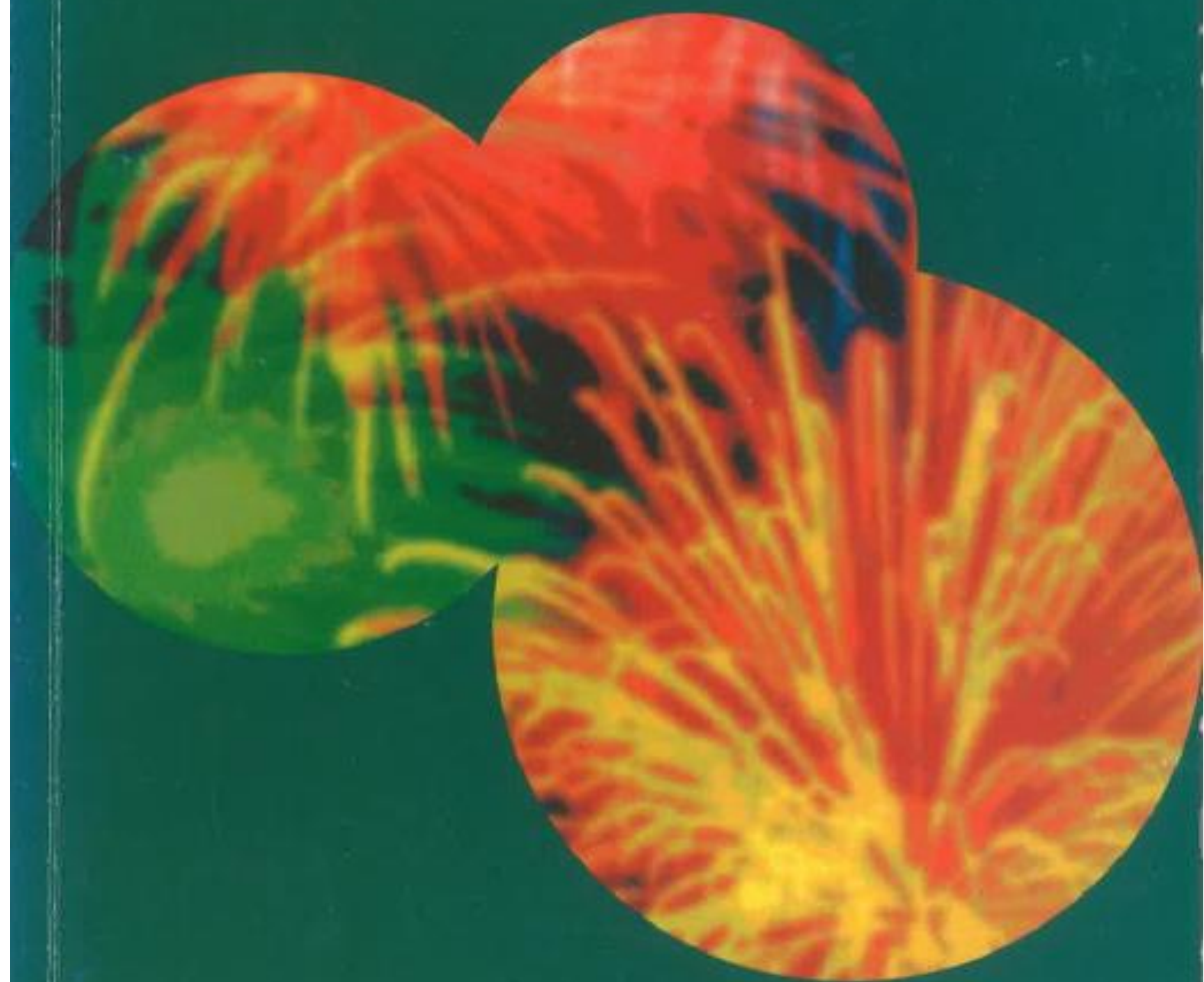


The Adult Learner



The Journal of Adult and Community Education in Ireland 1995

The Adult Learner

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Editorial Comment

The Adult Learner on this occasion is most appropriately titled because, for the most part, it is written by adult learners for adult learners. We invited contributions from many different areas in adult and community education and we were delighted with the response. We offer here a series of articles which give a flavour of the range and diversity of adult education activities in this country at the present time. Whether writers are describing their first faltering steps in adult basic education or their attempts to progress their learning at another level, the will and the determination to succeed are evident. The importance of adult learning for individual development is also highlighted, whether for those studying within their own communities or within prison walls. It is interesting too to note the manner in which these learners are anxious to make their knowledge and expertise available to other adult learners. But above all what emerges is the appreciation of these adult students and the sheer joy that they have found in their adult learning experiences.

It is sad to record that all of this enthusiasm and vitality, adaptability and innovation, which are the hallmarks of current adult education provision, seem to have been totally missed by those who had the responsibility for framing the White Paper on education called Charting Our Education Future. Of course, adult education will continue to meet the needs of students but it may not always prosper because, as is clear from the experience of the voluntary adult education group in Galway that is documented in this issue, there are situations where official support and encouragement are crucial. Please, framers of this document, do not think for a moment that we are fooled. You can steal our language, you can talk of liberation and empowerment, you can state the importance of lifelong learning and the right of every individual to education but only when you attempt to put these noble aspirations into effect, will you begin to be credible.

But, framers, it is not too late. You too can be lifelong learners and you can make a good start by reading and reflecting on what the contributors in this issue of *The Adult Learner* have to say to you.

I would like to thank the staff of the Curriculum Development Unit in Crumlin for making their premises and facilities available to us for our meetings and the members of the Editorial Board for their generous commitment of precious time and talents.

Liam Bane, Editor,

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Tony Downes, A.E.O. Co. Dublin.

Kathleen Forde, A.E.O. Dublin City.

Helen Keogh, National Co-ordinator, VTOS.

Joanna McMinn, AONTAS Executive.

My Journey into Adult Education

Peg Hanafin

I never liked school. Maybe it was because I had to walk more than a mile to get to school and get over stiles and climb through gates when I was only four years old, that the idea of school became a drag. I can never remember a time when I was happy at school. After spending primary school in a rural four teacher school where ear wiggling was the order of the day, I then cycled five miles to the Presentation Convent Secondary School. After the first year I was sent as a boarder and I was never sure whether this was because I had my appendix removed or because I was wild and perhaps a bit wilful.

Even though I liked most of the nuns, who were the majority of teachers then, I would still have preferred to be at home on the farm, milking the cows, carrying water by bucket from the well and doing all the other jobs that must be done on a farm. Anything was better than studying. The convent had a farmyard and there was never any problem getting me to work there. When tea time came, that was the signal for long silences. Except for the Rosary, all else was in silence. The amazing thing was that the vast majority of the girls kept that silence. Long silences did not suit me, so I was constantly in trouble, although I now realise that these extended periods of silences developed in me the sense of spirituality which has remained with me always. The only one I would talk to was God, and He did not answer back, and I suppose that suited me at the time.

