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*For Martin, colleague and friend,
former Chairperson of the
Adult Education Organisers
Association
who died so tragically
4th December 1986.*

Editorial Comment

Since our last edition, there have been some important developments in adult education. The ad hoc Adult Education Boards have begun to function and the Community Education and Literacy Fund has facilitated the introduction of a number of different and interesting projects across the country. We are grateful to Noel Dalton, the convivial and hard-working A.E.O. for Co. Kildare, who agreed to undertake the research necessary for a preliminary review of the Adult Education Boards.

The Education Opportunities School was another important development in that it represents an attempt by education authorities to end the scandalous situation where unemployed people are prevented from returning to study. Our report on the first year of the scheme from organisers and students who were involved in the pilot programmes is very encouraging but all pose the crucial question – will the scheme be continued?

And speaking of crucial questions, will 1988 prove to be crisis year for adult and community education? At the time of writing the signs are ominous, as drastic cut-backs begin to hit at the most vulnerable and under-resourced areas of literacy and adult basic education. We call on the new Minister for Education to ensure that her term of office will not be remembered as one where those who are most disadvantaged lost out – again. It would be a great tragedy if the work and effort and energies of so many fine people over the past number of years were now to be set at nought. And if it is a tragedy for those, what can we say about the situation of the students for whom the doors of learning were just beginning to open. Please, Minister!

Finally I am most grateful to my colleagues on the Editorial Board for their tremendous support and hard work over the past three years.

And remember, if you, the readers, feel like writing, then please do so.

Liam Bane, Editor.
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THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES SCHEME

The Educational Opportunities Scheme, originating from the Department of Social Welfare, set out, according to the then Minister Gemma Hussey's press release on the 18th of July 1986, to enable those who are in receipt of unemployment benefit or assistance for more than a year and who are over twenty-five years of age to pursue a one year, full-time education course without loss of benefit. It was envisaged that participants would follow a one year Leaving Certificate programme incorporating some elements of the V.P.T.P. course.

It was intended to pilot the scheme in three areas of the country: Donegal, Limerick City and Tallaght. In fact, the programme was run in two of these areas, Limerick City and Tallaght, and the Adult Education Organisers and some students who participated in the scheme in those areas have agreed to share with our readers their comments and observations at the end of the inaugural year of a most exciting and innovative development.

The Tallaght Experience

FRED GOULDING

On the 10th of June this year eleven adult students, along with about twenty others from the Tallaght area, sat the first Leaving Certificate paper of this year's examinations. For this eleven though, things were slightly different – for unlike their other fellow candidates who had attended their course for two hours or so per week – they had been attending school on a full-time, daily basis, five days per week for the school year. Not alone that, but being unemployed, they had been receiving their full, statutory social-welfare allowances while on the course.

The concept of providing courses for the unemployed is not new, although these have usually been exclusively of the vocational variety. The reality has been that for those on the dole being "available for work" has taken precedence over their attending a course of a purely academic nature. What distinguished the members of this group then from the rest of their unemployed peers was that they were participating in the Educational Opportunities Scheme being piloted in three areas of the country: Donegal, Limerick City, and Tallaght in Dublin. Tallaght, situated on the outskirts of Dublin, is the largest urban development in the country and has a population of some 70,000.

Recruitment

Recruitment would be carried out by the National Manpower Agency and the course in Tallaght conducted by the County Dublin V.E.C. The students, not being "available for work", would come off the live register and be paid their entitlements by the V.E.C. The cynic may be forgiven for concluding that this was yet another exercise in juggling the unemployment figures downward. However, considering that in Tallaght there were 5,400 people on the live register, the exercise did nothing to improve the unemployment statistics.

The Department of Social Welfare's own publicity leaflet (distributed to all those signing on in Tallaght) did little to help recruitment. Badly designed, it merely gave factual information (no attempt was made to make the scheme appear attractive) while carrying, in italics, the intimidatory warning "*If you do not finish the full course, you may not be allowed to go back on Unemployment Assistance/Benefit*". It thus achieved a unique effect in advertising of minimum encouragement coupled with negative undertones of future misfortunes. A strange method of encouraging those unsure of their own educational abilities or capabilities to embark on a hitherto untried, year-long scheme of undetermined content.

Deciding the Programme

For me, whose task it was to administer the scheme at local level, the usual sense of *deja vu* was emerging. Once again, no consultation had taken place with the only full-time professionals working at local level in the field of adult education – the Adult Education Organiser. Thus the Department of Education's documentation spoke of a Leaving Certificate programme only and of integrating adult students into existing classes in schools.

Nevertheless, in early November last, nine men and two women (this ratio, unusual in the adult education experience, reflects the proportion of men to women on the live register) signed off the live register and on to the new scheme. They ranged in age from twenty-six to early forties and in education from two who had previously sat the Leaving Certificate to most who had little or no second level schooling. All but two were married.

Initially, in the introductory sessions, questions focussed on social welfare entitlements, methods of payment, travel allowance (an admirable underlying feature of the course was that participants should not be at a loss by attending, so a travel allowance was paid to those who lived more than three miles from the centre), hours of attendance and subject choices. The eventual range of subjects was arrived at in consultation with the students. A core of four subjects to be taken in the Leaving was decided on – English, History, Mathematics, and Social and Scientific Home Economics. Along with these Art, Computer Studies, Irish, and Personal Development were to be slotted in as time allowed.

Back to School

So how then did the students adapt to the rigours of academic life? All reported on feeling under stress at having being so suddenly immersed in this new situation. Not only did their day not finish with the school bell but

they also had to tackle homework! Some who had successfully given up smoking were forced to revert to bad habits; others complained (albeit good humouredly) of not seeing their children for days due to the pressure of homework. It also became clear fairly early in the course that we had been over ambitious in our range of subjects given the short time available. Most had found Leaving Certificate Mathematics too difficult and so only four proceeded with this course, the rest concentrating on Group/Intermediate Mathematics – two of these students subsequently sat the Intermediate Mathematics examination. All realised the danger of spreading their attention too thinly over too many subjects and so an informal, self-imposed rationalisation process took place with most participants opting to concentrate on three Leaving Certificate subjects in addition to the other activities.

As the year progressed, tutors reported on significant changes within the group: people reading beyond the course, making their own discoveries in Mathematics, people who had previously regarded Shakespeare with more than a modicum of suspicion were rapidly becoming aficionados and moving on to fresh woods and pastures new in the shape of *Paradise Lost*; others had discovered a new creativity in the series of Art classes and were investigating commercial possibilities in silk-screen printing and glass etching. Two of the participants had even applied for entry to the University as mature students.

A Unique Experiment

On a personal level things had also changed for, although each member of the group was a rugged individualist, mutual support and encouragement was always in evidence and, on more than one occasion, pride was swallowed and personal prejudices (including my own) suppressed for the common good. All of us, students, tutors, and myself realised that we were involved in a unique experiment in Irish education and this knowledge bound us together so that the borders of professional and personal involvement became, if not completely blurred, somewhat indistinct. Humour (and it is hard to beat pure Dublin wit at its best), warmth and sincerity were other obvious characteristics of the group.

Is the Leaving Certificate relevant to the needs of the unemployed? Certainly the participants on this course were both realistic and experts when it came to assessing the job market and all agreed that while success in the Leaving was no passport to a job, participation in the course must surely make them more employable. As a frame of reference within which to work, the Leaving Certificate course also proved surprisingly effective, particularly in English, but less so in History and in Mathematics. Participants also spoke of an unexpected negative effect in their attending the course: that of under achievement due to the course being too short – they recommended that the course be taken over a two-year period.

A Relevant Programme

The Educational Opportunities Scheme has afforded me the opportunity to provide a relevant educational programme with the assurance of adequate funding for tutors, materials, and equipment, coupled with flexibility in its content and administration. As with almost all ventures in adult education, involvement in the programme was a learning experience for both participants and providers, and – here's the rub – will we be able to build upon what has been learned over the year, or will the scheme, still in its embryonic stage, be aborted?

How are we to measure the success of this scheme? By A's and B's in a Leaving Certificate examination? I think not. What has been achieved has been to alter the participants' fixation, to the exclusion of almost all other positive, creative and educational activities, on their state of "being unemployed". The scheme has given them: "friendship", "education", "confidence", "tolerance", "enjoyment" and has "diminished apathy" – their words, not mine.

The Educational Opportunities Scheme has proved itself to be progressive, enlightened, relevant, and, dare I say it, almost ahead of its time. It is capable of effecting such real, positive change in the lives of the unemployed who take part in it that not only should it be repeated in the pilot areas, but also extended to other areas of high unemployment.

Fred Goulding is Adult Education Organiser in Mid-West Co. Dublin, an area that includes Tallaght. He has been responsible for developments in adult literacy programmes, daytime education and education for the unemployed.

How I Hated Tuesdays

KENNETH MARTIN

Tuesday was the day it all began. How I hated Tuesdays. It was that day of the week that the depressing journey had to be made to 'sign on' at the local unemployment exchange in Tallaght. This particular morning in August, the floor of the 'dole office' was littered with leaflets. One particular leaflet caught my attention and, having picked it up, I read its contents. It offered the opportunity of further education under a new government scheme entitled the 'Adult Educational Opportunities Scheme'. I thought about it as the queue snaked its way around the four walls of the Labour and the idea began to appeal to me. I had always been an avid reader, probably the wrong books, but deep down I regretted not having stayed on at school when I was younger. Now the chance to return and pick up where I had left off presented itself.

I reread the leaflet and the only requirements necessary were that one must be over twenty-five years of age and have at least one year's experience of unemployment. I smiled ruefully to myself as I thought that this was one situation in which I was well qualified both in terms of age and unemployment experience. The leaflet stated that the basic remuneration was on a par with the dole allowance and that further information could be obtained through Manpower.

Having signed the assistance docket, thereby waiving my right to be included on the live register, I duly made my way up to Manpower.

Signing On

The Manpower Office was its usual hive of activity. The other two people there were either proof reading the few jobs on offer or were stunned by the lack of them as they never moved a muscle or blinked an eyelid when I entered. Being first on the queue, I didn't have to wait long before being attended to. I expressed my interest in the course and enquired as to when it would commence, its duration and what subjects were available. The man from Manpower, while not showing a lack of interest in the course, did not impress me with his amount of knowledge of the course itself.

I decided to put my name down for the course nevertheless and noticed that the man from Manpower was not too impressed either by my lack of academic qualifications and surfeit of years. My particulars having been taken down, he informed me I would be hearing from them if the pilot scheme ever got off the ground, as it depended on the interest shown by people like myself.

Making a Start

As the weeks passed by, thought of the educational scheme faded into obscurity. Finally in late October, a letter popped in the door informing me that the A.E.O.S. would commence the following week in Firhouse Community College. Panic set in. I now was between two minds as to whether I had made the right decision in applying for the course. I pondered the situation and wondered what advantages or disadvantages this course

would have to offer. I had always toyed with the idea of further education (toyed being the operative word) but had never done anything constructive about it. The fact was that when I'd attended one of these places of learning in my youth I thought out of it I'd never get. Now here I was, twenty-six years on, gradually accepting the fact that education was a priority if one hoped to achieve gainful employment in the future.

The morning finally arrived to attend the course. I apprehensively made my way to Firhouse not knowing what to expect. My thoughts along the way were about what the other students and teachers would be like. Would the other students have high expectations of the course, or would they be just like me going along to see what it was all about? Would the female teacher be of the prudish prim schoolmistress type and the male teachers like fusty old codgers whom I'd experienced a long time ago. I need not have worried on any account. The students were just ordinary unemployed adults seeking something better for themselves and just as apprehensive as myself, whilst the teachers were the opposite of my preconceived notions and probably facing a new experience themselves.

The local Tallaght A.E.O. gave us a brief rundown on the course which lasted most of the morning. During the talk he told us not to get 'hyper' about examinations as the main objective of the course was that we should gain some lasting benefit from it and prepare ourselves to face up to future challenges. The choice of Leaving Cert. subjects on offer were English, History, Mathematics and Home Economics. Other subjects, purely to broaden the mind, included computer studies, art and self-development training. The class consisted of eleven students, and as we chatted together during the lunch break, it became obvious that we all had a different standard of education and aspired to different goals. We varied from Primary Cert. level to Leaving Cert. level and our ages ranged from twenty-six to forty-six years of age. Because the group was so varied and from different walks of life, the course had to be changed eventually to consider each individual's needs. Students had to find their own level and with the assistance of the teachers decided on which course of study would be more suitable for them.

