book and we would go away and read. We began to realise that we were not just reading for pleasure, but as a group that we were learning from each other. Each member would have different opinions or views on the book. If we were reading at home, and alone, only one view of the book would be seen. With this realisation we began to think of the coming year. We chose Joyce's *Ulysses*, a book that many of us had shied away from because of its supposed difficulty. We pooled reference books, articles etc. and used our local library. At all times we tried to use resources that were readily available to us, so that no great expense was incurred by any one person. We felt this was very important, as we were all stay-at-home mothers with no independent income.

From that year we learned a great deal. Chiefly it was the joy of learning together, at our own pace and direction. We had chosen the subject to be studied, the time and place of our meetings, and as a member of a small group we felt a responsibility to each other to do the reading and research required. From these experiences The Leixlip Women's Group was formed.

## LEIXLIP WOMEN'S GROUP

Into the women's group we brought what we had learned from the reading group. We wanted it to be a place where women could share their experiences and views, where we could learn about ourselves and other women. Our beginnings were small, but now, more than a year later, it is well established. We meet weekly and discuss a previously chosen topic. One or two members will have researched or thought about the subject during the previous week. Self-directed learning is at its best in this group. Through discussion, research and shared knowledge, we have begun to understand ourselves and other women. Through examining the structures and institutions of

our society past and present, we have come to see the various roles allotted to women.

It is only with this realisation that we can begin to work towards change. There are many skills to be gained in such a group, the confidence to speak publicly, to express one's feelings, and an ability to recognise the repressive measures which women universally have to cope with. Recently we have started a small library in an attempt to pool our resources. It consists mainly of articles, pamphlets and books that might not otherwise be readily available. We hope in the future to enlarge our stock, funds permitting.

## **ADULT EDUCATION**

During the first year one of the subjects discussed was Adult Education. The group was generally dissatisfied with what was on offer locally. In Leixlip there are a range of classes at night time only, on offer. For many the time was unsuitable, others felt that there was nothing relevant to their needs. Of the many who had taken classes in the past, most felt that the method of giving the class, and the content were unsatisfactory. A few of us decided that we would try and get some day-time classes / courses going, with a creche provided so that women housebound with small children could attend. We spent many months discussing what we wanted. Some of the main feelings to emerge were that we wanted the new group to be as self reliant as possible, to use our own resources, and above all we wanted the group to explore and use the self-directed method of learning. We decided that this group should have a separate identity as distinct from the women's group, so the Leixlip Women's Studies Group came into existence.

## **LEIXLIP WOMEN'S STUDIES**

Leixlip Women's Studies was set up in September, '84. Our first daytime course was self-directed. We chose to study a period in Irish history, 1890-1937, with particular emphasis on the role of women. We decided not to employ a tutor because after our experience in the reading group, we felt we could manage alone. However, we did talk to a local history teacher, whom we had heard lecturing on women in Irish history and he helped and advised us in the initial planning of our course. There is a lot of material available for original research i.e. newspapers and periodicals of the period. This year we have not managed to cover that area, but the course will continue next year and some of this type of work may be possible.

We have found the course stimulating and enjoyable. While there

is a certain discipline in the reading, yet we choose our own pace and direction. We each bought or borrowed some basic texts, plus one specialised book. We share these, thus keeping expenses to a minimum. The fact that the history group was small ensured that there was plenty of time for each person to speak. Next year the group will be larger, but we intend breaking into separate sections, which will look at different events / themes in the same period. Now that we have almost reached the end of the course, we are quite happy with the way it went.

Our second morning class is Creative Writing. We did employ a tutor for this course as nobody in the group had any particular skill or knowledge of writing or publishing. As a group we intend to publish a selection of our work locally.

Plans are being made for next year. Some of our new courses will need a tutor e.g. a Women's Art Group. Others, like an Irish Discussion Group and Women's Studies we may be able to run ourselves. Each session of the latter will cover an issue relevant to womens' lives e.g. women and health, motherhood and contraception. It will be a group of women reaching out to share their knowledge and experiences with other women. We hope this course will be another beginning, a further step in using self-directed learning methods.