Carefree Years

I was not sorry to come to the end of my school years. I applied for and got a secretarial job with North Tipperary Co. Council and I could not wait for the day when I would start working. Alas that was not to happen, as my mother fell ill and I remained at home to care for her. Around that time we had got a Massey Ferguson tractor and I quickly became attached to the mobility it offered. After doing all the farm work with horses, it was very exciting to drive along and speed up with no effort on my part. All the milking had still to be done by hand, and rural electrification was just taking off. Life was good. We also had a Ford Anglia car. To get your license then all you had to do was send off a £1 note, back came your license and away you went. Leisure time was fishing, catching eels with a table fork, and now and then going to a dance, mostly on our bicycles.

Where we lived, on the bank of the river Suir, our nearest neighbour was over a half a mile away, so you quickly learned to occupy yourself. "Cuardaiocht" was great then. Over the winter months we danced to the sound of my mother playing the melodeon, and then when everyone was

warmed up, we would all play cards, with the smart ones cheating, and then the rows would start. I never remember being bored or lonely in those years. I had dogs and cats and farm animals galore to keep me company. Even though my brothers and myself worked hard in those years and our pocket money was limited, we always enjoyed ourselves. When we would be hoeing beet or turnips or tramping hay, we would be reciting poetry like Dan McGrew or some other lines that went on forever and ever.

Raising a Family

Then when I was just turned twenty, I got married and went to live in a bungalow in the town where I still live. In the beginning, I used to cycle home every day but when I became pregnant, that had to stop. For the first time in my life I felt lonely and isolated. I did not know anybody and all my neighbours appeared to be very old and I did not appear to have much in common with them. The days dragged by with nothing to do. After all you could only make the bed once, and wash two cups once. It was during this time that I started going back to reading - papers, books, magazines, anything to while away the hours while my husband was at work. As he was working in the family business, his homecoming was always uncertain and we did not have a telephone.

In the next six years I became the mother of five children. For the next twenty plus years, my time went between rearing my children and helping in the business that my husband and myself started after my first child was born. School curricula had changed in the intervening years. I could not understand how they all liked going to school. I never discussed with them how I felt about school in my day.

As the years passed and the children arrived at Leaving Certificate, each one in turn went on to third-level college. Our oldest daughter decided to go to Trinity College and that was my first encounter with a university. I remember the day quite clearly as in fear and trepidation I escorted her there. This was an intimidating, uninviting place, with thousands of boys and girls milling around and here was I leaving my daughter behind to fend for herself. I was devastated. I was soon to get used to it. Over the next number of years, as I attended their graduations at different colleges around the country, I was always fascinated by the milling crowds and the general excitement.

Awakening Interest

By now I felt that I was lost when it came to education. Our house was full with all kinds of books, and folders and all the paraphernalia associated with university. Now and then I would look through them wishing that I could understand. Since 1969 I had been a member of the local conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, serving as secretary under four different Presidents. My work with the society was diverse and included running holidays for senior citizens and children every year. This brought you into

close contact with many people. When you live with people for a week you develop a bond with them and more often than not they will confide in you. I felt ill-equipped to deal with the many problems I encountered. I yearned for more knowledge and better insight into what I was doing. Conversations with my children always came around to my ability and the possibility of doing some course to help me. Every one of them was enthusiastic and encouraging, as was my husband. In 1988 I buried a much loved brother, who was a priest and who had taken a Masters degree in Psychology while a chaplain to a prison in Detroit U.S.A. He had been my mentor.

I started looking at different courses. I applied to Trinity College to do an addiction study course but was turned down because I was not in full time employment in some helping profession. I was disappointed but more determined. In July 1989, my daughter telephoned me to say that the Adult Education Department in University College Galway had advertised a Diploma in the Psychology of Counselling. I wrote away for the syllabus, and an application form. For the first time in my life I was asked for a C.V. What in the name of God would I put on a C.V.? Again my eldest daughter came to my rescue. When we had gone through the various tasks I had performed over the years, it did not look too bad.

I was called for interview. That day changed my whole life. At the interview I was asked how would I manage a 200 mile round trip every week throughout the winter. I answered confidently "no bother". At that stage I was forty nine years old and my youngest daughter was twenty two years old. Our youngest son had come home to the business so I felt free to choose what I wanted to do. My husband was supportive and excited for me and encouraged me in every way. Then came the disappointment. I was turned down again. I remember well the feelings I had and decided that perhaps the journey would be too much for me. All the other successful applicants were from Galway. But on the 3rd of November 1989, a telephone call came to say I was to be in the University on Wednesday evening at 6.30 to start lectures. It was such a shock I had not time to work out the implications for me. An applicant who had had been offered a place had not turned up and it was decided to offer the place to me. I decided that they would not regret it.

University Days

While doing the course, I would leave home at around 2pm, drive to Galway, go out to Salthill, go for a walk on the promenade, get my tea and arrive back at the University well in time for lectures. The first evening I was apprehensive and fearful. When the lecture started, I kept thinking what a foolish decision I had made and when I realised that most of my classmates were all in professions, I nearly passed out. The lecturer welcomed me very warmly and asked me if I had any questions to ask. I was dumbfounded and shook my head. I had never been any good at speaking in public, because

of my flat mid-Tipperary accent, and with all these cultured accents I felt really intimidated.

You can imagine how someone out of a class room situation for 32 years in a class with Ph.ds, teachers, nurses, lecturers, and a couple of nuns as well, was feeling. At break time the lecturer came over to me and asked me how I was feeling so far. I asked him how much I had missed and would I be able to catch up with the class. When the class re-convened, he asked the class to give me any notes I had missed and explain to me anything of importance that I should know. There was a lot of smiles and then one man said they had not got into the swing of things as yet. I was also at a great disadvantage in that they all seemed to know each other and many were obvious friends. I must say that the class took me to their bosom and in no time at all I fitted in.

What a wonderful decision I had made. I absolutely loved University life. I loved the trip every Wednesday and I was always there hours before time. Leaving Galway at 10.30 at night to start the journey home, I used to feel so happy. I felt for the first time in my life that I had control of my own life. I would put on my favourite tape and I would sing all the way home. I would be nearly sorry to reach home and I would be as fresh as a daisy and on top of the world.

By Christmas I knew that I had something to offer to the class. Twenty years of "on the ground" experience left me with much practical knowledge and skills that I did not realise I had and this gave me a great boost. My classmates were very supportive and when the bad weather of winter came, I could have my choice of beds every week. But I always came home because the next morning I would be back at the counter.

The Second Year

When the first year ended, I prayed hard that I would be returning for the second year. My prayers were answered. The second year my eldest son returned to do an M.B.A. in U.C.G. and I now had to travel to Galway on Saturday as well as on Wednesday. I loved every moment of that year. My son and myself would meet for lunch, discuss college life and our immediate problems and he would give me advice on taking notes, how to use the library, the best place to study in my free time, and now and then check on my driving to see if I exceeded the speed limit. All my children were interested in my progress, and every lecture had to be discussed with my husband, who always gave me valuable feed back. When project time came and the report was good, I was really proud of how far I had come.