Making History

That same afternoon saw the arrival of our History and English tutor (one and the same person) who quickly shattered any illusions I had as to the existence of Fionn Mac Cumhaill, St. Patrick and King Brian Boru's participation at the Battle of Clontarf. In History, all we would be dealing with were historical facts. This was later to change and we were required to consider, treat of, assess and discuss these facts. In English, Poetry, drama and fiction, these terms also applied but included opinions based on form, style, language, imagery, tone and subject matter, all coming under the heading of 'waffle' if one couldn't back up one's opinion. We were then presented with some of our school books by the A.E.O. and allowed to make our way home, weighed down by volumes of literature and decades of history. I was now a committed student whether I liked it or not.

That night I settled down with my new novel 'Animal Farm' and thoroughly enjoyed it, only to discover next day in class that the pigs were not pigs at all but represented real people in Russian History. This totally confused me but bore out what I had always suspected – that one should not believe everything that one reads. The learning process had begun.

The Maths. class from the outset was something else. The A.E.O. in all his wisdom had shown us an algebraic problem, the solution of which was x equalled three, but neglected to inform us that x was a variable and could change at any time. This proved a problem for the new Maths. teacher as some of us believed that x always equalled three. The nightmare had begun. Soon we were introduced to mensuration and periodic functions which some thought were women's problems until they were fully explained. We sailed from many ports in trigonometry and found ourselves all at sea until we solved the problem of co-ordinating the plane. Maths, soon became my principal interest and my negative attitude towards the course changed as my rate of progress in Maths. increased. History and English began to fall by the wayside, and the leisure subjects were scrapped altogether.

Throughout the course which lasted for seven months my biggest difficulty was in finding the time and inclination to study. As an adult with a growing family, the home did not offer the peace and quiet necessary for serious studying. That plus the fact that I also enjoyed a social life made it difficult to keep up with the other subjects. Even though we were told at the beginning of the course not to get 'hyper' about exams, I realised that we were being taught in such a way so as to guarantee a pass in certain subjects, especially Maths. This disillusioned me as I wanted to learn the full Maths. syllabus on the course and not just four questions on each paper. In History, I found certain characters and events very interesting. This often led me on a wild goose chase whereby I would find myself reading material unrelated to the course itself. This I found highly stimulating and resented the lack of detail provided by the text books themselves. It was a more in-depth knowledge that I sought.

Personal Reflections

As the months slipped swiftly by and the day for the Leaving Cert. examination loomed nearer, I regretted not having put in a more concerted effort into the course. Though I realised from an early stage that the exams were not all that important to me, I felt I owed it to others to do well. I think now that the exams are over, further thought should be given to the format of adult education and good results in exams should not be a priority. In our class, the main achievers are those who gained a much broader education and sadly this will not be reflected in their exam results. Adult education should be there for all who wish to avail of it and there should be no discrimination against those who have had no previous second-level education. This is an important aspect to remember, because, if this scheme were to continue, the weakest members of a previous school system would be isolated from further education.

From a personal point of view, I found the Adult Educational Opportunities Scheme highly rewarding. It gave me a love for poetry which I had not got before. I also found that I enjoyed writing, and reading works of a more literary nature. I shall continue to pursue my study of Maths. in the future. I found new friends on the course and also realised how much I did not know and how much there still is to learn. I shall resent going back on the dole having regained the zest for life and a hunger and thirst for knowledge.

Ken Martin is unemployed and lives in Tallaght. Married with children he sat the Leaving Cert. examination this year.

The Limerick Experience

DEIRDRE FRAWLEY

The City of Limerick V.E.C. piloted the Educational Opportunities Scheme during the academic year 1986/87.

Recruitment

Two classes were recruited in Limerick – one initially and the second when the Scheme did not succeed in Letterkenny. The second class was not fully recruited until December – awaiting a positive nod from the funding body!

It was felt that the explanatory leaflet circulated by the Labour Exchange to all eligible people was not attracting much response. A simple leaflet was designed using leterset to highlight particular points and included the name and address of the Adult Education Organiser at the V.E.C. offices, which are located next door to the Employment Exchange. An information desk was set up in the Employment Exchange with the co-operation of the manager and the leaflets were then handed out by the A.E.O. with some part-time teaching staff over a period of a few days. An advertisement was also placed in local papers. The second class was recruited with the help of students from the first class.

There was pleasant surprise at the response – constant traffic into the V.E.C. offices to enquire about the course. Unfortunately many people did not qualify – either they were under twenty-five years or not quite one year unemployed, and some were on disability benefit.

Student Profile

A class was formed with 23 people (20 male, 3 female), and there was a waiting list of qualified people. The second class had 14 (11 male and 3 female). Of the total 37 participants, 25 were married, 11 were single, and among them they have 65 children. Nearly all came from the City Corporation Housing Estates. The ages ranged from 26 years to mid 50's – with the majority falling into the late 20's and early 30's. Most were at least three years unemployed and not very optimistic about the future.

Planning a Programme

Introductory meetings were held with all prospective students to discuss the operation of the scheme. All were asked to fill out forms, giving personal details, education, training, work experience (paid and non-paid), hobbies, reasons for coming on the course and favoured subjects. There was also a self-assessment exercise on study/learning skills and people were asked about any fears they may have had in taking on the course. All this formed a good basis for developing a suitable programme. All students did a two week Introductory course on study/learning skills. This session helped students to overcome initial apprehension about their abilities to cope with the course. In co-operation with the Employment Exchange, it was arranged that students could finally make up their minds about signing off during the introductory period.

It was agreed that Maths and English would be the core subjects. They would be the foundation for other areas of study and most people felt that they would like to work towards taking the Leaving Certificate in these subjects. Home Economics (Social & Scientific) was added giving the students an introduction to Social Studies, and to Science. CoAct, the Limerick College of Art, Commerce and Technology made the Computer room available for three hours tuition per week and facilitated students in practising at off-peak times.

The programme was structured so as to have full classes in the morning in English and Home Economics, Social & Scientific – following the Leaving Certificate Course, and Maths – starting from the basics. In the afternoon, classes were broken into groups (3) with two tutors moving from one group to another. The concentration here was on functional English, Maths, and helping students to cope with work done in the large class. Homework could also be done during this time. Emphasis was placed on students helping one another.

To cater for minority interests, the V.E.C. allowed the E.O.S. students to enrol in their own Adult Education night classes, free of charge. Languages, wordprocessing and computing were popular there.

The students in the second class also took the Introductory course outlined above. The programme was based on the need for students to have a good basic education and exposure to a wide range of subjects before making decisions about examination subjects and their needs in other areas of learning. The programme included Maths and English (again core subjects), Geography, History, Economics, Social Studies, Food and Nutrition, Computing and Workshop skills (woodwork).

At the time of writing, many of the students have identified the subjects which they hope to take to Leaving Certificate level in 1988. Students in both classes are currently doing a job seeking skills module and interview techniques. The approach adopted with this group has been the more satisfactory – easing, as it did, people gently into the rigours of serious study and providing necessary variation.

Aims

From the very beginning, it was emphasised that exams were not the only objective of the programme. Learning was for life – personal, family, work, community. Exams were part of that process and students could sit for them when they felt ready to do so. Nevertheless, there was a strong desire in most students to sit an exam at the end of the year.

The decision to follow the Leaving Certificate programmes put a lot of pressure on the students to work hard from the very beginning. By February, most students had a fairly good idea of where they stood – of whether the Leaving in '87 was a realistic goal, or whether it was a bit further down the road. It was agreed to stay on course for Leaving Certificate English and Home Economics for '87, and to work towards the Maths for 1988. Students who felt that they weren't ready for the Leaving Certificate Course, changed into the second class.

Teaching Approach

Facing the end of the pilot stage, it can safely be said that the Scheme has been very successful – looking at it from the students' point of view and also that of the V.E.C. It is generally agreed by all concerned that staffing on the course was the key influence. Apart from competency in the subjects, tutors were selected primarily for their communication skills and their ability to empathise with adult learners. All had previous successful experience of working with adults, mostly with the V.E.C. and were excellent at maintaining lively, interesting and stimulating classes with a good dollop of humour. Emphasis was placed on experiential learning techniques, encouraging students to learn by doing, exploring new areas and developing the ability to assess critically aspects of an ever changing society. Consultation between Organisers, Tutors and Students was an integral part of the decision making process, thus facilitating trust and co-operation.

Joint social occasions were regular occurrences. Regular visits were made to the theatre and poetry readings, as it was considered the best way to introduce students to poetry and drama. Guest speakers were also a regular feature throughout the course with students introducing and chairing sessions.

Examinations

All Students sat a City of Limerick V.E.C. examination in General Studies at the end of the course for which certificates will be awarded. The examination included all subjects studied. It was felt important that all participants would have recognition for their achievement over several months study.

Fifteen students sat for the Leaving Certificate English and ten for the Home Economics. While most candidates were very anxious to pass well this year, some approached the Examination with a view to 'doing as well as possible this year and improving next year'. Results are anxiously awaited!

Assessment of the Programme

While the Scheme in its pilot stage leaves room for many improvements, it is potentially the most significant development to aid the long-term unemployed, the majority of whom lack educational qualifications and are seriously disadvantaged in the very competitive job market to-day. For most, it has rekindled hope and equipped people a little better to face the challenges of our modern society.

It is probably a bit early to assess the Scheme fully, but the following are the Organiser's impressions of its benefits (the students can speak very well for themselves).

There is just no comparison between the people who apprehensively enrolled for the course some months ago, and the same people who are now facing their last week of the first year. There is a marked change for the better in everyone's self-confidence and self-esteem – a new dignity has been found in learning and personal development. Depleted energies have been renewed to tackle life's challenges. In general, the students show a much more positive approach towards life, family and other people.

Most of the students who are parents talk of the beneficial effects of the course on their children's education and on their own relationship with the children. There is a much greater awareness of the importance of education and its influence on future life chances. The parents have a better understanding of how the educational system works, more knowledge on various subjects – especially the new maths! – and now have a new role in helping their children with homework. Many of the students have commented on the encouragement and support they received from their spouses as the course progressed.

There is no doubt that participation on the course has made the students significantly more employable, even before examinations are taken into account. All now have attained a higher standard of education, thus opening up more job opportunities, access to training programmes and further education.

Being part of a team again and working productively has made a major difference to the lives of the students and their families. New friends have been made, experiences shared and awareness of additional opportunities for social life has been created. One of the very positive outcomes has been the involvement of many students in voluntary service organisations such as the Adult Literacy Scheme, and the Simon Community. Some have also looked at their own communities in a new light and have become involved in Community development and Youth organisations in a very positive way.

Perhaps one can sum up by saying that the enrichment of the individual leads to the enrichment of their community and to society in general.

Deirdre Frawley is Adult Education Organiser in Limerick City. She has taken a special interest in the promotion of adult literacy and she was responsible for the administration of the Educational Opportunities Scheme for unemployed adults.

A Student's View

MICHAEL SHEAHAN

I was born into a large poor family which influenced my decision to leave school at the age of twelve years, to seek employment. I found work but it was hard and paid very little. Still it allowed my family the luxury of having dinner three times a week instead of once. My Dad was unemployed due to an illness and someone had to work.

I grew older and realised I was the victim of circumstances. I had no education and no hope for a decent future. I decided to leave this country and head for England in search of employment. I was to be disappointed. Every vacancy which I encountered, wanted qualifications with it. I didn't have any.

Return to Study

I met a girl who attended college (she is now my wife) and she encouraged me to go to night school. I really wanted to but I could not afford the fee for it. I returned to Ireland and remained on the dole queue for two and a half years until I read a poster, which offered an opportunity for unemployed people to return to study. I jumped at the chance and now I find myself a better and happier person for it. I have become more confident and optimistic about my future. I have just completed two subjects in the Leaving Certificate and three internal examination papers with the Vocational Education Committee.

While all these things have been wonderful achievements in themselves, I feel it would be useless unless I could continue and finish a full Leaving Certificate. It would be a sad and bitter disappointment to myself and my fellow students if, after coming so far, we were left stranded in the middle with no way out.

Michael Sheahan is unemployed and lives at Southill, Limerick.