## THE FUTURE

The future for the Leixlip groups looks bright. As long as we continue to use our own resources, we will continue to grow. The possibilities are endless. Even though the Leixlip Group appears to have chosen academic subjects i.e. Literature and History, we are open minded for the future. What we have done and are doing is simply sharing our skills and ideas without direction. The formal system has failed so many in the past and appears at times to be totally inadequate for adult students. We have found a way of learning that suits our particular needs. It is flexible in that as a group we can choose the time that suits us. We can plan the content and method of our courses, so that our expectations may be met. We can also as a group decide to continue and develop a course, an option that is rarely open to students in formal adult education classes. We hope we will continue to develop by defining our needs as a group, and working out ways to fulfil them.

On a wider scale, perhaps in the future, we may see groups like ours gaining degrees through a credit system. The possibility, however, seems remote. To gain a degree in Ireland today demands a large amount of money and an ability to attend an institution full-time. When groups like ours are more numerous, perhaps the educational establishment may be forced to open their gates to allow

for a more flexible system, that takes into account the needs and lifestyles of all the people.

This article is a personal view of the Leixlip groups and does not claim to represent the groups' views.

### **BRID SPAIN, 1985.**

*BRID SPAIN is the mother of three children. Her main interests are reading and the women's movement. She is involved in a number of women's groups, especially the Self-Directed Learning Group as described above. She is in the process of seeking access to Maynooth as a mature student.*

# Access to Third Level Education

MAUREEN BASSETT

I PROPOSE in this article to concentrate on access to degree programmes or other long courses leading to a higher education qualification. This is not to invalidate the need for, or worth of, other forms of participation at third level e.g. through extra-mural provision. However, in recent years there has been increasing interest in the possibilities for adults to complete such programmes and I would like to clarify some of the issues involved.

## **SHOULD ADULT EDUCATION PROVIDERS BE CONCERNED WITH ACCESS TO THIRD LEVEL?**

Some Adult Education students and organisers often argue that focussing attention on access to third level is unrealistic, in the light of the lack of access for adults to even basic education, due to the totally inadequate provision in this country. However I would argue that concern with access to one level need not, or indeed should not, preclude concern with access to all levels. Many adults who initially participate at a basic level later aspire to other levels. However these aspirations are rarely met due to the many barriers to participation which exist. I will discuss these later.

Also it has to be recognised that universities and other third level institutions accredit their graduates with qualifications which allow access to particular spheres of employment. Without these qualifications, people seeking access to such areas are automatically debarred.

Recent research has shown that our third level institutions continue to be extremely elitist with certain social classes enjoying a vastly disproportionate representation. Whilst it is not suggested that greater participation by adults would of itself redress the imbalance, it could at least contribute in this area.

It is also argued that third level institutions should be avoided as they are such centres of orthodoxy and bureaucracy. However the fact that they are so, at present, does not mean that they must or should remain so. A much greater participation by adults, particularly from the social groups and classes traditionally excluded could play a major part in forcing such institutions to change. The nature of the "officially sanctioned" knowledge which they impart could be questioned with, for example, the absence of a working

class or womens perspective being challenged. At present, even with the small numbers involved, "mature students" are much more likely to question the nature of the knowledge being imparted. Much greater numbers could escalate this challenge. Also participation by more adults, with their particular needs, could force the institutions to change the often flexible nature of structuring and time-tabling courses.

## **PARTICIPATION — THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Compared to other countries, we have an abysmally low rate of participation by adults in third level institutions. Although figures referred to below are taken from a study of entrants to these institutions in 1980, there is little reason to believe that there has been any substantial increase in recent years. The fact that University College Dublin, in 1984, did introduce a positive programme to facilitate participation by adults will have improved the situation somewhat.

In 1980, of 13,360 new entrants to Higher Education establishments, only 487 or 3.6% were over 22 years of age. Perhaps a more striking statistic is the fact that of this 487, 302 were between the ages of 22 and 25; thus leaving a mere 185 people aged 25 or over or 1.3% of all new entrants. By any standards, this situation could not be considered as satisfactory. It would be interesting to know how many of those who did enter, did so without the usual qualifications i.e. points based on leaving certificate results. It would also be interesting to know the social class background of these entrants and what proportion of them were male/female.

If we compare these figures with participation rates for the United Kingdom, it immediately becomes obvious how far behind we are. In 1982, mature students represented almost a third of all new entrants to degree level courses in the Polytechnics and other public sector colleges (30.5%) whilst they represented 12% of new entrants to the Universities<sup>2</sup>. The U.K. is by no means in the lead in this area, with such countries as Sweden and Yugoslavia having far higher participation rates, reflecting their policy of promoting recurrent or life long learning.