If only people realised the value of adult education, there would be queues a mile long for every course offered. It offers a whole new dimension to life, a wonderful life. Meeting people with different points of view, the learning process, life experiences, all give a sense of pride and achievement and such a boost to morale.

I got to know so many marvellous people, from lecturers, students, to Peggy who ran the canteen and who always made sure to put by a couple of sandwiches for me if they were getting scarce. The second year of the course was even better for me. I now knew that I was capable of holding my own in the class and fully accepted that each person had their own unique experiences to offer. In the two years of lectures, seminars, counselling, co-counselling I never once missed or was late for a lecture. It did not go unnoticed by the co-ordinator and when it was commented on I felt really proud. Many of my colleagues from that class kept in touch with me regularly and when I go to Galway, I make a point of meeting up with those still around.

I would love to tell the whole world what a difference that Diploma made in my life. The joy of graduating. Hearing your name called out by the President of the college, with all those men in their flamboyant colours and peculiar hats in attendance. The shaking of your knees as you walk up to the podium to collect your piece of parchment. No other occasion in my life gave me such a profound sense of myself and what I could achieve.

Further Study

I was addicted to studying. While going to Galway I worked in our business during the day. I used to get up at 5.30 in the morning to get my studying done before the hustle and bustle of our busy household got under way. In 1993, at the instigation of a very good friend of mine, I signed on to do an advanced Diploma in the Organisation of Community Groups with North Tipperary V.E.C. I won't deny that it was a demanding course, where only the best was good enough. How many times have I wished since completing that course that I had had that knowledge throughout all my years organising groups. Being taught the exact way of organising, fund raising, keeping accounts, advertising, the day to day running of an organisation was just marvellous. How easy all these tasks appear when the trial and error element is eliminated. This is a course I would strongly recommend to all voluntary workers.

The Rural Experience

Attending University when you live in a rural area is extremely difficult and for many it is not an option. Firstly, there is the distance involved. For me it was a round trip of 192 miles each time I had lectures. You must have a good car and then there is the cost of petrol and meals. And of course there are no grants towards your fees. Secondly, there is the time factor, which is considerable and would affect many who might aspire to continuing their education. People who live adjacent to third-level colleges do not know how lucky they are. They have such choice in comparison with people from rural areas. It's a pity that the possibility to enhance your life like this depends on where you live.

Thank God for our local V.E.C.s. The recognition that many people would avail of further education if available locally is to be commended. We now see the day when universities offer selected courses to the rural population in many V.E.C. centres. It is early days yet and many people are not aware of the enormous benefit these courses bring to their lives.

Two years ago the local V.E.C. asked me to co-ordinate a certificate course in The Community Aspects of Health and Ageing for University College Cork. It was a whole new experience for me and when the year was finished, the students wanted to continue with the course. Needless to say they were accommodated and they will now continue in their studies for a Diploma. This group of people would not have met but for the course, and they had much to offer to each other. Break time was a time of laughter and fun and a time of sharing. It is essential to have a C.E.O. who is willing and able to provide this facility to persons in rural areas and to encourage people to participate in third-level courses locally. I would like to compliment the Adult Education Department of U.C.C. in responding to the V.E.C's vision and interest in providing rural students with the courses which they wanted to pursue.

VTOS Co-ordinator

I now co-ordinate a Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme for the V.E.C. and I just love every minute that I spend with this group. Last year I retired from the shop after 36 years behind the counter, thinking that I would have plenty of time for visiting or maybe take up some new hobby. I am so happy to be involved in adult education, my waking hours are filled with new ideas of how I can transmit to my students the exciting dimension that continuing education can give to their lives. The very fact that this group had the vision and the wisdom to return to education shows the calibre of the participants. Their search for knowledge and their commitment to returning to further education makes them very special people. It is a most rewarding job for me.

Many of the students who join this course are inhibited and they are often disillusioned. They experience a loss of dignity, a sense of aloneness and many have a deep sense of failure. In a very short while I witness them becoming happy, with a sense of purpose in their walk and a recognition of their own self worth. I am happy and proud to be part of this great change in their lives. Since I joined this band of people who are proud of their involvement in adult education I am completely happy. My husband asked me recently would I like to be young again and my reply to him was "No, but I would like to stay this age forever".

Conclusion

When I came to putting this article on the computer, I had asked a friend to type it for me as I had never used a computer before. He said to me "Have a try at the word-processor yourself. We'll see how you get on". I did just that.

I am continuing my education as I type this document myself, hopefully with not too many mistakes. This is further proof of the fascination of learning, even to people of my age. Now that I have accomplished this much on the word-processor, it has encouraged me to further improve my skills in computing.

As is evident from what I have written, I nearly did not make it into adult education. What a tremendous loss that would have been to my life.

Peg Hanafin is VTOS Co-ordinator in Thurles with Co. Tipperary (NR) VEC.

The Liberation Trail

Rita McAuley

My first thoughts in writing this article centre on the hope that it will encourage people to become part of their community. I must honestly admit that starting community work can be a very lonely and frightening experience. There will be anger, anxiety, depression, frustration, chaos and many times when you will ask yourself: what the hell am I doing here?

It can be very lonely when you fail to convince people that what you are trying to do may be of some benefit to them. You always have to face the unknown which entails risk and commitment. You will have to be willing to wait for those whose help you have sought until they catch up with you in their own time. Most of the time those whom you considered reliable turn out to be too scared to stand alone or even as part of a group. The opposite can also happen when others unexpectedly blossom and discover their inner resources and abilities. But through all this emptiness there remains the need to wait and be willing to go with the flow. Nothing grows without some form of shedding. This is a natural process of drawing together a community.

This article will see me at my most vulnerable as I try to explain that even now I'm not sure where I am, in the broad sense, in the community where I live and work. My hope for Kilmore West is for a series of projects that would accept people at the point in life where they feel they now are. Trust is a precious gift in the community and before any learning can take place, that is the first most important factor necessary for the liberation of education to take place.

Childhood and School Days

I was one of thousands of war babies born in Dublin during the Second World War. Poverty was rampant in the Inner City at that time. Money was as scarce as extra ration books. Whatever damage lack of food did to me medically, brain-wise at six I am told I was as sharp and bright as a new pin. I had started school at three and the days were not long enough for me. I loved classes, my friends, teachers and most of all, I loved the sense of belonging. School was not only a very safe place for me to be but it also forms my happiest memories of childhood. At age seven I was reading books above my class age and at twelve I had reached sixth class, good at all my subjects, especially English. I loved learning and good stories, and at age thirteen I passed my Primary Cert with 99.9% in all subjects.

However, through necessity, I had to take a job on my fourteenth birthday. I was devastated by a sense of loss that I felt at leaving people and places that could provide me with the food I needed in terms of learning. I was

articulate both in English and Irish. At that time the word "education" was not connected with going to school; it was "learning". I really envied anyone who got the chance to stay at school in those days.