An Investment in People

NOEL McCORMACK

Personal Background

Eighteen years is a long time to have been out of the educational system and the thoughts of going back to school to improve my educational qualifications seemed a daunting task to undertake at my age. I am thirty two years old, married and have no children. Since leaving school, at the age of sixteen, I have had more jobs than I care to remember; but that's when work was plentiful and employers were not demanding a high standard of education. This situation has changed over the years and with the growth of unemployment, employers can now demand a higher standard of education from anyone they wish to employ.

I have been out of work for over three years, and like most of the unemployed, I have applied for every type of work that was on offer. When you look at most of the application forms that you have to fill up when you are applying for a job, you will see that more than half the application form is taken up with space for your educational qualifications. I often thought – “If I had that much education, then I would be doing the interviews instead of the applying only”. But like the changing patterns in the work place, qualifications for work have also changed, and it was this that set me thinking about returning to full time education.

Return to Study

The opportunity for this came through the Department of Social Welfare, who initiated the new scheme, and it was the local City of Limerick V.E.C. who organised and monitored the scheme which was to be called the Educational Opportunities Scheme and was available to anyone over the age of twenty five and on long term unemployment. Having made a decision that would mean me going to school for seven hours per day for five days per week was not an easy thing to do. It was with the support and encouragement of my wife that I decided that I would take this opportunity. My aims were simple and twofold; first this would give me the opportunity of improving my educational qualifications which would improve my chances of getting a job.

Individual Aims

It is now eight months since the E.O.S. Scheme was started and from the original twenty two people who started on day one, fifteen have actually sat for two subjects in the Leaving Cert. Examination and expect to do quite well. Many of the other people who are on the Scheme are married and have families; to have attained this standard in such a short time proves the commitment that all have given to this Scheme. The aims of all who are taking part on this Scheme differ from individual to individual. Most of the married men and women want to improve their own education along with being able to contribute to the education needs of their children – for example, taking an active part in their children’s homework and giving them advice from a knowledgeable position. It is this that most people found most rewarding. But there is more to it than that, just being off the dole gives people the chance to regain the self-esteem that had been taken away from them in the dole office. It also makes them feel that they are now being more productive because they are now reinvesting what they are learning in their families and communities.

A Breakthrough

This Scheme, the E.O.S., has been for many, the first opportunity to break the cycle of unemployment, and offer them a positive approach to education for life. People on this Scheme also see the benefits as being more productive than say getting paid for staying at home, which is what the dole is all about, and accepting your lot. The educational system of this country has failed many people and the opportunities that exist for adults to enter the educational system are next to nil unless you can afford it. There should be no reason why adults cannot return to education or continue with their education.

The pilot Scheme that is taking place in Limerick is proof that people are prepared to take the opportunity, if presented with it, to return to education. The demand for the Scheme was so great that the numbers for a second class had to be limited. The only sad part about the E.O.S. Scheme is the uncertainty which surrounds it. Because of funding, the future of such a Scheme is uncertain. Most of the people who have sat examinations this year hope to sit further exams next year and in doing so, they will make up with the required amount of further subjects, five in all, for a full Leaving Certificate.

Given the choice of being paid to stay home, or taking part in the E.O.S., all would agree that the E.O.S. is better value for money, from a Government's point of view, than, say, the dole. The E.O.S. is a positive investment in people.

Noel McCormack is unemployed and lives in Ballysimon Road, Limerick. He is married and he has had very little formal education.

Available for Work & Willing to Learn

PAUL MAGUIRE

In this day and age, with a crippling National Debt poised like a Damoclean sword over our heads, we as a nation have some tough choices and decisions facing us. Perhaps the most difficult area in which these decisions have to be made is in the area of unemployment. Should a person who spends his day sitting around doing nothing receive exactly the same amount of unemployment assistance as the person who walks the streets day in and day out looking for a job? Or why should not a person who attends an educational course while being unemployed in order to make himself more employable receive extra unemployment assistance benefits?

The sad answer to both questions is that firstly, nobody cares how you spend your idle time, and secondly, when it comes to education, it seems that the Dept. of Social Welfare love to put obstacles in a person's way, to prevent anyone bettering themselves. For instance, it is illegal to receive an education (even part-time) while being unemployed and anyone who does indulge runs the risk of losing his entitlement to unemployment assistance or unemployment benefit because they will be seen as 'not being available for work' while they undergo the learning process! It does appear as if the government's attitude is that the unemployed don't matter. With the exception of the Educational Opportunities Scheme, (the future of which has a question mark over it), it seems, following the February General Election, that the weaker disorganised groups in society such as the unemployed, the poor and the ill are going to foot the bill.

If we take the existing law as being a reflection of the attitudes of consecutive governments, it seems as if we must accept that to be unemployed is to be destined to spend your best years on the scrapheap of society, living on handouts while the poor get poorer and the rich get richer.

Cutbacks

We are supposed to live in a democracy, but what is democratic about the Health cuts or Education cuts? Whilst I agree in theory with the concept that everyone must tighten their belts, these types of cuts are blatantly anti-working class, anti-poor, and pro-'the rich'. Education cuts will mean very little to private secondary schools which charge around £1,600 per pupil per year, compared to Vocational and Community Schools which rely solely on the Department of Education's grants. Likewise, Health cuts will mean less to V.H.I. patients than to people who earn just that little bit too much to qualify for a medical card.

In the education system, as it stands, the existence of groups like N.A.L.A. points to a series of deficiencies which need correcting. Yet this kind of correction requires a commitment in terms of finance and a commitment in terms of an overhaul of the system. We need to focus attention on improving the quality rather than the quantity of education.

These problems were all recognised by the recent Aontas conference on the theme of Poverty, but sadly in the short period which has elapsed since, they seem to have forgotten their good intentions. At this stage, it seems that the Aontas conference was nothing more than an exercise in futility. Somebody somewhere has got to make up their mind to fight for those at the bottom of the pile, otherwise our society will end up like that of Britain – totally divided between the haves and the have nots.

We seem to have a simple choice – either we go the same way or we start at the very bottom, by educating and re-educating people to demand a fair and equitable deal for all the inhabitants of this country, rich and poor alike.

Paul Maguire is unemployed and lives in Tallaght. Married, with children, he participated in the Educational Opportunities Scheme this year.

ADULT LITERACY IN A RURAL SETTING - TWO MODELS

Introduction

Adult Literacy provision in a rural context has many of the problems of the city and a unique web of its own problems. Living within a small community where everyone knows you and all belonging to you, means that confidentiality is of major importance. There are new and very pressing literacy demands within agriculture. To work as part of a group becomes almost impossible when the community is so small that everyone knows you and every detail of your business. Rural communities can be wonderfully caring places to live, but the fear of being talked about, or being different, is a real one for many rural residents.

Accessibility is another major consideration. Although closely-knit, rural communities tend to be widely-spread, often remotely located and unsupported by an adequate public transport system. Unless provision can be made at local level, thus avoiding the need to travel long distances, many potential students are likely to be deterred.

Perhaps the most important problem is motivation. A rural economy, substantially based on subsistence farming, offers fewer incentives to acquire literacy skills.

It is against this background that the Mayo and Clare Literacy Schemes have organised and operated. Like Schemes in other areas of the country, they have at times made great progress, building on whatever funding was available. At other times the funds dry up and the schemes recede. However, the schemes have survived on minimal funding, attempting a huge task on much good will and limited resources. This is their story.

Adult Literacy in Co. Clare

SEAN CONLON

Origins

The County Clare Adult Literacy Scheme had its origin in the late seventies. A local Franciscan priest together with the C.E.O. launched the Clare scheme with a tutor training course in 1977. About twenty tutors were trained in a course organised by U.C.G. Few of these tutors actually worked with students and, with the transfer of the priest to another part of the country, what little action there was, ended.

By 1981, when the A.E.O. got around to considering literacy provision, the old scheme had almost totally disappeared. A new start was called for. Another group of voluntary tutors was assembled and in May 1981 a training course was carried out by Sr. Benedict, a Mercy nun, who had completed the Maynooth course for Tutor trainers. The Clare scheme has been very fortunate to have Sr. Benedict as a constant support and resource over the years.

During the winter of 1981-82 the literacy campaign went on with considerable enthusiasm. All the usual sources of publicity were tried, newspaper articles, posters, advertisements, announcements and leaflets and cards in public places. The initial response was very good. Within one year of the launch of the scheme, fourteen students were working on a one to one basis with tutors.

We needed another tutor training course. And so the scheme has developed. On average, we have held one training course each year.

Organisation

At first all the organisation of the scheme devolved to the A.E.O. However, as the scheme built up, time for organisation became more of a problem. Eventually students could be left waiting for some weeks before being matched with a tutor. This was completely unsatisfactory, and a solution had to be found.

Our first part-time organiser was Vivienne Purcell who, having recently returned from the Third World, was unemployed. She worked for 6 months under a Manpower scheme. During her time the service again expanded, organisation was tightened up, in-service training for tutors became a reality and the number of active students went to over twenty for the first time.

Vivienne eventually moved on, but was enticed back in 1984 to head up a Teamwork project designed to develop literacy material suited to the adults in our scheme.

After much correspondence and form filling, the Dept. of Labour sanctioned a Teamwork scheme, which began in November '84 and lasted until April 1985. This represented an investment of over £10,000 in the scheme, brought five very skilled and interested people into the scheme and allowed for a fresh development to take place.

Most of the work of Teamwork was in the area of production of material. But they also developed a day time provision for students. Small group tuition also developed at this time, as a direct result of the freshness brought by the young Teamworkers. The legacy of Teamwork has been a huge stock of material suited to adult needs. This material, on a wide range of topics, is now available to all students working in the county and is widely used.

Teamwork ended in April '85 and, through the following months, organisation of the scheme again fell back on the A.E.O. However, the advent of the Adult Education Board, with its small budget, meant that in late '85 a co-ordinator could be taken on. Maura Keane stayed with the scheme from October '85 until March 1987. Maura was paid 14 hours per week, and travel expenses by the Adult Education Board. This development brought a new professionalism to the service. Matching of student and tutor was done more quickly, regular newsletters were published, problems were solved more rapidly, in-service meetings were organised and attempts were made to decentralize the service.

The service had always been based in Ennis, and students coming forward were always serviced from Ennis. Maura began the slow process of decentralization, attempting to develop small groups in Shannon, Kilrush and Ennistymon. These groups now exist and meet irregularly. The scheme still retains its central referral number and the co-ordinator at base will meet, assess and match each student coming forward. The local groups act as a support structure at local level, meeting occasionally as a group or making contact between themselves as the need arises. This structure has been relatively successful, in avoiding the isolated feeling which tutors can and do experience.

Maura left the scheme in March 1987, at which point the number of students had risen to thirty-five. During 1986, the numbers had reached an all time high, when the scheme had over fifty active students. Maura has since been replaced by Mrs Pauline Chadwick who is at present learning the ropes.

Major Issues:

The Clare scheme has been active for six years. The major issues facing the scheme were and are the following.

Attracting students: This is often very difficult, particularly in the rural areas of the county. Planning, publicity and training can be excellent but if students do not emerge, tutors become discouraged. In some areas tutors may wait for years before a student emerges. In general, our experience has been that student take-up is in direct proportion to the amount and intensity of the promotion. However, our best efforts often fall flat in the more remote areas.

Research: No research exists on the extent of the Adult Literacy problem in Co. Clare. Some attempts have been made, particularly in Ennis, but no county-wide profile exists. This hampers development as initiatives can only be based on very sketchy data and hunches about the situation in a particular locality.

Organisation: Only since the provision of funds from the Adult Education Board, has there been anything approaching adequate organisational back-up. Even now, there is still no adequate resource centre, and the organiser, being part-time, can still not reach into the more distant areas of the county as the time and travel allowances available will not allow it. Decentralization is happening, but even decentrealized groups require servicing, which means time and money. In general, the scheme is still under-funded.

Students: The majority of students come into the scheme, meet their tutor, work well for the required amount of time and leave with better literacy skills. Most students are well able to learn. However, the Clare scheme has also attracted a number of students who have come through special schools. In general, the scheme has not had much success with these students. Usually motivation is low, the student is referred through a relative, basic skills are poor, and where we have taken on such students, tutors find the experience very frustrating. More recently, the scheme has been reluctant to take on such students, feeling that voluntary tutors devoting an hour or two each week, can make very little progress where long years of special schooling may have had little success.