## **MAIN OBSTACLES TO PARTICIPATION IN IRELAND**

Perhaps the single greatest barrier to participation is that of finance or the lack of it. The third level grant scheme as it is now structured discriminates against mature students, based as it is on honours gained in the Leaving Certificate examination. The fact that application for a grant has to be made within two years of sitting the examination is an obvious stumbling block for most adults. However,

more serious is the fact that, whilst some third level institutions are prepared to accept "mature" students without leaving certificate qualification, this fact is not recognised by the Department of Education in its structuring of the grants scheme. The fact that more than a third of the present adult population left school on or before the age of 14 testifies to the degree of discrimination in operation.

Another way in which more adults could be facilitated to participate would be through the medium of paid educational leave. However, successive Irish governments have failed to ratify the ILO convention 140 which deals with provision for paid leave. Also the fact that people are debarred from continuing to claim social welfare benefits while engaged in study, inhibits the level of participation.

Whilst the last two mentioned possibilities are important and need to be addressed, they should not be seen as solving the problem of financial constraints, as they would in no way assist those women who have left paid employment to care for children. Therefore there is a need for a range of options which would facilitate the optimum number of adults.

## **FULL-TIME?**

Linked to the problem of financial constraints is the fact that most degree or other higher education courses are structured in such a way as to be deemed full-time. For most people in paid employment, the prospect of giving up such employment for a period of three to four years is simply not tenable. Even if the grant scheme was revamped to allow more adults to apply, the fact is that the level of grant assistance is so low that it would not permit most adults (particularly those with family responsibilities) to avail of such grants. Also in the present situation of high unemployment, most people would be extremely reluctant to leave a job in order to attend a third level institution. Therefore, there is a need for a restructuring of such courses to allow people to combine part-time work and/or family responsibilities with part-time study. The introduction of modular schemes such as exist in other countries would be an important step forward in this regard.

## **OUTREACH: EXTENSION: DISTANCE EDUCATION**

The provision of an extension or "outreach" programme is another way in which access to third level could be widened. These programmes could be designed with the particular needs of adults in mind, taking into account time constraints imposed by family responsibilities and/or the need to continue in paid employment. It would also help overcome location difficulties, which particularly

affect those living outside the major centres of population. The development of distance education on the lines of the Open University is an obvious way of widening access for adults. There are some developments in this regard being offered by the N.I.H.E. in Glasnevin.

## **IDEOLOGICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS**

Because of the elitist nature of third level institutions, many adults feel that they have no right to aspire to such establishments. For the few who do, at present, brave the odds, it can often be a traumatic experience. Also, while, in the main, it is felt that mature students do well in the various courses which they pursue many do, particularly in the initial stages, experience problems in terms of study techniques, note-taking, essay writing and tackling examinations. This fact needs to be recognised by the authorities in these institutions and assistance should be made available. Also the provision of foundation courses for those adults intending to pursue degree programmes should be explored. An exaggerated idea of the intellectual capabilities of the bulk of the student population can often lead to feelings of inadequacy. This is often intensified if a mature student has a particular area within his/her course of study in which he/she feels particularly weak. Once again college authorities and lecturers need to be sensitive to these feelings and give practical assistance and reassurance where necessary.

## **LACK OF INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING**

At present, there is a serious lack of information as to what options are available for adults who wish to attend a third level institution. There is a need for practical information on what courses are available, how to go about applying and the selection criteria involved. There is also a need for counselling to assist adults in choosing the courses best suited to their needs, interests and capabilities. This could reduce the numbers who end up on the "wrong" courses with the resulting anxiety, disappointment and sometimes failure or "drop-out" involved. It is important in this regard that providers and organisers of second level adult education make themselves aware of the situation regarding third level as it pertains to adults.

## **HOW MANY PLACES?**

At present some institutions have a positive policy regarding the allocation of places to "mature" students and accept these students on grounds other than the usual matriculation standards. It is

essential that all institutions develop such a policy and that as far as possible, there should be standardisation between institutions regarding age limits, selection criteria etc. Those institutions which already have such a policy cannot afford to be complacent. They must keep this policy under review and assess ways in which more places can be allocated to mature students.

## CONCLUSION

Access for adults to third level education cannot be discussed in isolation. It must be developed as part of a coherent policy on Adult Education, which has as its aim the provision of opportunities for recurrent or life long learning. Whilst the report on Lifelong Learning addresses the problem of access to third level and makes recommendations, many of which are similar to those suggested in this article, it does not pay sufficient attention to the financial constraints which exist. Most of the suggestions put forward in this article are already in operation in other countries e.g. grant schemes which facilitate adult participation, paid educational leave, modular systems, extension services, the provision of information and counselling services. Research needs to be done into how these measures operate elsewhere and how they can be best introduced into this country.