Family Life

I was married at age twenty and got on with my life. When it was time for my three children to go to school, I helped them as much as possible. I wanted them to get as much education as they desired. The Leaving Cert. was the highest I could help them with but the chances were there for them if they wanted to go further.

All the time they were growing up, I had continued to read as much as possible and to keep up with all the changes that women were bringing about, especially in health, politics, education and child care. I had always promised myself that by my fortieth birthday, I would be free to start back into the educational process that I had missed in my youth. My childhood did give me the incentive to develop my inner resources. Education was the catalyst needed to enable me to realise my potential. This happened most noticeably through an Addiction Awareness programme which showed me the need to develop my self-worth and a proper appreciation of myself, to learn to be free of all guilt and to accept myself as I now am.

Adult Education.

In January 1980 I enrolled in an AnCo course, Return to Work. As well as having very interesting speakers, there was the added incentive of being paid for the pleasure of being back in a learning situation. It was a most worthwhile six-month course and at the end of it, I was offered a chance to continue for another six months at the Institute of Adult Education, learning office skills, typing and social studies. I was the only mature adult in the class which consisted of women from the inner city with an average age of twenty. It was great working with them and I learned a great deal about myself and my own children by listening to them.

For the next few years I worked in Citizen Advice Centres until I visited Colaiste Dhulaigh and met Kathleen Forde. I felt the need of Personal Development in order to develop the confidence to express myself better in public. Kathleen was very helpful in directing me into a Personal Development class and also a Social Studies course. Nuala Kelly was the tutor and I enjoyed the way she ran the class and got us all to pool our knowledge and share experiences in an organised manner. The high point of the course was doing our project for Maynooth College. I made friends with three great girls and we worked well together. We were so proud of ourselves when we were presented with our diplomas at Maynooth.

In 1985 I decided to do a Psychology course organised by Kathleen Forde. A lecturer from Cathal Brugha St. College ran the classes which were pitched at

first year college level in order to give us a taste of third level. Quite a challenge and hard to cope with but we all succeeded. I continued in Colaiste Dhulaigh with Creative Writing and we published a book of our writings. This was good therapy for me and it helped me to direct my thoughts about working in my own community.

Community Work

This desire was further prompted by getting involved with a research project on adult education led by Tom Inglis and sponsored by Aontas. I was part of a group of 12 women who recorded their experiences of childhood, marriage, family, learning and the role of education in their lives. All of these ideas were recorded and published in a book called Live and Learn. As a result of this project, I decided to become a voluntary community worker, feeling that I had a lot to share with others in my locality. I have been doing this since 1986; it is hard work but I am happy to be involved.

Since 1986 I have been working to build up contacts in the community of Kilmore West on the Northside of Dublin City. I started a Community Playgroup with two friends with Personal Development going on in the adjoining room. Addiction Awareness was badly needed in the community, so I did a year's course in that area starting with Pre-intervention and Intervention. While doing this course I had to come to terms with the different emotions that knowledge like this can bring up in one's life, painful and traumatic but leading eventually to further personal growth.

Lay Ministry and Partners in Mission

In order to deal with the spiritual side of my life and because working within the community brought me into contact with the priests of the parish, I spent two years in All Hallows College. This experience gave me the knowledge and skills necessary to work in lay ministry in unison with the parish team. The ministry I chose was the promotion of adult education. I also learned how to be critical in a positive way of the church's role in society in the 1990s. Another step along this road was my involvement in Partners in Mission (see the article on Partners in Faith in this issue), a community development programme organised by the Dublin diocese, using Paulo Freire's philosophy as a basis.

I feel happy at the way that all my knowledge has increased my ability to co-ordinate and facilitate local community groups for the past few years. But I still hunger for more knowledge and learning. There is always something new to learn and especially when working in the community, skills need to be updated all the time. Fifteen years ago when I started on my journey, I didn't know where it would lead. I love where I am now and have enjoyed the journey to find myself. 'The glory of God is the human person fully alive' (St. Irenaus)

So when I finally got funding and a premises in 1994, Kilmore West Education Group was born. It is a three-day programme with classes in

Personal Development and an introduction to Addiction Awareness with two counsellors from Stanhope St. The last class of the week is a Writing Group which some people use as an outlet for the issues that the other two classes bring into their consciousness. There are fifteen women in this group who have developed a close bond with each other and who are not only growing in knowledge of themselves but are also spreading the good news about this type of user-friendly, locally based learning experience.

Framework for Future Living

My involvement in community based learning gave me the ability to affirm myself and to validate the work I do. I also got the courage to move on to my final stage of empowerment in the form of the Kilmore West Joint Care Community Group. This group consists of local voluntary and statutory workers who have come together to provide a Framework for Future Living in Kilmore West. We now have a catalyst for bringing together the sixty local groups who have been working hard in the area since the early 1970's. Each group, while doing valuable work, has been very much on its own up to now.

Representatives from these groups now attend regular meetings in order to produce an Area Action Plan for the next five years. Funding for this project comes from the Northside Partnership. As chairperson of the Kilmore West Joint Care Community Group, I am excited at the prospect of my community finally coming into its own. Kilmore does not have a very high profile within the Coolock catchment area, but with the energy and commitment that have been evident at the monthly meetings, prospects are looking good for the community. This joint care group does not set out to tell people what to do, but rather strives to make people aware of their inner potential for development. So my learning is guaranteed for another five years, and in spite of the anger and frustration I have sometimes felt, I have no regrets.

I have lived and loved, laughed and cried, been melted and moulded. I am grateful to all the friends I have met on the Liberation Trail.

Rita McAuley is a voluntary adult education organiser and community worker in Kilmore West, a Dublin Corporation housing estate on the north side of the city.

Death By Neglect

The Mervue Adult Training and Education Group

Breda Lymer

Background

This is a short account of the development of locally based adult education groups in Galway. The story began in a women's group which was established in 1984 by two women who were neighbours in the Mervue community on the east side of Galway city. The women, Breda Lymer and Mary Kearney, both 'blow-ins' to Galway and who stayed at home to look after young families, were anxious to get to know other women in their community. The women approached the local parish priest, Fr. Tom Tarpey, to arrange access to a room in the community centre one morning a week. A notice was placed in the parish newsletter inviting women to come along and meet others in the community.

On the first morning over thirty women and assorted babies and toddlers arrived at the centre. They came from all sections of the community. It was decided to meet one morning a week and have speakers, share skills and crafts and topics of interest with each other. For many of the women it was the first time they had been involved in a group, others had been involved in the I.C.A. or the local Ladies Club - which were still in existence but met at night. The "Thursday Morning Women's Group" was a great outlet for women both socially and educationally and participation and attendance were always high. The women expressed an interest in doing a personal development course. An approach was made to the V.E.C. for a tutor or funding. They were unable to provide either. The group contacted the Adult Education Officer, Mr Seamus O'Grady, at University College Galway and the Health Education Officer, Ms Jacky Jones, at the Western Health Board for support. Both organisations jointly supported and funded the course. There was a great response to the advertisement and so many women applied that a second course was organised. The courses ran one morning a week for ten weeks. The courses were very successful. Running them in the community, in the morning and with creche facilities made it ideal for the women. It was out of this success that the demand to do other courses grew and this is where the development of the Mervue Adult Training and Education group began.