Tutors: We have had no problem in getting voluntary tutors of a high calibre. Training of tutors has been very successful and efforts at in-service meetings are regularly made. However, we have found few tutors who will take on more than one student. A tutor will work for perhaps up to two or more years with a student. After that, few tutors have the commitment to continue. We are losing our most experienced people all the time. The effort of working with one student over a long period can be wearing for the tutor, despite best efforts at support. The voluntary nature of the service means that you are constantly dependent on people who can at any time leave, give up, move on, become bored, or tired or wish to stop for various reasons. Some paid tutors are definitely required to bring a continuity and professionalism to the service.

Group Tuition: Group tuition is almost non-existent in Clare outside of AnCO schemes and workshops. The average adult student approaching the scheme wants to work on his or her own. Movement towards group tuition is possible subsequently, but has happened only in a very small number of cases. Group tuition has advantages, but to date the more rural conditions in Clare seem unsuited to its development. Confidentiality is still of paramount importance to most students.

Sean Conlon is Adult Education Organiser, Co. Clare and is an Executive member of the Adult Education Organisers Association.

Mayo Adult Literacy Scheme

PATRICIA FLYNN

Research figures for Mayo estimate 10,000 adults (one in ten), to be in need of reading, writing and numeracy skills: a statistic which reflects the national and European average.

Origin of the Scheme

Since the mid-70's Mayo V.E.C. has provided and developed an adult literacy tuition scheme to meet the needs of its population. The first formal response to the problem was initiated by Chief Executive Officer, Sean O'Riagain, who established a panel of voluntary tutors, drawn mainly from retired teaching and civil service backgrounds, and whose names were kept on file at the V.E.C. office in Castlebar. Mr. O'Riagain supervised the scheme and was responsible for the allocation of each student to a personal tutor.

Of major importance during these early years was the contribution of an active literacy campaign group who sought to gain recognition of the problem and to secure the provision of adult literacy instruction outside the school system. Castlebar man, Ernie Sweeney, brought a unique dimension to the campaign: formerly illiterate, his personal experience of illiteracy served as a dynamic to publicise the problem and to generate interest and action.

In 1983, supervision of the scheme devolved to Patrick Stanton and O.R. O'Neill who were appointed by the V.E.C. as Adult Education Organisers for South and North Mayo, respectively.

With the assistance of the National Adult Literacy Association (N.A.L.A.), a tutor training course was organised and held in Castlebar in March, 1983. The course attracted participants from a wide range of backgrounds: housewives, professionals, the retired and the unemployed, all drawn together by a shared interest in adult literacy.

Despite an increased number of tutors, operational difficulties arising from the centralised structure of the scheme now became apparent. Tutors were located predominantly in the Castlebar/Westport area, making it difficult to provide tuition to students from other parts of the County. Nor was it practical for the A.E.O.s, based at administrative centres, to monitor the progress of students. An improved structure, with more full-time input by specialised personnel at local level and increased funding for resources was required.

Organisation

In 1984 a working party was formed in order to document the current situation and to devise a method of improving literacy provision. After consultation with experienced tutors, educationalists, interested parties, the working party devised a structure appropriate to the needs of a rural community. Based on the existing format of private home-tuition and serviced by voluntary tutors, the structure could be applied throughout rural Ireland. The proposals of the working party were adopted by the V.E.C. who gave overall responsibility for the scheme and implementation of the proposals to the newly formed Mayo Adult Education Board in 1986.

The 'organisational model' chosen to facilitate the expansion and administration of the scheme was that of a 'Cell Group'. Following tutor training courses held throughout the country, a network of Cell Groups was established.

Designed to be an autonomous unit, each Cell Group, is comprised of tutors drawn from the surrounding area. Regular meetings provide an opportunity to discuss problems and ideas. Membership of the Cell also enables tutors to receive support and encouragement in their work. Each Group is primarily responsible for the literacy provision of the area. Important functions include the recruitment of students and tutors, local publicity and the assessment of tutor training requirements within the Group.

Each Cell Group requires a Co-ordinator to take responsibility for the allocation of student to tutor. The Co-ordinator is also required to act as secretary to the Group and to liaise with the area A.E.O. With the establishment of the Cell Group network, the role of the A.E.O.s has become that of Co-ordinators at county level. Finance for the scheme, training and the provision of facilities are the responsibility of the Adult Education Board.

The most recent development to assist the workings of the scheme has been the appointment of 7 Adult Literacy Development Officers under the Department of Labour Social Employment Scheme. Each Officer has been deployed to a Cell Group to take responsibility for co-ordination of the scheme at local level.

Operation

Self-sufficiency, in as much as it is possible, is the essential quality of the Cell Group structure. Tuition is conducted in either the student's or the tutor's home, as is convenient, or may be arranged at an independent location.

Meeting times and frequency are mutually agreed. Tutors try to select learning material based on adult interests and make a lot of material themselves. Each tutor is encouraged to keep a record of their student's progress which is helpful to them both.

In a relationship of mutual trust and shared learning, it is important that the tutor recognises his responsibility to preserve the privacy and anonymity of his student.

The role of the Co-ordinator in allocating student to tutor requires perception and judgement. In some cases, the student/tutor relationship can prove to be unsatisfactory, in the event of which the Co-ordinator is required to arrange a new allocation.

Should tutors encounter specific learning difficulties with their students, a list of specialist personnel is maintained in case referral may be required.

Problems

Perhaps any service which survives on the interest and commitment of volunteers is a delicate mechanism. The demands of adult literacy tuition can be exacting and time consuming. For tutors within a Cell Group who do not have a student, the obvious problems are lack of motivation and boredom.

As in most literacy schemes, the main difficulty is the slow and painful process of recruiting students. Advertisement and newspaper items promoting a literacy scheme do not reach the student directly but they are a means of creating awareness of the problem.

To date, the most successful method of student recruitment to the Mayo scheme has been the use of church announcements which reach a large and captive audience. However, the numbers coming forward are still relatively few.

The only real improvement in student recruitment will occur when the stigma of illiteracy is removed and both the student and the wider community come to consider adult literacy tuition as part of the adult education process.

Patricia Flynn is Adult Literacy & Education Development Officer with Co. Mayo V.E.C.

The Unkindest Cut of All

PETER CASSELLS

The Irish economy is a very sick patient and is now at a critical juncture in terms of its future health prospects. The symptoms are there for all to see. One out of every five persons wishing to work, is unemployed and the ICTU estimates that, under present policies, unemployment would increase to 290,000 by 1990 and, in the meantime, a further 125,000 people will have emigrated. Total employment would be at least 25,000 lower in 1990 than in 1986. The economic growth rates, achievable under present policies, would be insufficient to prevent a further deterioration in the public finances. The major inequities in Irish society, particularly in the areas of taxation, social welfare and education, would remain.

Different Approaches

Recognising that the patient is sick is the easy part. How do we cure the disease? At the moment, there are strongly conflicting views between workers, farmers and employers on the specific action to be taken to cure the patient. Two different approaches are being advocated. Hopefully the current negotiations between the Government, trade unions and the employers can, for the sake of this country's future, reach a compromise between these conflicting views.

Some people are advising that the Government adopt a single-handed approach of focussing just on the management of the public finances and give a 'short sharp shock' to the Irish economy through massive cuts in public expenditure. This should be opposed. The economic dislocation and the level of conflict caused by this approach will increase unemployment and the level of inequality in Irish society. Also, as we shall see later, adult education is one area which has and would continue to suffer massively from indiscriminate, across-the-board cuts in public expenditure.

The Deprived

The current across-the-board cut-backs in the budget for adult education amount to a virtual assault on the present underdeveloped and very fragile infrastructure for adult education. The savings to the exchequer are paltry but could mean the patient losing a whole limb. Once again, however, not all sections of society will suffer because of these cut-backs. It is the unemployed, the poor and the already deprived who are going to be hit, in particular those needing literacy tuition, basic education and second-chance education. Already adult literacy and community education schemes in disadvantaged areas are closing or being severely curtailed.

There is an alternative approach. This approach recognises the need to bring the national debt under control but also recognises the key role adult education could play in assisting people to tackle the current crisis and to remove the major inequities in Irish society. The Government should reject the single handed approach of across-the-board cuts in public expenditure and adopt a medium-term integrated strategy which would allow all our people to participate in tackling the crisis.

Integrated Policies

The grave problems facing this country have accumulated over a period of years. It will take several years to resolve them. A medium-term approach must, therefore, be adopted. As pointed out earlier, across-the-board cuts in public expenditure will not solve the problem and will, if implemented without development measures, kill the patient. The Government must, therefore, implement simultaneously integrated policies covering growth, the creation of jobs, control of the national debt, tax reform and the removal of the major inequities in Irish society. Failure to reduce these inequities while undertaking public spending cuts will only exacerbate this country's present difficulties.

Mobilising all our resources, including our people, to tackle the current crisis can only succeed only if it is built upon the fullest involvement of all those affected. A strong participation element must, therefore, be built into our response to the crisis at all levels.

Key Role

Under this approach, adult education would not be perceived as merely providing for leisure time or hobby pursuits. It would play a key role in helping to remove the major inequities in society and in mobilising our people to respond to the crisis. Resources would be allocated and concentrated on providing basic and second-chance education for the unemployed and for working class adults. Resources would also be provided for courses and projects that would assist adults to cope with the current crisis and to comprehend and influence the economic, social, cultural and political changes needed to get out of this crisis.

How do we get the Government to adopt this approach? Adult education organisations must now organise a public campaign, calling on the Government to:

- * Give priority to adult education for the unemployed, the disadvantaged and working class adults generally.
- * Restore the 1987 budget for literacy and community education to the level originally planned.
- * Give a long-term commitment, including funding, to adult education, in particular education for the disadvantaged and projects on social and political education.

These issues will be raised by the ICTU in the current negotiations with the Government on a Programme for National Recovery. A public campaign by all those involved in adult education would strengthen our hands enormously in those negotiations.

Peter Cassells is Assistant Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and President of the Peoples College.

DAYTIME EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

KATHLEEN FORDE

They squeeze themselves into wherever they can fit, in premises ranging from community centres to vocational and primary schools, a friary, library and even into a disused Methodist Church. They endure extreme cold and discomfort in some centres, "make-do" with childrens' chairs in others, and face a constant financial crisis in funding the essential creche. They negotiate with A.E.O.s, School Principals, management committees, clergy, Manpower officials or whoever needs to be approached in furthering their aims. They lobby politicians and cultivate the media, as well as doing the hard slog from door to door, delivering their leaflets and constantly encouraging friends and neighbours to participate in one of the most energetic and exciting developments in adult education in recent years.

A Profile of the Participants

Who are these people? They used to be called housewives, but now prefer to be known as women in the home, ordinary folk in the best sense of that word, and they do include in their numbers a handful of men, either unemployed or retired. Where do they come from? Mostly, but not exclusively, from the Dublin areas, including Blanchardstown, Finglas, Pearse Street, Lucan and Tallaght. Why don't these women stay at home? They want to re-claim their lives for themselves by developing their talents and potential in the form of learning activities, in common with like-minded colleagues. "I wanted to get out of the house. The classes have given me a sense of purpose and achievement in life," according to Mary Cummins of the DATE (Dundrum Adult Training and Education) group. This sense of identity and purpose is constantly re-echoed, as in the comment by Sandra Tyrrell at a recent seminar in Coolock: "In the Personal Development class you are yourself, not someone's Mammy or wife. I was beginning to feel like a cabbage stuck in the house."

The average person who comes forward to join a class is female and has left school some twenty years previously at age thirteen or fourteen, often coming from that third of the Irish population who finished their education at primary level. She is very lacking in self-confidence and thinks everyone

else is better than her and more knowledgeable. Courses in Personal Development are an excellent introduction for this "typical" person, who learns a sense of self-worth in the course, and is gradually empowered to take control of her own life. This process, in turn, has a beneficial effect on the rest of her family. The atmosphere in the classes is friendly, informal and encouraging. With teachers and students on a first name basis, traditional authoritarian barriers are broken down and a harmonious working relationship develops.