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*MAUREEN BASSETT, who is married with one child, left her employment at age 30 to become a mature student in Trinity College, Dublin. She graduated in June 1984 with an honours degree in English Literature and Sociology. While at Trinity, she was instrumental in founding the Mature Students' Society and was chairperson of the society. Since finishing college, she has become involved in Adult Education, mainly by teaching Social Studies through St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, both in the Dublin area and also in Longford and Newbridge. At present, she is working in Kells on an AnCO community survey.*

# Adult Literacy

KATHLEEN FORDE

REFLECT for a moment on this question: "Would you be where you are today if you had to depend on the charity of voluntary tutors to teach you to read and write?". Yet this is the position of 100,000 adults with inadequate literacy skills to cope with the reading and writing demands of life in present day Ireland. More than 3,000 of these adults live in Dublin's Inner City, and less than one quarter of them have attended Literacy or Basic English classes, according to a recent survey done by the Curriculum Development Unit of the City of Dublin VEC "Adult Literacy: A Survey of its Status in Dublin's Inner City."

Why do so many people have a literacy problem? As the problem is complex, so too are the reasons for it. In another report "Identifying Adults with Literacy Needs," also recently published by the Curriculum Development Unit, an attempt is made to deal with the "why" of illiteracy. "The reasons for failure to acquire literacy skills are multi-dimensional and in a society where illiteracy is not supposed to occur, where education is a universal provision, the bases of the early condition are very complex. As early physical, emotional and psychological conditions are all contributory factors, the school system can hardly be held exclusively responsible for this failure. However, the school system cannot deny its own responsibility for the development of basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy."

While in theory, educationalists acknowledge the decisive role of the family in a child's development, in practice hardly anything is done to involve that family, and in many cases to offer essential back-up services, especially in poorer areas, thereby wasting huge amounts of human and financial resources. A dual approach would make a significant improvement. In this respect it is encouraging to see the recent Report of the Commission on Adult Education.

LIFELONG LEARNING make the following recommendations on Basic Education:

*"Courses for adults in basic education — literacy,*

numeracy and coping skills — should be provided free of charge and the Government should accept that fees for certain other disadvantaged groups need to be waived in whole or in part”.

The Organisers of basic education (literacy, numeracy and coping skills) are not paid. This inhibits continuity in and development of these basic education services for adults and it should be reviewed as a matter of urgency by the Department of Education.

When will literacy become a right and not a privilege?

## **ADULT LITERACY: A SURVEY OF ITS STATUS IN DUBLIN'S INNER CITY.**

### **IDENTIFYING ADULTS WITH LITERACY NEEDS**

*ADULT EDUCATION* (Journal, Vol 57, No. 4)

THIS journal is published by The National Institute of Continuing Education which provides a means of consultation and co-operation between all the forces in adult continuing education. It also offers a service of information and advice on all relevant aspects; it conducts researches, surveys and enquiries; organises conferences and services and publishes material relevant to its field.

The journal provides an opportunity for administrators and practitioners, professional and voluntary, to exchange ideas and information about policy and action. It is also concerned with the development of all aspects of adult continuing education.

In the March 1985 issue, some of the topics discussed include “Wider Opportunities for Women,” “The St. Francis Unemployment Education Project” and “The Teaching of Politics in an Extra-Mural Context.” It provides relevant and stimulating articles on a wide range of issues in adult education. The journal costs £2.00 per issue or £6.50 for a postal subscription post free and is available from:

**The Editor,**

**19 E De Montfort St., Leicester, Le 1 7GE, England.**

## *Who Owns Ireland Who Owns You?*

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED AT, OR THOUGHT ABOUT, THE FACTS THAT:

- ★ THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND IS THE SECOND MOST POLICED STATE IN EUROPE — THE NORTH OF IRELAND BEING THE FIRST.

- ★ THE GOVERNMENT GIVES £5,000 TO SIMON COMMUNITY FOR CARE OF HOMELESS AND YET GIVES £89,000 TO PROVIDE SHELTER FOR DOGS.
- ★ IRELAND IMPORTS £12 MILLION WORTH OF FOREIGN POTATOES EVERY YEAR.
- ★ ONLY 14% OF THE FISH CAUGHT IN IRISH WATERS IS CAUGHT BY IRISH BOATS. 47% OF MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IN IRELAND IS FOREIGN OWNED.