Support and Lack of Support

Around the same time, Spring 1986, an article appeared in the Irish Independent about the Dundrum Adult Training and Education group. Contact was made with Mr. Liam Bane, an Adult Education Organiser who works with D.A.T.E. and a meeting was arranged. Five of us set out from Galway with the support of a local parish sister, Mairin Murphy, who drove

us to Dublin. We learned so much from this lively, vibrant group who shared their experience of organising and running day-time adult education courses with the support of the V.E.C. and Liam Bane. We knew this was what we wanted to do in our own community and we couldn't wait to get back to Galway to make contact with our A.E.O at the V.E.C. and start organising classes. We set up a meeting with the C.E.O of the V.E.C. in Galway. We prepared well for the meeting and had high expectations. Unfortunately, it was not forthcoming. Firstly, we discovered that the city did not have an A.E.O and secondly, the V.E.C. were unable to provide funds or tutors to help us organise the classes. Whatever funding was available went to Literacy and they organised night classes at local V.E.C. schools. We were bitterly disappointed. However, we were not going to be put off so easily and we then took the decision to organise the classes ourselves.

We had a strong sense that there was a need for 'second chance' education and day-time adult education classes run in the community with creche facilities. The women's participation in the personal development courses proved this. However, we decided to organise a meeting locally in order to establish if there was an interest in the wider community. We invited members of the D.A.T.E. group to come and address the meeting and share their experience with us. Over 100 people turned up at the meeting. There was a huge interest and we identified a wide range of classes people wanted to take. That morning a group of approximately 12 came together to start work on organising the classes.

Solving the problems.

Our aim was to establish the group and start classes by the Autumn of 1986. As a group we had problems in the early days. We were new to this work and we didn't know each other very well. We decided to try and work collectively (although we didn't know that word or that way of working at the time - it just felt the right way to work - for some of us!). This did create problems as others in the group would have preferred to work in the traditional committee style. However, we persevered and struggled and organised. In terms of access to facilities, rooms and premises in the community we had wonderful support from the local priests, especially Tom Tarpey, P.P. He even gave us rooms in his own house! As our numbers grew, the demand for space grew and the group fundraised and re-furbished rooms in the basement of the local church to meet these demands. We also had a small office space and a creche based there.

In the early years, the demand for spaces in classes outweighed the places we had available to us. We were overwhelmed with numbers. Our registration mornings were unbelievable. People queued from early morning to register for places. People came from all over Galway city and the outlying districts to the classes. The range of classes on offer was very wide and ranged from Gardening, Art, French, Computers, Drama, Bridge,

Psychology, Cookery, Irish, Return to Study, to Keep Fit and Set Dancing - to mention a few! We also organised 'off-site' classes such as Car Maintenance at the locally based R.T.C., Bowling and Swimming. We always offered Adult Literacy classes. We charged a minimum for the classes and prices ranged from £10 to £20 for one morning per week over eight weeks. We offered reductions to those who were unable to pay.

We encouraged and supported local people with particular skills to become tutors. The tutors themselves participated in group skills/dynamics training workshops. We ended each term with a meeting of tutors and the core group. The tutors were given the evaluation forms from their courses. It was here that we developed new ideas and organised new courses.

We always provided creche facilities. Our motto was "No Creche - No Classes" and the creche was heavily subsidised by the group. In fact most of the activities were subsidised by the group. We received no direct funding from the V.E.C. or other organisations. We received a once off grant from Lottery funds for audio-visual and office equipment. The result of having no sustained funding was that there were huge demands on the group to fund-raise. We organised flag days, cake sales, ceillis and socials.

The end of year was always an important event. We published a newsletter and organised a morning where all the participants and tutors came together to celebrate the work of the classes. Art exhibitions, pottery, crafts, cakes, exotic dishes, dancing, poetry and drama were there for everyone to view, taste and participate in and most importantly to celebrate success. We usually invited local councillors, adult education tutors and groups, various local organisations and the local press to these mornings.

Some of the successes of the group were that a Bridge Club, Flower Club, Art Group and Drama Group were established in the local community. A video made by women who attended a video course and workshops was launched. It documented the work of the group. It is called "A Time for Change". The title song, "Dancing Lady" was written and sung by a local woman Jan Nagle. Jan also launched her singing career with this song on the Pat Kenny T.V. show.

The group hosted a visit from Mary Robinson when she was campaigning for the Presidency. She was very impressed with our work and subsequently mentioned us in one of her speeches.

The Wider Effects

One phenomenon which we did not anticipate was that of the 'pebble in the pond'. Since people from other communities were participating in the classes, a great interest was shown in starting up in their own communities. Women from the Barna community approached the group for help in

establishing an adult education group in their own community. Breda Lymer and Mairin Murphy designed and facilitated a four morning course for the group, which included sessions on: Why an Adult Education Group?, Starting a Group, Roles in the Group, Planning and Running Daytime classes. The Barna group was then established and was followed by the Westside Adult Education group. Then came the Oranmore Adult Education group. All of these groups worked along the same lines as ourselves. We were/are all voluntary, non-profit making providers of day-time adult education classes.

As the adult education groups began to develop, we collaborated with each other in order to avoid clashing with each others' open days, registration mornings and classes. We jointly advertised in the local newspapers in order to save costs. We always supported each others fund-raising events and open mornings. We organised an exhibition and information week at the city library every September. It was organised on a voluntary basis and participation was free. This was an opportunity for the groups to come together to advertise and give information on their classes. Other adult education providers also participated in this exhibition, such as the WHB - Health Education, UCG Adult Education, RTC Adult Education, Slánú, Diocesan Adult Education, Adult Literacy and many more. The groups attempted to form an umbrella group in Galway with the idea of jointly looking for support, funding, cheaper insurance and to discuss other developmental issues. Unfortunately, it did not take off as the members were already over-extended in their own groups and it was impossible to make the commitment required.

Coming to an End

The Mervue Adult Education group organised classes until 1992. In recent years numbers dropped off. This was due to many factors. One was the success of the idea of day-time adult education and the development of other groups in Galway. Another factor is that, as a result of the personal development of many of the participants, several returned to paid work, participated in training schemes such as FAS programmes, Community Development courses at U.C.G. and other further education courses.

In recent years there was difficulty with access to premises. Tom Tarpey had left the parish and with him went a lot of support. It became more difficult to negotiate with community centre committees and accessibility and rent became more difficult to reach. It was around this time that I left the group. Some of the reasons were personal. I was also burned out and felt frustrated. I felt that what seemed to be never ending fund-raising, not getting proper support (what did we need to do to prove ourselves?), dealing with bureaucracy and committees made the work more difficult especially for a voluntary group.