Origins of the Groups

How did these adult education groups get started? "A group of women in Kilbarrack who were involved in a summer project wanted to stay together and explore possibilities open to them. So in 1980, with the cooperation of the recently appointed A.E.O., Joe Kelly, they embarked on a Personal Development course, and eventually K.L.E.A.R. was born, "explains Carmel Jennings. In Dundrum, the A.E.O. Liam Bane, called a public meeting from which a committee was formed called D.A.T.E. A more recent development in Dublin's Inner City in Pearse Street was due to the determined efforts of a certain Dolores Salmon, who single-handedly canvassed the area for students, negotiated with VEC officials and St. Andrew's Community Centre board of management, and eventually succeeded in interesting a core group of twelve people in October 1985. Since then, classes have been held in a large nineteenth century red-brick disused national school that is presently undergoing construction as a developing community centre. Other groups started up through networking: "duirt bean lion, go nduirt bean eile, gur chuala si bean, go bhfacá si bean...."

Common Problems

While each group developed in its own unique way, and experienced its own particular teething problems, nevertheless, all groups have some common threads, especially in relation to the twin problems of premises and creche. Day-time adult education did not come as a neat pre-arranged package to be handed to participants on a silver platter. Rather, it presented itself as a challenge from which the groups did not flinch in their weary search for suitable premises, and the concomitant hassle of persuading various authorities of the rightness of their cause. Some principals and boards of management have been very helpful and accommodating, as in Blanchardstown, Coolock and Whitehall. Other unmentionable places had the opposite experience. At the same time, no group feels they have security of tenure. At best they have their premises through the good will of the providers, at worst they suffer from a thinly veiled semi-hostile tolerance of their presence. VECs have cooperated by paying the necessary rent where groups are accommodated in non-vocational schools.

"I wanted to go out and change the world, but I couldn't find a babysitter." One of the most significant innovations in this form of adult education has been the provision of a creche which has compounded the initial headache of finding suitable premises, and then finding the money to pay a

creche director, without overcharging, and, therefore, dissuading the very people most in need of second chance education. Basically, it's a do-it-yourself syndrome, though credit must be given to Nuala Fennell who provided a seed grant of £500 to most groups in their initial stages. Creches continue to operate due to the unflagging efforts of the groups in a variety of fund-raising activities, from coffee mornings, marathon sponsorship, fashion shows, table quizzes, reading nights, appeals to different organisations and the provision of tea and biscuits at the morning break.

Content of the Courses

You are probably wondering at this stage what exactly these people do in their courses. The list is long, and caters for a range of diverse interests and activities, in spite of the restrictions placed on the provision by the scarcity of adequate premises. Courses include a whole range of second chance education, from Basic English, Maths and Irish, on through Leaving Cert. Business Organisation and Biology, also Get Out of the House, Personal Development, Parenting, Counselling, Dance, History, Self-defence, Crafts, Politics, Women's Studies, Yoga, Writing Groups and extra-mural courses provided by Maynooth and U.C.D. In nearly all the centres, only courses not requiring any specialist equipment can be offered, as the premises consist mostly of basic class rooms. In Coolock, the women squeeze themselves into the Typing and Word Processing rooms during the school's lunch time, and there are plans to squeeze more people into Wednesday afternoons when the school has a half day.

Lack of Confidence

In talking to the different groups, the theme of lack of confidence keeps weaving its way into the discussions. A member of C.A.L. (Coolock Adult Learning) confessed: "I initially approached the school on four consecutive mornings to enroll, and it was only on the fifth and final morning that I plucked up the courage to actually go in and put my name down." People arrive in my office with trembling hands and quivering voices, asking if they are too old, too stupid, too shy, too uneducated to join the classes. As John O'Callaghan of the Active Retirement Group in Dundrum commented: "My latent talent is only now coming out. School broke my confidence." Indeed, past schooling has a lot to answer for in terms of turning people off school, which in the past has been seen as synonymous with education.

Development of the Groups

How does this day-time education differ from the more traditional night-time provision? Joan McKenna from T.A.C.T. (Tallaght Adult Community Training) believes that "the day classes are more democratic and depend on the active involvement of the students in deciding their own subjects, so that the whole structure of the group is different." She also feels that the role of

the A.E.O. is vital in day-time education, not that s/he must necessarily do everything, but s/he should be there as a support and resource, especially in the beginning of the group's development. Most of the groups have given themselves a name, e.g. L.I.N.K. (Lifelong Interest in New Knowledge), F.A.M.E. (Finglas Adult Morning Education); M.A.D.E. (Maynooth Adult Daytime Education), and W.A.L.L. (Whitehall Adult Lifelong Learning).

Due to the struggle for survival in which these groups are engaged, they develop a critical consciousness which can be a source of deep-rooted learning more beneficial than the mere theory of how society and power operate. They also develop a sense of solidarity with each other and are always reaching out to involve others from their community in the benefits they are reaping from their involvement in lifelong learning. Jo Reilly of K.L.E.A.R. sees the group becoming a community resource centre which would incorporate other community groups, such as the elderly, the unemployed and youth groups. This would depend on appropriate funding and tenure of premises being available. Already, in Dundrum, the D.A.T.E. group works closely with the Active Retirement Association with whom they share premises, the women using the rooms in the mornings and the others in the afternoons, though a number of classes contain a mixture of both groups.

So exciting and rewarding is the discovery of latent talent in one's middle years that these day-time classes have become a life-line for most of the two thousand people involved in the greater Dublin area. "Once the brain has started working again, I just don't want to stop and have to stay at home," says Mary Tester of Finglas. With subject choices limited to a handful of rooms in premises without any specialist equipment, it is difficult to see what long-term structure can be built to cater for the growing number of adults becoming involved each year. The desire for some form of accreditation has often been expressed, as Leaving Cert. fulfills the needs of only a minority of the participants, and anyway, it's an exam for teenagers. Some groups have taken steps to persuade the universities, T.C.D. and U.C.D., to provide a part-time degree course in Coolock and Killester. A handful of the academic staff in both institutions were receptive to these ideas but foresaw such enormous difficulties that they declined the proposal. In Killester Vocational School, the Community University Project is operating quite successfully due to the unflagging efforts of a few women who started off in Kilbarrack. Five extra-mural courses are being provided, but there is no proper recognition for the work done in these classes.

As Different as Day and Night

The piece-meal nature of much of adult education provision has become blatantly obvious over the past five years, especially with the development of day-time classes. In the main, the VECs fulfill their statutory obligation to provide adult education through running night classes, whether or not this is what really suits people. Even further limits are placed on access to adult education by the insistence on the self-financing principle. How can a

Basic Maths class for twenty-five weeks pay for itself? Therefore, the providers of the courses are mostly forced to choose hobby and leisure courses in order to bring in the necessary money. So it's no wonder that the common image of adult education is one of luxury status, rather than an essential right, just some harmless activity to while away those long winter evenings. People were never meant to stick with adult education for several years, it was meant to be dipped into occasionally. Take it or leave it.

But that reality is quickly changing because those involved in day-time classes realise that adult education is really about lifelong learning. In their own way, these groups are trying to fulfill the aspirations of the recent report of the Commission on Adult Education, *Lifelong Learning*: "...we hope the Commission's concern is clear, that is, that adults would have, through continuing education, the opportunity for fulfillment as individuals, as members of a community, and as citizens of a free and democratic state." Little if any direction is forthcoming from the top in terms of a structured, attainable, relevant educational package for adults. Rather, they must "make do" with part-time provision, inappropriate curricula, public exams geared for teenagers, school type teaching situations and a general attitude of not belonging anywhere.

I.D.E.A.

Many of these issues have been taken up by I.D.E.A. (Improvement of Day-time Education for Adults), which is a voluntary group of adult students, tutors and organisers who offer support and practical advice to new groups and individuals interested in setting up day-time adult education courses. According to the I.D.E.A. manifesto, "adult students are there because they want to be. The consumers of adult education are continually voting for day-time education because education for adults means more than leisure courses for bored middle class housewives. It also means a range of courses from literacy right through to university. The increasing number of voluntary, community based groups, offering day-time courses means that students learn also by doing, by being involved in their group."

Obsessed by Belief

In conclusion, day-time adult education has succeeded in harnessing the vast creative energy of hundreds of people who will no longer be content to hide their light under a bushel. Instead, they stand prepared to take up the challenge of the Report on *Lifelong Learning*: "Nothing or not much ever happens in response to a report. Something only happens when someone obsessed by belief fights the proposal through."

Meanwhile, they squeeze themselves into wherever they can fit....

Kathleen Forde is an Adult Education Organiser with the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee. She is based in Coolock where her main involvement is with the development of day-time Adult Education provision,

Seminar for Daytime Groups

MARY CONNOLLY

Sometime in April, the LINK Group received an invitation to attend a seminar for all the voluntary daytime adult education groups in the Co. Dublin area. We were delighted with the idea because we felt that, at last, after years of 'labouring in the field', here was actual recognition of our existence, and, perhaps, even some acknowledgement of the enormous contribution of volunteers in our area of lifelong learning.

The idea behind the invitation was to bring together the new and longer-established groups to exchange ideas, identify difficulties and ways of overcoming them. It was the brainchild of one or all five of our A.E.O.s. Members of the Adult Education Board were also invited to attend and find out what was happening on the ground. Three members of the Board came along on the day. I hope they found the occasion a 'learning experience'.

The proceedings were opened by the Chairman of Co. Dublin VEC, Councillor Jimmy Murphy, who chaired the first session. This consisted of representatives of three well-established groups – DATE (Dundrum), TACT (Tallaght) and LINK (Blanchardstown) giving an outline of their origins, structure, aims and activities. This included, for example, how the creches were set up and funded, the range of courses offered and how particular problems had been overcome, nor not, in some cases. This was followed by questions to the speakers. The rest of the morning was taken up by group sessions, feedback and a discussion at the end. Just to demonstrate that adult education is for everyone, one of our A.E.O.s who had problems trying to divide the attendance into small groups had to finally give up and leave it to the volunteers.

The fact that we had representatives of 14 groups in the Co. Dublin area demonstrates very clearly that this is one of the fastest growing areas in adult education, and it was quite obvious that it is far removed from the old idea of classes to occupy the leisure time of the middle classes. Some of the groups were just starting and felt that the task ahead of them i.e., finding a premises; negotiating with the VEC to pay the rent; persuading others to join the organising group; arranging publicity; finding teachers; and finally, convincing people to actually come along and enrol for classes was daunting even with a friendly co-operative AEO. So, what inspires these volunteers?

What came across on the day most strongly was that we, as volunteers, became involved

- for ourselves – to develop hidden potential, to have a second chance at education, to have a say in the courses and their content,
- for our children – to show them learning is for life, to keep in touch with their schoolwork,
- for the community – when we realise how education in its broadest sense can change our lives, we want others to have the same experience.

Major Difficulties

The first and biggest difficulty for most groups is finding a suitable premises, where there is no objection to providing space for a creche. The most obvious place to look is a nearby school. Unfortunately, we are then left entirely dependent on the goodwill of a particular school principal, whose main priority would be to her/his own school, and its pupils. Many groups do not know from year to year if they will retain their premises. What is needed here is a firm policy commitment from the Department of Education that space be provided locally by the VEC for day-time education and that, if the accommodation is in a school, some security of tenure be provided.

The second major difficulty is creche provision. It is quite clear that an enormous amount of time and energy is expended fund-raising for creches, to cope with insurance, childminders' wages and other costs. A demand was made for direct funding for creches from the exchequer so that no-one would be denied access to continuing education because of creche unavailability or cost.

The other problem raised on the day was that, due to various factors, not least of which is the Department of Education's self-financing rule for adult education and the consequent level of fees, we are not reaching those who are most in need.

The Future

Is there a future for adult education? We are worried that, in view of the recent enormous and disproportionate cuts in the miniscule amount spent on adult education, and, in view of the growing demand, particularly in the day-time area, we will return to adult education being for those who can easily afford it. We are worried about possible fee increases to further restrict access. We are worried that the volunteers may become disillusioned with lack of support. We are worried about the Minister's direction to the VECs to concentrate their resources on the day-schools (for younger pupils). Adult education is about developing one's potential. Don't we all have the right to do this? Isn't this a lifelong process? Shouldn't those who missed out on education first time around be entitled to a second chance? We know the answers. Do our politicians know or care?

Was it Worthwhile?