**Who Owns Ireland Who Owns You?** is one of four publishing projects to be produced by the women participating on the ten month 'Women in Community Publishing Course.' This training course for eighteen unemployed women, jointly funded by AnCO (The Industrial Training Authority) and the European Social Fund, is the second to be designed and implemented by IFI — the external training agency. *Who Owns Ireland Who Owns You?* draws on the personal and collective experiences of the women involved in its production.

This book is an indispensable and handy reference book that will stimulate discussion and argument in any study group, classroom, living-room or pub. This book, containing a superb selection of cartoons and photographs and interspersed with highly original graphs, makes for fascinating reading. The only problem this book will present you with is the difficulty of arguing without it.

*Who Owns Ireland Who Owns You?* can be obtained from bookshops and newsagents throughout the country @ £3.95. 160 pages illustrated.

IFI's recently launched publishing imprint, Attic Press, will distribute *Who Owns Ireland Who Owns You?*

## “DID YOU KNOW?”

ERNIE SWEENEY went through the school system in Co. Mayo in the 1950s without being able to read and write. In this short autobiography, he describes what it was like to be in this kind of situation. "You just can't imagine what it is like not being able to read and write. You are cut off from everything." The National Adult Literacy Agency launched this book at its last AGM. It is designed for use by learner readers and is the first in a series that N.A.L.A. hopes to publish during 1985 in order to provide relevant Irish based materials for literacy work. "Did You Know?" by Ernie Sweeney is available from: National Adult Literacy Agency, 3 Mountjoy Sq., Dublin 1. (Tel. 01-743251)

## *“BY THE WAY DID I TELL YOU?”*

THIS book is a collection of articles, stories and poems written by people living on the north side of Dublin City. The pieces reflect a variety of personal experiences and emotions, as well as raising wider social and political issues. The book is as unique as the writers: adults who are taking a second chance at education. The reader will be touched by the poetry, and warmed by the stories of the now and the days gone by. It has been launched by the K.L.E.A.R. Publishing Group (Kilbarrack Local Education for Adult Renewal) and copies can be obtained from: Anne McGrath, 75 St. Brendan's Drive, Artane, Dublin 5. (Tel. 01-480890).

# BOOK REVIEW

## Adult Options: Three Million Opportunities

WHEN I first heard the title of this book with its "three million opportunities", I decided that it could not possibly refer to the adult education situation in Ireland, and I was right. It refers to the United Kingdom. But I was wrong in my interpretation of "opportunities." This book is about the three million or more unemployed people in the United Kingdom and about ways of enabling them to channel their talents and interests into creative methods of self-help programmes.

The prevailing attitude in the book is best expressed in its statement of aims by the Cornwall and Devon Unemployment Resource Network which believes that we are at a crossroads in social history, and that the premises on which we base our understanding of work, leisure, jobs and employment must be carefully examined in the light of changing times. We do not believe that "full employment" can be seen again in the old terms, and seek to develop and communicate attitudes to deal with the changes which we are all experiencing.

Who could disagree with such high ideals? Lip service comes easy. Many professional adult educators in Ireland today have opted to join forces with a bewildering variety of AnCO training schemes, YEA projects and assorted enterprises . . . the list is endless, and to what purpose? Could it be the assumption that people lack jobs because they lack training? Could it involve just a touch of political whitewash, such as reducing the numbers on the live register?

What about the quality of lives led by those on the "live" register? In this book, **Adult Options: Three Million Opportunities**, various contributors describe some exciting and creative projects in experience-based education for unemployed people, such as a skill-swap project in Devon, a drop-in centre in Kent, a School for Fools in Bristol and the Bakehouse Arts Centre. The book also contains several wide ranging chapters challenging traditional assumptions and methods of providing adult education, such as "the structures of adult education need bursting apart to include more incidental

learning . . . by osmosis rather than by filling up the pots," and fervently hoping that the water has turned into wine.

For anyone interested in the issue of unemployment, which is either acutely awful, or overflowing with potential, depending on how you view it, this book will provide both a stimulating and provocative challenge.

**Adult Options: Three Million Opportunities.**

Eds. Cann, Haughton & Melville, £4.95 sterling. Published by: The Weavers Press in association with the Educational Centres Association.

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