In late 1992 the core group, which consisted of nine people, (some who had been there from the beginning and one, Mary Kearney, who was one of the

founding members of the women's group), decided to formally wind down the Mervue Adult Training and Education group. It was an emotional decision for them to make and difficult for them to tell the rest of us. We ended up together, a small group of regular participants and organisers, one night in a local hotel where we shared the stories of our work and regretted the demise of the group.

This article raises many questions in my mind. Why did we end up doing the work, to a great extent, of the V.E.C.? Despite many requests we were given no support for our work. The work was done on a voluntary basis. There was/is an obvious need for 'second chance' education based in the community with creche facilities. We relied on goodwill in the community for support and fund-raising events. Our ideas were innovative and creative. I wonder if we knew then what we know now about such things as community development, sources of funding, paid work, sources of support, how would we have developed?

In this article there is no way that I have done justice to or given a full account of the tremendous work and commitment of the group over the years. We did not know what we were getting ourselves into. While we had some ideas from the D.A.T.E. group, nevertheless the experience and struggle we had, the work we did, the development and contribution we made to the whole area of second chance learning and adult education in general needs to be more fully documented and recorded. We were a mighty bunch!

I wish to record with thanks the support I personally received from Mary Kearney, my neighbour and friend who started out on the road with me - we gave each other courage to move forward into the unknown. Also to Mairin Murphy and Tom Tarpey who had the keys and used them!, to the core group - many of us have developed lasting friendships - and to Liam Bane and the Dundrum Adult Education Group, Jackey Jones, Western Health Board and Seamus O'Grady of University College Galway for supporting our first venture into the work.

Breda Lymer is a founder member of the Mervue Adult Training and Education group. She now works with Combat Poverty as a Community Development consultant on projects funded by the Department of Social Welfare.

Partners in Faith

An experience of hope, empowerment and living active faith.

Susan Gannon and Frank Naughton C.S.S.P.

It is perhaps no accident that this article on Partners in Faith is the joint effort of two people, one a woman, the other a man, one a lay person, the other a member of a religious congregation, one whose work and community experiences have primarily been in Ireland, while the other has spent much time abroad. The recognition and blending of diversity, whether in giftedness or experience, is a key element in the Partners experience.

We write as participants and would like to begin by offering some words from others who have participated in Partners in Faith programmes. The Radio One religious affairs programme, Cross Currents, recorded one participant as saying:

...the experience I've had for the past twenty five weeks will live with me for many years to come... instead of being a passive person you're active and involved... Where there is hopelessness we will inspire people to have hope and we won't get discouraged too easily ourselves We'll build citizens who care for their neighbours and are not all grab, grab, grab.

Another spoke of

...the great dignity and power that comes from realising that your struggles are connected to peoples thousands of years ago and that God is constant through history, all the way through my struggles and my community's struggle.

On another occasion the participants were invited to respond to a presentation on the Ten Commandments which saw them as the Constitution of a New Society. One group brought in the plastic bags supplied by a large supermarket chain and spoke of their experience of the way that firm actively discriminates against women workers. Their new reading of the commandments saw them as, among other things, calling for equality of opportunity.

What experience has evoked the comments recorded on Cross Currents, has inspired people who seldom put pen to paper to write and has enabled people to make connections between the Ten Commandments and the personnel policy of a large supermarket chain? All were participants on P.I.F. programmes.

Throughout what follows we will try to communicate to you what P.I.F. is about. What is put forward is but a flavour because only as a participant can

you gain a full sense of its meaning and potential. We hope to capture something of the experience and do justice to its creators and participants.

What is Partners in Faith?

Partners in Faith is a programme of adult faith development made up of 27 two and a half hour sessions. There are five phases:

- The exploration of the participants' experience of mystery and their images of God and how these have shaped their lives.
- The discovery of the liberating God of Exodus, of God's dream for people and the prophetic critique employed when this dream is not fulfilled.
- An exploration of spirituality.
- An exploration of the God of Jesus (Abba), of Jesus's vision, stance and action within his own context.
- In the light of Jesus's action for the Kingdom, participants are invited to see their personal, group, communal and societal concerns as revealing God's call. They are further invited to arrange action to bring about the fulfilment of God's dream in all these areas.

The purpose of the programme as a whole is to create together an experience of Christian community where people gain a fresh understanding of the core liberating message of the bible in relation to who God is and what God wants. People express these understandings through their relationships, team tasks, mutual support and co-operation. People experience their own power and ability to make a difference through action together and they celebrate through prayer and ritual a partnership in faith.

Who devised Partners in Faith?

Eight years ago while based in the Dublin Institute of Adult Education and with a mandate to develop pastoral projects, Ciaran Earley O.M.I. and Gemma McKenna, in collaboration with Michael Reidy, John O'Brien and Eamon Bredin, took on the challenge of adult faith development in and through small groups. They were acting out of a conviction that there was an urgent need for new ways of being church and a renewed understanding of the Judaeo-Christian message. They believed that this could happen more effectively within small groups with a radical biblical sense of mission and an orientation towards action. Drawing on their combined knowledge, skills and experience as missionaries (Africa, Latin America and Asia), theologians, adult educators and community animators, they devised Partners in Faith. The influence of Paulo Freire is very evident. They also drew on the work of Walter Bruggemann, Norman Gottwald, Karl Rahner, John Shea, Denis Edwards and others. In many ways P.I.F. might be regarded as a gift from the struggling small Christian communities of the South to the established more institutionalised churches of the North.

Since these beginnings, Gemma and Ciaran, who constitute the core P.I.F. team, have collaborated with a wide range of people in running sessions and at this stage have a wide and extensive network of Partners willing to share their experience and skill.

Initially P.I.F. was run in the Dublin Institute of Adult Education with a number of parishes sending teams of about four people. Subsequently it was run in different localities such as Tallaght, Jobstown, Ballymun. Presently there are courses running in the Ballyfermot/Rowlagh area, in Tallaght and in Ballymun. In all, groups from over 40 parishes have participated in P.I.F. programmes. The majority of people participating have been/are working class and come from parishes where the linking of faith and community concerns is given priority. Women have slightly outnumbered men and the average age of participants has been in the 35-40 age bracket with some younger and older people. Each team usually includes a full-time pastoral agent from the parish.

The 'How' of P.I.F.

Perhaps the best way to describe this is to examine the phrase 'programme of adult faith development'. The term programme may lead some to conclude that P.I.F. is a prepackaged set of inputs designed to communicate its own perspective on given themes. It's not! P.I.F. is a process which facilitates an experience of Christian community. This process contains key inputs from particular perspectives but they are not ends in themselves. What is central to the programme and indeed what the programme is entirely dependent upon is the willingness of the participants to explore, articulate and reflect on their experience of the themes being examined. Time and time again, participants are invited to say their word, to share their insights, to honour their experience and to do all this in as creative a manner as possible. A dialogue is facilitated between their experience and the tradition so that there is a constant process of affirmation and challenge.