It's always worthwhile to enable groups working away in different areas to come together and pool ideas and experiences. It enables the newer groups to see what can be done and forces those longer established to have a look at themselves and see if they are going in the right direction and achieving what they set out to. There was a clear demand for another such seminar in the Autumn. Perhaps, at that stage, we would form a group which could liaise with the Adult Education Board. It seems astonishing that no-one thought of having student representatives on the Board. Perhaps this will be remedied next time around.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Adult Education Board and Co. Dublin V.E.C. for hosting this seminar and, particularly, to those members who came along. We look forward to the next.

Mary Connolly is Secretary of the LINK Group, an active member of IDEA and one of two student members of the Executive of Aontas – The National Association of Adult Education.

The Ad Hoc Adult Education Boards: A Preliminary Review

NOEL DALTON

Establishment of Boards

The Report of the Commission on Adult Education "Lifelong Learning" (The Kenny Report) recommended the establishment of Adult Education Boards as the most effective structure for Adult Education at County and County Borough level.¹ In advocating this model The Kenny Report mentioned two principles which should guide the establishment of the Boards:

- " (i) In their composition they should be representative of those bodies in each area... concerned with the provision of adult education.
- (ii) They should be as autonomous as possible. An essential element of this autonomy would be the authority to disburse their own funds..."²

This proposal was one of the few elements in the Kenny Report which was acted on by the Minister for Education. Effect was given to the Adult Education Board concept by Circular Letter M 71/84. The principal features of the proposal can be summarised as follows:

- (1) The ad-hoc Boards would be established pending an amendment to the Vocational Education Act, 1930 which would allow for more than 12 members. These Boards would replace the old Adult Education Sub-committees of the V.E.Cs.
- (ii) Membership would consist of twelve people appointed by the Vocational Education Committee (V.E.C.) with the following breakdown:
 - 2 members of the V.E.C.
 - 3 members, one each representing ACOT, AnCO and the Library Authority.
 - 7 members would be chosen from organisations other than the the V.E.C. with an involvement in Adult Education.

A further 3 members, with observer status, would be appointed by the Board. These members were to be chosen from other significant interests not already represented on the Board, e.g., Trade Unions and Employer Bodies.

- (iii) The key functions of the Board are to:
 - (a) Assess the adult education needs within its area;
 - (b) Prepare an annual programme of activities and estimates of expenditure;
 - (c) Administer the programme within the limits of the resources made available to it;
 - (d) Furnish an annual report on its activities to the Minister and the V.E.C.;
 - (e) Discharge such other responsibilities as may from time to time be allocated to it by the Minister through the V.E.C.
- (iv) A separate fund was to be allocated to the Board to establish courses (free or at a nominal charge) in the areas of *Adult Literacy* and *Community Education* for Disadvantaged Groups. In the initial period of the Boards' existence, i.e., September 1985 to December 1987, the Government of the day promised a budget of £1m.
- (v) In selecting the Board members, V.E.Cs. were advised to seek application from a broad range of adult education interests within the Committees's areas, through advertising and open meetings.

The Survey

Before I deal with the results of the survey, the following points must be kept in mind:

- (i) This survey is only a *preliminary* examination of the Boards' operations for the period 1985 to April 1987.
- (ii) It is not intended as a comprehensive and detailed analysis of all aspects of the Boards' operations. However, the issues raised in this article may stimulate the undertaking of a more comprehensive review.
- (iii) The questionnaire was designed to get the views only of the Adult Education Organisers (A.E.O.) This decision was taken on the basis that the Organisers are in a unique position to assess the effectiveness of the Boards on the ground. Other practical considerations were also taken into count, e.g., time and resources. To do a survey of all interested groups, e.g., Board Members, C.E.O.s, Students, etc., would require far more resources and time.
- (iv) Given that the results of the survey have to be condensed into a short article, it is impossible to give all the details in this review.
- (v) This survey was aimed at A.E.O.s which means that in certain cases (two or more A.E.O.s to one Board) the statistical replies would be the same and in other cases you would have two Boards covered by the one A.E.O.

Responses

At the time of the survey (April-June 1987) there were 45 serving Adult Education Organisers who were also members of the Adult Education Organisers Association (A.E.O.A.). Each of these were circulated with a confidential questionnaire. Of these 26 were completed and returned by the end of June 1987. This represents a response rate of 58%. The regional breakdown is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1:

Response by Region

| | <i>No</i> | <i>Total in Region</i> | <i>% of Total in the Region</i> |
|---|-----------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Munster | 8 | 14 | 57% |
| Connaught/Ulster (i.e. Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal) | 4 | 11 | 36% |
| Leinster | 14 | 20 | 70% |
| Total: | 26 | 45 | 58% |

The response rate could have been better. In particular, the result from the Western region was disappointing and this fact must be taken into account when deductions and recommendations are being made. One gratifying statistic is the fact that all the major urban centres responded with the exception of one city.

Analysis

In this article it is proposed to look at the results as they relate to the following key issues:

1. Selection of Members to the Boards.
2. Representation on the Boards.
3. Allocation of Budget.
4. The role of the Boards in the development of Adult Education at local level.

1. Selection of Members to the Boards

Table 2 gives a general breakdown of how the members were selected. The question seeking this information was open-ended and the information was post-coded into four categories.

A number of interesting points arise from these results:

- (a) In only 50% of the cases were the recommended procedures followed for the selection of the members. This, in turn, raises the point of how representative some of the Boards are, given that one of the original purposes was to broaden representation at local level.
- (b) It should be pointed out that some of the responses did mention that the recommended procedure was followed in the selection of the old sub-committees and that to go through a similar procedure was a waste of time and money. Furthermore, it was also felt by some Organisers that the Boards' power to appoint observers would help broaden the base of representation.
- (c) A worrying factor from the A.E.O.A. point of view is that in nearly 23% of cases the A.E.O. was not consulted on the membership of a Board with which they were expected to work closely.

Table 2:

Process By Which Board Members Were Selected

| | <i>No</i> | <i>% of Total Respondents</i> |
|--|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Advertisements seeking nominations/ Open meetings/Careful selection | 13 | 50% |
| Lists submitted by A.E.O. in consultation with C.E.O. | 3 | 12% |
| Reconstitution of old subcommittee | 4 | 15% |
| Selected by V.E.C. in consultation with C.E.O./A.E.O. not consulted | 6 | 23% |
| Total: | 26 | 100% |

2. Representation on the Boards

The information supplied on this dimension proved very extensive and detailed and I propose to deal only with the more salient features.

A. Male/Female Representation

In all the Boards, male representation constitutes a majority of members. On average only one quarter of members are female. In over 50% of cases this representation consists of three members or less. While the question of equal representation can be argued at length, it is ironic that given women's major involvement in adult education as students, tutors, literacy workers, voluntary helpers, etc., they are severely under-represented at statutory level. This point once more raises the question of how representative of local adult education interests the Boards are.

B. The Appointment of Observers

Table 3 gives a breakdown of the number of observers appointed by April 1987.

Table 3:

No. of Observers Appointed

| | <i>No.</i> | <i>% of Total</i> |
|------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| No observers appointed | 10 | 38 |
| 1 observer appointed | 3 | 12 |
| 2 observers appointed | 5 | 19 |
| 3 observers appointed | 8 | 31 |
| Total | 26 | 100 |

Again these figures tell their own story. The original reasoning behind the appointment of observers was (i) to broaden the base of representation pending an amendment to the 1930 Act and (ii) to provide the Board with its own powers of appointment. While the reasons for not appointing observers was not sought in the questionnaire, nevertheless, it can be concluded that for a majority of cases the theory behind the original proposals is not working out in practice. Whether this arises from structural faults within

the system, or a general lack of interest in the community at large, is not possible to deduce from this survey. However, it must be a cause of concern for all those connected with the Boards that this important aspect of their operations is not being carried out in a majority of cases.

C. Interests and Organisations represented on the Boards

Space constraints prevent a listing of all the organisations represented on the Boards. Furthermore, given the wide variation in the type of groups that exist in different areas it is not always possible to make valid comparisons. Nevertheless, a number of interesting points do emerge:

- (i) In four cases, the Organisers did not know what organisations were represented by all the members on the Board. In one case, the A.E.O. had so little dealings with the Board that he was not able to supply any information on this question.
- (ii) These apart, the Boards by and large followed the directives of Circular letter M 71/84 with regard to composition. Local statutory and semi-state bodies were well represented. All the Boards had two or more V.E.C. representatives and most of the Boards had representatives from ACOT, AnCO and the Library Authority. There were a number of exceptions in cases where no AnCO Training Centre existed locally. Trade Unions and Post Primary Schools are also well represented on most Boards, e.g., the T.U.I. (Teachers Union of Ireland) is mentioned in 17 of the 22 completed replies, while 14 have representatives from Community/Comprehensive schools with the same number from V.E.C. run schools. Voluntary Organisations such as Macra na Feirme, I.C.A., Youth Groups are also well represented on most Boards.
- (iii) There are a number of interests which do not seem to have made a major impact in terms of representation:
 - (a) *Literacy Schemes*
Only 12 Boards (54% of valid responses) have adult literacy interests represented. Given the high priority placed on this area of Adult Education, especially in the context of the Adult Literacy/Community Education Budget, this is a disappointing proportion. It may be the case that some areas still have no adequate Literacy Schemes which would account for the low representation.
 - (b) *Adult Students*
Only 3 out of the 22 valid responses had some form of student representation. This is a very low proportion. If we regard the needs of learners as being of primary importance then it would seem logical that some form of representation should be accorded to their interests.

(c) *Industrial/Commercial Interests*

One of the original reasons for increasing the membership of the Board was to include Employer Bodies and Commercial Interests. However, only 6 Boards (i.e., 27%) said such groupings were represented.

3. Allocation of Budget

I have excluded 1987 from this analysis as the information was not available in all cases when the questionnaires were completed. Of the 26 replies the information in one was inadequate and is, therefore, excluded. It must also be understood that the amounts of money allocated to the Boards for Literacy and Community Education projects was very small. For the period September to December 1985 only two Boards obtained more than £6,000. The average would have been closer to £3,000. For the whole of 1986 the figures are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4.

Budgets Allocated to Boards in 1986.

| <i>Budget</i> | <i>No. of Boards</i> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Between £4,00 – £6,000 | 8 |
| Between £6,000 – £8,000 | 7 |
| Between £8,000 – £10,000 | 2 |
| Between £10,000 – £12,000 | 6 |
| Over £12,000 | 2 |

The following are the proportions spent on Literacy and Community Education respectively.

A. Adult Literacy

Table 5 details the proportions spent on Adult Literacy. The most interesting question arising from this table is how could a literacy scheme be run on under 20% of a very small budget? It is now an accepted fact in the Adult Literacy area that an adequate service cannot be provided without proper funding.³

Table 5:**Proportion of Budget Spent on Adult Literacy**

| <i>%</i> | <i>No. of Boards</i> |
|-----------|----------------------|
| 0 – 20% | 6 |
| 21 – 40% | 5 |
| 41 – 60% | 9 |
| 61 – 80% | 5 |
| 81 – 100% | 0 |

Table 6 gives a further breakdown on the main items on which this money was spent.

Table 6:**Items on Which Money Allocated to Adult Literacy Was Spent**

| <i>Item</i> | <i>No. of Boards</i> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Organisers'/ Tutors' Salaries | 14 |
| 2. Tutor Training | 22 |
| 3. Materials/Resources | 17 |
| 4. General Expenses | 12 |
| 5. Administration | 7 |

While each Board determines its own level of priorities, it is interesting to note that in 11 cases no money was allocated to either organisers' or tutors' salaries. Effectively, this means that most of the work is still being carried out by volunteer organisers and tutors. Again we must ask ourselves is it sufficient and morally justifiable that this important work should be left to the goodwill of non-paid staff? A question must also be raised as to the standards and quality of service of service in a scheme where all the work is carried out by volunteer workers.

B. Community Education

Table 7 gives the proportion of the budgets spent on Community Education projects.

Table 7:

Proportion of Budget Spent on
Community Education Projects

| % | <i>No. of Boards</i> |
|-----------|----------------------|
| 0 – 20% | 0 |
| 21 – 40% | 6 |
| 41 – 60% | 8 |
| 61 – 80% | 6 |
| 81 – 100% | 5 |

This table confirms the results of Table 6 that on average a far higher proportion of the budget is spent on Community Education projects. This money is spent on a very wide range of projects. The more typical courses included Personal Development, Household Management, Practical Skills Training, Day Time Self Directed Groups, Parenting and Second Chance Education. To do a detailed analysis and assessment of these projects would require a separate research project.

4. The Role of the Boards in the Development of Adult Education at Local Level

Of the 25 responses to the questions dealing with this topic, 24 said that the Boards take on a predominantly advisory role, i.e., they act as a forum for discussion, offer advice and make suggestions. In only one case was this role broadened to take on an executive dimension, i.e., getting involved in the practicalities of the work like organising projects, doing research, preparing reports. In all other cases it is simply a question of attending meetings and giving advice. However, even in its advisory capacity, 18 Organisers said that the Boards were of benefit, e.g., gave adult education a higher profile, was influential in having proposals accepted at V.E.C. level, gave encouragement and support to the Organisers in their work. Furthermore, no Organiser said that the Board was in any way a hindrance to his/her work.

While most organisers feel that the Boards have a positive role to play, it is the overwhelming view that this potential is not yet being realised. To the question what are the major problems/obstacles to the proper functioning of the Boards, the following difficulties were mentioned:

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Inadequate Budgeting. | 14 Organisers |
| No real power and autonomy. | 7 Organisers |
| Lack of clarification on the Board's precise role. | 6 Organisers |
| Broader Representation | 4 Organisers |

It is also significant that only three areas had held any in-service training for Board members apart from one or two members attending national conferences on Adult Education.

General Conclusions

Despite the limitations of this review already referred to, there are a number of recommendations and issues which should be addressed immediately:

- (1) A more democratic and open process should be used in the selection of Board members.
- (2) The membership should be broadened to insure wider representation especially in such areas as Literacy Groups, Adult Students and Commercial Interests.
- (3) In the allocation of small budgets, many Boards do not seem to appreciate the importance of allocating an adequate proportion to the development of adult literacy work.
- (4) The lack of an adequate budget is probably one of the main obstacles to the development of the Boards as a substantial local force in adult education. As one organiser put it "We have been given a watchdog that cannot bark". In this context, the reduction of the proposed grant for 1987 from £500,000 to £400,000 is a further blow to the effectiveness of the Boards.

- (5) There is an urgent need to clarify precisely what the Boards' role should be. Should it simply be that of an Advisory body where ideas are discussed or should it take on a more practical executive role? Whatever option is taken will have a radical effect in determining the type of person who is nominated to the Board.
- (6) It is ironic that a body primarily concerned with adult education does not, in most cases, undergo the adult education experience in order to improve its own effectiveness. Therefore, there is a need for a more co-ordinated and long term programme of in-service training at local and national level.

References

1. Lifelong Learning "Report of the Commission on Adult Education" (Published by the Stationary Office). see pp. 129 - 133 for a full account of its proposals.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
3. "Guidelines For Good Adult Literacy Work" N.A.L.A. 1985. See in particular Part B.

Noel Dalton is Adult Education Organiser for Co. Kildare and Vice-Chairperson of the Adult Education Organisers' Association.

The Agony of Adult Education

AD HOCK

Dear Aunt Hock,

I have been away from school for a number of years. I would now like to return and possibly take a Leaving Cert. course. However, every time I think of this, I break out in spots. What should I do?

Yours etc.,
A.K. Nee

Dear A.K. Nee,

This is a fairly common condition known as recurrent education, for which there is no known cure. For your consolation, unless it is a really serious outbreak, you will only be affected now and again.

Dear Aunt Hock,

For many years I have enjoyed the woodwork class at the local Tech. This year, however, we have a new teacher. He is tall, strong, and from Kerry and for these reasons I have fallen in love with him. This is a grave distraction and it has hampered my progress to such an extent that I have not been able to move on to Woodwork 111.

Yours etc.,
Bored

Dear Bored,

At the moment you cannot see the wood for the Three. It is very plain that you have had a rough deal and all adze up to a touch chestnut to crack. Perhaps you should move to another branch. That would solve it, wooden it?

Dear Aunt Hock,

For a number of years I have been attending a course in Self Discovery. Recently, however, I am sure that I have found myself and I am now very uncertain as to where I should go from here. What do you recommend?

Yours etc.
Fulfilled.

Dear Fulfilled,

Get lost!

Dear Aunt Hock,

My girlfriend and I are very weak at Maths. We have decided to take a special course at night because we feel that, should we decide to marry, it will be important for us, for tax purposes, to know how to subtract. Unfortunately, since we started this special Maths course, both of us have gone right off our food and are unable to eat. Can you explain this?

Yours etc.,
X & Y.

Dear X and Y.

It's a clear case of 'Two summers don't make a swallow'.

Dear Aunt Hock,

I am not a very good driver and I live a considerable distance from the Adult Education Centre, where I have enrolled for the Basic Golf Course. The nights around here are very dark and dangerous for cycling. Should I take the bus?

Yours etc.,
S. Roche.

Dear S. Roche,

No, you car.

Dar Aunt Hock,

I am a member of a Marxist-Leninist group and I never seem to meet the right people. Recently a friend of mine who has been attending adult education classes told me that I should take part in such classes as there is a great chance of meeting people of your own age and interests.

Yours,
Etcetera.

Dear Etcetera,

I am glad to say that there are a number of agencies in the adult education field which deal specifically with problems like your own. I can recommend AONTAS (Anyone Over Nineteen Tired and Single), NALA (Never Again Live Alone), IVEA (Introducing Very Eligible Adults), and of course, any AEO (Always Expecting Offers).

Ad Hock was responsible for the establishment of the Ad Hock Adult Education Board. Having been established as a permanent feature of adult education, he is now working at becoming a legend in his lifetime.

OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM

Adult Education - Action for Change

CORK COMBAT POVERTY RESOURCE PROJECT

Adult Education, as part of the work of the Cork Combat Poverty Resource Project has been going on in various forms, groups and through various expressions over the past ten years.

For a great part of our work it has been one element in a basic action Programme to change a specific aspect of oppression in working class lives and in working class communities. Components of the action programme include:

- The action/reflection/action approach adopted by the Education Action Group in their effort to have a school built in the Knocknaheeny area that would reflect the majority of parents needs and wishes.
- The information gathering/research Programme adopted by the Information Group, documenting the experiences of the 'clients' of the Social Welfare System, and the Peoples Enquiry run by the recipients of Social Welfare Benefits on their experiences of the system – thus educating the public and turning on its head the notion of 'who should hold enquiries'.
- The Study Programme undertaken by young unemployed people on unemployment trends in the city, based on analysis of the figures available from the Employment Exchange – and the challenge provided of finding ways to include early school leavers actively and centrally in this research.
- The course "You and the Law" organised by local resource workers with back up from legal personnel – which gave rise to at least two Action Groups, based on shared needs.
- The series of open meetings and discussion groups held around the theme "Marriage Breakdown" – which a) ensured that submissions to the Commission on Marriage Breakdown, reflected the needs and wishes of working class and poorer women who had experienced the trauma of the break-up of a marriage and b) encouraged women organised together, to challenge, and change, the system of 'Separate Payments' for women at the local Employment Exchange.

All of these and many more are the specific Adult Education elements of a Community Action Approach to social change in working class communities.

There will be those, who, because they need to classify, define, conceptualise or make Adult Education into a speciality for the professionals, may not consider this type of approach as a dimension of community action, as Adult Education at all.

However, our experience has taught us over the years that the best form of Adult Learning (viewed from the peoples' – as distinct from the professionals' – viewpoint) is where people learn together in a group by action and reflection on that action, leading to further work for change.

In addition to this integrated organic Adult-Education-through-action-and-reflection-approach, Cork Combat Poverty Resource Project has also been involved in more structured formal Adult Education activities, basing this involvement on certain criteria and principles such as:

- it should be self-directed, with local working class people taking key roles in organising the content and format of the courses and activities. This has happened within the Write Together Adult Literacy Scheme and through the specific Basic English, Social Studies and Assertiveness Courses run by the Womens Action Group.
- the form of Adult Education should be class based and oriented, reflecting the needs, aspirations and cultural experiences of the participants (e.g., content of Social Studies courses for Women and writings in the Write Together Scheme).
- they should be based on Group input and co-ordination – thus challenging the middle class individualism and career-promotion/orientation of many formally involved in Adult Education.
- work in the field of Adult education and Community Action is not a question of 'charity' but of 'justice' – and that Basic and ongoing Adult Education is a 'right' not a privilege.
- learning/teaching is not a neutral process, people learn from each other, not just from the 'experts' or resource people, and decisions can be reached democratically.

Obviously this approach and practice of Adult Education in communities presents certain challenging questions to the established Adult Education and Community Agencies and Organisations.....e.g.

- How does a system used to recruiting and hiring people, with professional/university qualifications to 'teach' others, recruit, acknowledge and remunerate local working class people without academic qualifications for their work in Adult Education?
- In an administrative system that acknowledges and reinforces individualism and payment to an individual for individual work done, how does it deal with the reality of a collective approach to an Adult Education Course, and pay a group/collective for their Adult Education work? This question has to be faced, so as to ensure that working class people are not used as a way of providing alternative Adult Education on the cheap. (We have had this problem ourselves, where we would have little difficulty in getting payment for a professional to come in and teach a group of people a given skill, but were unable to get funding to run our own self-learning, in women's and other Adult Education Groups).

- What processes could be explored to allow the skills and resources of statutory agencies to be accessible and available to community groups, in a way that they could be used freely, while at the same time acknowledging the need for accountability in the use of public resources?

Clearly, these and many other areas would need to be looked at and practically explored if State agencies and voluntary organisations allow and facilitate more organic development in Adult Education provision and Adult Learning provision by peoples' groups, at community levels.

It is a challenge that needs to be met if we are to reverse the process, whereby the already educationally advantaged gain yet more advantages through the Adult Education system. It is a challenge that calls for a response from all those formally involved in the distribution of Adult Education resources, if the centre of Adult Educational gravity is to move on to the territory where the less powerful feel safe – and where the more powerful may feel less so!

The Cork Combat Poverty Resource Project has been involved in adult and community education for a number of years. Applying collectivist principles to education, the groups have made significant and interesting contributions in the areas of adult literacy, writing and adult basic education.

West Belfast – 'A Radical Educational Project

DESMOND WILSON

There is just one good thing to be said for cutbacks in education – they revive our wildest dreams of creating education without money. It is an impossible dream, but there is another dream which is not an impossible one: to provide education which will survive whether there is money or not.

Springhill Community House in West Belfast began in 1972, to explore the possibility of creating education without money and without teachers. People in the housing estate where unemployment rose from 50 to 80% were just as likely to accept adult education opportunities as anyone else; they had as much talent as anyone else; perhaps for all we knew, more, because in an artificially created housing estate it is likely that just as high rates of disability exist at one end of the scale, so high intellectual ability exists at the other, both to an extraordinary degree. The interesting thing was that while everybody was anxious to examine and prove the disability rates, nobody at all seemed interested in the likelihood of the higher than average intelligence lurking around the corners of the grey uninspiring blocks.

Educational Eccentrics?

Could we possibly create a free zone for adult education, where people did not have to come cap in hand to learn anything and where every kind of learning was welcome, and where education was under the control of the learners rather than the government, political parties or churches? Money expenditure was cut down as far as possible by holding classes, meetings, discussions etc., in a house in the estate. There were anguished cries from officials in the education boards who told us that it could never work because trying to bring education into homes like this would be as foolish as bringing work back into people's homes! When we pointed out that that would not be entirely a bad thing, since the whole family could see what the mother and father really worked at when they were away from home, this was treated as further evidence that educational eccentrics had once again appeared on the placid educational scene. Those were the days when the big school and the big factory were still the educational equivalent of paradise. When the cuts came it began to appear that at least those who held their own classes in the front room of a council house could continue to do so while for many others it was a case of paradise lost as one set of adult classes after another was cut.

So after about 14 years of the experiments most of us are satisfied that it was worth all the trouble, three boycotts, various attacks by nervous political parties, threats of physical destruction, and interminable searching for money which we need in spite of all our desire not to need it.

Formal and Informal Education

The original House has formal classes in languages, sociology, literature, psychology, word processing, literacy, drama etc. The adults who came in the early nineteen seventies were followed by children who, wonder of wonders, asked for education, having been expelled from school or having found school impossible to live with. A factory floor of 5000 sq. feet was given up to us a few years ago near the city centre and there is now a theatre there, for groups who want to produce anything from Readings to new, experimental drama, a workshop, creche, lecture rooms, cafe.