The word adult is at the heart of the approach, an approach that is founded on a deep belief in the value of people's experience, ability and creativity. This belief translates itself into every aspect of the P.I.F. sessions.

From the very beginning people are asked to take responsibility for tasks on a weekly rotational basis. The immediate tasks are:

- the preparation and presentation of local, national and international news
- the preparation and leadership of prayer each week in tune with the topic being explored
- the preparation and presentation of reports and commentaries on previous sessions
- the arrangements regarding refreshments for the group
- the maintenance of the working space.

Through these and other tasks the teams develop a sense of themselves, of group interaction, of responsibility and ownership of all aspects of the course. Less than half way through the course the participants are introduced to a group method for action. This involves listening to each others' concerns at personal, group, communal and societal level, formulating what is heard into themes and presenting an aspect of the theme to further explore the group's interests. Finally, after research and planning, each team responds to the needs of the whole group by running a learning event on a topic of their choice. In practical terms, this means that the participants themselves are responsible for the entire session. This is a very exciting, empowering and creative aspect of the P.I.F. process. Among the topics explored have been, unemployment, causes of poverty, understanding the church, interaction in groups and care of the elderly.

Perhaps for the first time in some cases people are asked, in an educational setting, what they believe, understand, experience and think. Their issues and their perspectives on their own issues becomes central. It is amazing to watch a group of individuals blossom as persons and develop as a team. By the time the learning events mentioned above happen, what was partial ownership through team tasks and the highly participative and experimental nature of sessions now becomes full ownership of process and content. A sense of responsibility grows throughout the weeks as people realise that each night depends on them. The willingness to act out of this is evident in the enthusiastic, diligent and creative ways people enter into each session and conduct their own learning events.

Underlying all this is a mutual respect and trust between the participants and the leading learners who, as the process goes on, hand more and more responsibility over to the participants. It is, of course, a risky venture but even the risks capture something of the spirit of the faith journey of a group of differently gifted individuals.

What Else?

A few points remain to be made in order to bring this article to a conclusion. In our experience P.I.F. has afforded many participants an opportunity to bridge the gap between faith and life. Participants involved at all levels in the development of their communities learn a language which enables them to translate faith convictions into concrete actions and then use these and other concrete involvements as material for faith reflections. However, when the course is finished, what happens? Many miss the support, the nourishment, the interaction with others. We would see P.I.F. as a foundation course, as the beginning of a process. Ideally, at the conclusion of the course, support or faith reflection groups might be formed so that the process of intentionally linking faith and life in such a participative and empowering way might continue.

It is important to distinguish between the book, *Partners in Faith*, and the process, *Partners in Faith*, facilitated by Ciaran and Gemma. The book, which outlines the content and process of P.I.F. and is a wonderful resource in itself, comes without the physical presence of the authors. They are both very experienced, resourceful, talented, committed adult religious educators whose style of facilitation enables so much of the growth and learning we have mentioned above. All practitioners are not as skilled or as wise.

In our experience both book and course are imbued with a particular perspective, one which some might call liberationist. It takes sides, challenges the status quo, civil and ecclesial, troubles rather than soothes, evokes questions rather than provides answers. In all, it sets out with the intention of disturbing rather than keeping the peace. But then that seems to have been the principal occupation of the Jewish carpenter on whose life the whole project is based.

Susan Gannon lives at Fatima Mansions in Dublin. She is a community activist, who is presently working with Partners in Faith in Ballymun.

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Thoughts on a White Paper

Liam Bane

Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus Horace, *Ars Poetica*

So this is it. The sum of the combined wisdom of the education institutions and agencies, the end result of a costly process of consultation, including a National Education Convention and hundreds of submissions from all interested individuals and parties.

I have read the White Paper and I am not impressed. I have read the White Paper and it is dull, boring and uninteresting. I have read the White Paper which has the nerve to call itself Charting our Education Future. This is a misnomer because the White Paper is not forward-looking. It has more to do with preserving the past and with reinventing history. I have read the White Paper and I have seen the past masquerading as the future. If it weren't so dull, boring and uninteresting, I would be seriously depressed.

Two Approaches to Education

I am an Adult Education Organiser and I am based in Dundrum in the foothills of South County Dublin. I operate from a simple philosophy of education, which I like to think informs all my work. A basic tenet of this philosophy is that adult education, indeed all education, must be primarily concerned with enhancing personal self-image and with increasing individual self-confidence. It follows that any programme, class or course which does not correspond with this fundamental principle cannot be called educational, since it does not affirm and does not allow the fragile human spirit to grow and flourish. Sadly, there have been too many institutions, in the name of education, which have actively discouraged individual students and succeeded in leaving them with a negative self image. Indeed, too often, those involved in adult education find themselves having to deal first of all with old wounds, and with having to restore the notion of self-worth and dignity before any learning can happen. This is part of the process of empowerment and liberation and it is founded on respect for the integrity of the individual learner.

All over this island, there are groups of adults, the majority of them women, gathered together by day and by night in community centres, in schoolrooms grudgingly given, in parish halls, even in private houses and of course, in draughty prefabs. These people are attending adult classes but they are not being taught. They are learning.

I mention all of this because the White Paper which I have read knows nothing of this phenomenon or, if it does, then it does not consider it to be

of any great importance. This makes clear to me something which I have long suspected, that there are now two approaches to education and that these approaches are proceeding along parallel lines. Not only that but I now realise that they must remain on parallel lines. The formal system, which is the primary concern of this White Paper, is hierarchical in structure with the student firmly on the bottom. The emphasis is on teaching through a methodology by which the possessors of all knowledge transmit information to what are presumed to be empty receptacles. This old fashioned Utilitarian concept is at the heart of this education system. The recipients (or students as they are generally called) are trained for competition in which winners gain the points, the plaudits and entry to third level, where the process is repeated. Once upon a time, the winners could be assured of the best jobs; now they can be assured of whatever jobs are going. And then there are the losers. Well losers are losers and you can't console them by telling them that, like the Olympics, taking part is everything.

The alternative approach to which I have referred earlier cannot dialogue with this formal system precisely because it is an alternative approach. It is as concerned with learning as it is with teaching. It operates on principles of equality and respect, where knowledge is shared, not transmitted, where who you are is infinitely more important than where you come from, where there is more interest in facilitation than in control and where we tread softly lest we tread on your dreams. It is also an education approach promoted very often by voluntary groups, whose members often work longer and harder than many professionals in receipt of an A post allowance.

In from the cold

I am reluctant to comment on the White Paper in detail lest I lose any readers who have ventured this far. Yet it must be done. For adult education the question is how to come in from the cold and retain what is essential - the shared vision and the spirit of mutual respect. The section of the document that is concerned with philosophy contains much that is praiseworthy and sentiments with which no one could quibble. It speaks, for instance, of education as a right for each individual and a means to enhancing well-being and quality of life for the whole of society.¹ It also endorses the notion of lifelong learning but even in this section, it seems that the document is referring to education which is based in schools and colleges. A philosophy of education is fine and desirable but the test of such philosophical principles is the manner of their implementation.