People ask for formal classes leading to 'O' and 'A' levels and eventually may go to university or some job enhancement, or they may simply be glad to have found education not so formidable after all. But the informal education which runs parallel with this is as important, perhaps more important. Political meetings, lectures, exhibitions, study courses etc., which people want and need may not be provided for by public education (or church education) programmes, but with this kind of space available to them, citizens can provide it all for themselves. The extent to which they do so is satisfying and very exciting.

Radical or Conservative!

To those who value controlled education as almost something of divine right to the controllers, such education is also frightening. What would happen,

they ask, if people were allowed, even encouraged to write for their own theatre, if they could have complete control over what they learn and could therefore meet whomever they like, to talk about whatever they wish? Would not fiercely radical thoughts, words and deeds emerge which would question the very foundations on which our society is built?

Alas, no. When people have free reign like that, what they write is amazingly tolerant, gentle and conservative. They produce theatre whose mildness shocks visitors from the north of England who are used to vicious anti-government satire in their social clubs. When free to do so, the people coming to Springhill House decided first of all to meet representatives of every political party, even those who had oppressed them most. Suffering does not make people fierce; it sometimes emphasises how gentle they really are. What makes them fierce, and sometimes rightly so, is to be told what they can do and what they can not do, by people who have no right to dictate to them about anything.

Some politicians and others think Springhill House is a radical educational experiment. The people involved think it *could* be and maybe is on its way there. This year more adult students who restarted their education in the House will be finishing their degrees.

We are waiting however, for the first of them to write, say, a treatise on liberation theology, or to create a new theory of politics.

Free running education is one thing – radical education, alas, is something else again.

Desmond Wilson is a priest who has been involved in community work in West Belfast for many years.

Training Centres: The Solution to Education for Travellers?

PADDY HAVERTY

The concept of the training workshop as an educational intervention is perhaps a paradox. However, over the past decade and particularly the past 5 years this concept has been gaining momentum to such a degree that at present training workshops of one particular type have become a growth area in the education of the deprived. There are 25 such Training Centres for Travellers currently in operation in Ireland.

The idea of developing manual skills side by side with improving literacy, numeracy and social skills is not new. It has been an integral part of vocational education since 1930 and previous to that was embodied in the old Technical Instruction Acts. In the early days of primary education the co-development of "hand and eye" was frequently found, particularly in the rural national school. In reality, therefore, the concept of education through and in conjunction with the development of manual skills is soundly based and pre-dates the foundation of the state.

Background

There are many reasons why this phenomenon of "training centres" has become a growth area in the Irish education/training scene over the past few years:

- The separation of education and training through the setting up of AnCO the Industrial Training Authority. This ensured that a different model from that of the school would develop, a model more closely aligned with the requirements of the work place and based more closely on the industrial day/week/year.
- In Ireland there existed a substantial minority group – travellers – who had a very limited access to education and who had in the '70s begun to undergo a social revolution. They were moving into the urban areas, their skills were obsolete, their adult population almost totally illiterate and innumerate, and they were beginning to live in houses among the settled community. This new lifestyle created problems for both the settled communities and the travellers and demanded action.
- New thinking regarding "community effort", i.e., local groups identifying a local problem and coming together to attempt an analysis and recommend a solution.

So it was that in the late '70s the idea of providing for the education and training of the traveller community through setting up training centres for travellers developed. In 1979 a National Co-ordinating Committee comprising members from the Department of Education and the Department of Labour (AnCO) set to work to develop a set of guidelines which would provide the basis for the system.

The structure of the training centres involved a large degree of co-operation between the various agencies involved. Suitable premises were to be provided by the Department of the Environment (Local Authority), training allowances and budget for running costs were provided by the Department of Labour (AnCO) and instruction and maintenance costs by the Department of Education through the local V.E.C. Management of the centre was provided by the local Management Committee comprising representatives of each of the statutory bodies as well as local members. The success of the training centres throughout the country today is a tribute to the vision, dedication and commitment of those who strove to overcome the many difficulties imposed by such a wide and varied superstructure.

Advantages:

- The primary advantage of Training Centres must be the training/education which they provide for those who attend. While no scientific appraisal of this has as yet been undertaken, it is obvious to all involved that the increase in skills coupled with the increase in self-esteem and self-awareness is quite striking.
- The Training Centre becomes a focus and meeting point for the two communities – the settled population and the newly settled travellers – and helps to dispel the prejudice which exists on both sides.

- Barriers of prejudice and ignorance within the settled community are broken through the activities of the centre. Good Centre Directors ensure that a high profile is maintained locally by the Centre through participation in shows, parades and local fetes. Many centres also undertake work to aid local charities and provide funds for the centre through the sale of some goods to members of the local community.
- It provides a much needed back up service to the settlement programme through the training it gives the travellers in the skills of homemaking and the settled way of life. Programmes in health, hygiene, childrearing and budgeting serve to improve the quality of life of the trainees.
- Travellers who attend a Training Centre learn to appreciate the value of training and education and develop positive attitudes towards the education of their own children thus hopefully breaking the cycle of illiteracy and educational deprivation.

Disadvantages:

It would be wrong while pointing out the advantages of the Training Centre, to ignore its shortcomings. Thus, for example:

- The very success of the Training Centre leads to one of its greatest disadvantages. Because it is structured along industrial lines and governed by the rules pertaining to industrial training, trainees are permitted to attend for 48 weeks only. This is agreed by all to be too short a period of training for those whose previous formal links with education or training vary from sporadic to non-existent.
- Another disadvantage is the limit on numbers who can attend. Training Centres normally cater for 12 or 24 trainees and the upper limit cannot be exceeded. Demand for places in a centre may vary because of the nomadic nature of the trainees and the settlement policy of the Local Authority.
- No scientific evaluation of the training programmes has been carried out to assess their suitability for the needs of the trainees nor indeed have these needs been investigated recently despite the fact that the lifestyle of the travelling community is changing at a very rapid pace.

Establishing a Centre:

The following is a brief outline of procedures for setting up a Training Centre.

The first step is to form a local committee of interested persons which will carry out a survey to identify the population of travellers in the area, the age structure of the travelling community, the settlement policy/proposals of Local Authority, suitable premises to house the Training Centre and negotiate a rent.

Secondly, the Committee applies to the local V.E.C. for instructors – 100 hours per week for 24 place centre, (pro rata for 12 places), and to the local AnCO centre for training allowances specifying the number of trainees, the capital equipment budget for start up of centre, (supplying lists of equipment needed for various training areas) and a budget to cover day to day running costs including rent and portion of the Director's salary.

When all of the above have been sanctioned, the Committee advertises for and selects its Director. The V.E.C. should by now have got sanction for its instructors from the Department of Education and have selected its team to cater for the needs of the centre, AnCO should have purchased the equipment and the centre should now be ready to start, once the trainees have been selected.

Role of the State Agencies

The Department of Education, through the V.E.C., provides; 100 hours of instruction per week for a 24 place centre and pro rata for a 12 place centre; funding to cover the cost of heat, light and power; funding to cover the costs of educational materials; maintenance of premises. AnCO provides allowances for trainees; budget to cover running costs; a portion of the Director's salary; and rent for the premises.

Where do we go from here?

The success of the model has attracted others towards the training centre concept. The Department of Justice in co-operation with AnCO and the V.E.Cs provides training centres for young offenders and those at risk and some V.E.Cs are providing Junior Training Centres for Travellers in the 12–15 age group who would not otherwise attend full time education. To ensure the continued effectiveness of the Training Centres it is now time for scientific evaluation of both the work that they do and the needs of those for whom they cater.

Because they are funded 55% by the European Social Fund they do not present a heavy burden on the finances of the state. In fact, taking the amount which is saved on social welfare payments to trainees and the P.A.Y.E. and other taxes which are recouped by the Exchequer they must represent extremely good value for money in strictly financial terms.

However, it is in the social and educational sense that such projects must ultimately be judged and, therefore, careful management, enlightened direction and a continuation of the goodwill which brought them to fruition will remain the best guarantors of their future growth.

Paddy Haverty is Adult Education Organiser in County Galway, and has been actively involved for a number of years in working with Travellers' Training Centres.

Book Reviews

TEACHING ADULTS

by Alan Rogers
Open University Press
12 Cofferridge Close
Stony Stratford
Milton Keynes, MK11, 1BY
England.

This is a most interesting book, both for those teaching adults formally, and also for those dealing with groups of learning adults in any voluntary manner.

It draws a distinction between teaching adults and school students, and is very tuned in to the feelings of adult learners. To this end, the author draws on his own experience of teaching, and his book is at pains to inform the reader that nearly all adult learners are voluntary participants.

It also points up the fact that three people are usually involved in adult learning: the organiser, the teacher and the potential adult learner. These people must work together to get the best results. The book stresses this involvement and gives helpful hints to teachers and to group workers alike. It aims to provide a platform of experience for the teacher of adults, not just to discuss how adults learn, but also how the teacher can plan accordingly and help those in his class to learn more effectively.

The book includes a definition of adult education, also it takes a look at what is understood by the term 'Adult Student'. In addition, it looks at the expectations of adult learners and gives useful hints to teachers on how to achieve these goals. It stresses that the environment is important in adult education, even how the adult group is seated.

This is where the role of the teacher is vital, according to Alan Rogers. Firstly as teacher of the group; secondly as teacher of the skills they wish to impart; thirdly as a member of the group under a degree of pressure, and finally as an audience for the group to perform to.

Quite correctly 'Teaching Adults' stresses that teachers should not expect 100% success in their endeavours. It makes the point that patience and understanding are two vital ingredients for anyone involved in adult education, and that the teacher can become part of that learning process.

The book is also concerned with teaching methods, and the approach teachers adopt towards each course. Alan Rogers maintains that it is more beneficial to help adults to learn by concentrating on part of the syllabus, rather than to try to teach them everything. "The purpose of teaching adults is to help them to learn, not to teach them all they know and thus stop them from carrying on learning."

One can forgive the author for stressing the rather obvious point that, above all, the teacher of adults must have tact, and that the teacher has a duty to encourage the more reticent members to contribute, while the persistent talker has to be treated in a firm manner and not allowed to dominate the other members of the class.

'Teaching Adults' also takes a look at mental blocks to learning. These cover a wide range, including the psychological, situational, or perhaps just plain bad relations between the teacher and the learner. Anxiety is another characteristic of adult learners. Most teachers will come across this in their groups: it can come from a negative self-image, and it is in the teacher's own interest to build up the group's self-esteem.

The author stresses that each teacher of adults needs to face every situation as a unique event, requiring a new assessment and perhaps even a new method. We are reminded that what will work with one group may not necessarily work with another – an area where the teacher must tread carefully. "Teachers need to address themselves to the problem of overcoming the sense of exclusion that they have created in many of their fellow human beings."

Alan Rogers has written a book which I believe teachers, student teachers and administrators will find extremely useful. His achievement in this is, I surmise, due not only to the fact that he is an experienced teacher, but that he genuinely seems to like people.

Phyllis Roche

TRAINING FOR TRANSFORMATION A Handbook for Community Workers

by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel
Mambo Press
c/o Trocaire
169 Booterstown Ave.
Blackrock, Co. Dublin.
£13.00

These books should be of interest to anyone involved in Adult Basic Education. They illustrate the Christian concept of community transformation, with the basic philosophy, derived from Paulo Freire, that we should all participate in making this world a more just place in which to live.

Book 1: covers the theory of Paulo Freire on developing critical consciousness, and how to put this theory into practice.

Book 2: focuses on the skills necessary for participatory education, in particular the theory and practice of group work.

Book 3: deals with social analysis, long-term planning and evaluation.

As Literacy Organiser in Coolock, I found Book 2 the most helpful and interesting of the lot. From beginning to end, it contains much of the theory and practice needed to develop literacy group work in a community setting. Although intended for use in Third World countries, I found this book an excellent source of information and exercises which I will use in literacy teaching and tutor training.

All three books are well written and illustrated. They are not recommended to be read from cover to cover, but rather used as back-up material for anyone planning to do group work with adults in a community setting. They are also very useful reference books for any literacy scheme and reasonably priced for such a wealth of theory and methodology related to adult community education.

Bernie McCann

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