Hopes and Fears

Let me say, firstly, what I hope. The ideas in this White Paper, which is concerned mainly with charting the education future in schools and colleges, is couched in language so cautious and all embracing as to be almost meaningless. We had expected that the broad provisions contained in the

Green Paper would be refined and that the specifics would be spelled out. Amazingly, what we have instead is a White Paper which is more general and more vague than its Green predecessor. What we have for the most part is a series of aspirational statements, which do not threaten any establishment. Perhaps that is what was intended, giving the Minister the freedom to do everything - or of course, the excuse to do nothing.

My hope, then, is that the Minister and her Department have purposely presented their proposals in this way so as not to raise unnecessary fears at this stage and to avoid the inevitable howls of protest from vested interests of church and state. When, however, legislation has to be framed and hard choices have to be made, the Minister and her Department will then put in place their policy and plans, which will put flesh on the grand philosophical principles referred to above. After all, the document is so general and so aspirational that there can be movement in almost any direction. That is my wild hope.

I fear - and right now, the fear has established a commanding lead in the points race - I fear that the language is so vague that it indicates that there will be some tinkering with the present system. There will certainly be new education bodies to replace old education bodies - boards and councils and committees to beat the band, but there it will end. The structure will not really be radically altered and the old wars will continue to be fought, but on new battlefields. The present owners of the system will retain possession and where education policy and practice are concerned, there will be no significant changes.

Adult White Papered Education

We are informed that "adult education and training will be an integral part of the framework for the future development of education"², just as we are informed that "the policy priority will be to ensure that suitable and effective programmes are in place for all who wish to overcome literacy and numeracy problems"³. These statements are contained in a section headed Adult and Continuing Education and Training which takes up three pages out of a total of 231. There is not, of course, the slightest indication as to how these noble aspirations will be put into effect. Just how will adult education and training be an integral part of the framework and what framework are we talking about? And who will devise these suitable and effective programmes for those who wish to overcome literacy and numeracy problems? How will they be funded? Where will they be held? And all of this from a Minister who to date has displayed a remarkable reluctance to meet with adult education interest groups.

Furthermore, a place has been found for this Adult and Continuing Education. It is a new and threatening environment. Its name is Further Education. This Further Education is a predatory animal and it has ambitions

of a colonial nature. It seeks to colonise and to aggrandise the hard won territory of adult and community education. Further Education will include Post Leaving Cert courses, which at present are sited in a limbo somewhere between the formal schools system and adult education provision. Further Education will include the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, a genuine adult education initiative and that, too, will in due course be institutionalised. This chapter of the White Paper is fronted by a photograph of a nice young male teacher reading a book for two nice female students and a nice young male student. They couldn't even get the gender balance right - the part-time teacher should, of course, be female and there should be three women and one nice older man.

Indeed, as worrying as what is included in this Further Education is what is excluded. The report states that Adult Education is characterised by the voluntary nature of participation.⁴ Where would you place those voluntary groups if it should happen that they are no longer required to sustain adult education programmes, if they are not needed to plan and enroll, to advertise and organise, to make the tea, to wash the cups, to clean the floors, to arrange the furniture, to provide the creche, to flush the toilets, to call the fire brigade, and to do it all with a smile? Do you think these folk will be granted a place among the professionals? (Would they want it?) Who and how many Further Educationists will take the place of these people?

Set Us Free

Despite these fears which are raised by the proposals in the White Paper, we are nothing if not positive, as we are nothing if not optimistic. I have a message for the Minister and her Department. It is simply this -Set us free. Loose us from the shackles that are now binding us and that are hindering our growth and development. Minister and Department, you have now a wonderful opportunity to engage in a process of empowerment and liberation, for there is now the opportunity to establish an adult and community education service which will have autonomy.

Of course, where state funding is concerned, we accept the need for accountability and responsibility and the necessary structures that must be put in place for this purpose. There ought to be an Adult Education Board, which will take full responsibility for the funding and administration of adult education provision. It would also be responsible for developing adult education policy and ensuring good practice. It is essential, however, that this Board is not composed of the usual suspects but is representative of genuine adult and community education interests.

It is something of a paradox that, despite all the frustrations and obstacles, adult education is still an exciting and interesting place to work. There is enthusiasm, innovation, vitality, optimism and the excitement and freshness of new ideas. There is a marvellous flexibility which allows all of this to prosper. It must be the primary duty of any new Board to try and ensure that

this is allowed to continue and it can only continue if it is given its own space. If this is not encouraged, it may well die and this country will be a sadder place. Perhaps if the space is not created, then it may be time for the people to reclaim those unused school rooms which were built with their money, simply by occupying them and refusing to leave. Then we can learn and laugh, we can develop and dance, we can create and celebrate, sharing in the ritual and the mysteries of head and heart and hand. Set us free. Now.

Liam Bane is an Adult Education Organiser with Co. Dublin VEC and he is editor of The Adult Learner.

1. Charting our Education Future, p.6.
2. *Ibid.* p. 77
3. *Ibid.* pp. 78-9
4. *Ibid.* p.77

Within the Walls

My Experience with Adult Education

Martin Keane

My first introduction to the area of adult education occurred at the beginning of 1989 in Mountjoy Prison, when I found myself in the initial stages of a long prison sentence. Consequently with a lot of time on my hands, I began to attend the education unit in Mountjoy and to dabble in various subjects such as History, Geography, English and Drama. To be frankly honest, my participation and my interest in these subjects could best be described as fragmented, and really it was just a method I employed to enable me to pass the time.

Interest in Drama.

However I must point out at this stage that I did develop a strong interest in drama as a result of being introduced to it at this early stage. This was for me a totally new experience, as I had absolutely no interest and very little knowledge about drama previous to this. I began to do small scenes from plays in the classroom in Mountjoy. This was my first attempt at acting. I also began to listen regularly to the plays broadcast on the radio and I found them very interesting. Then in the beginning of 1990, I was selected to play the part of a guard in the Hugh Leonard play called *Madigans Lock*, and this was an experience I will always remember.

This production was on a fairly large scale with a professional director and some well known professional actresses from the outside taking part alongside us inmates. So it was a step into the unknown for me. We spent over three months rehearsing the play and I learned a great deal about live drama and all that it entails. I must add that I also had a really enjoyable time participating in these get-togethers. Anyhow we then performed for a whole week to live audiences in Mountjoy, and on each occasion I really enjoyed the experience. On the last night, friends and family were invited as well as numerous dignitaries from the outside, including the author Hugh Leonard. It is hard to describe the "high" which I got from performing in front of a strange audience. It was exhilarating and gave me a massive confidence boost. I was now bitten by the bug of drama. There and then and ever since, I have continued to participate in whatever prison drama is available. I will always remember an officer in Mountjoy saying to me after *Madigan's Lock* that my participation in that play "had brought me out of my shell", and he was right, because previous to that, I was quite shy and self-conscious. But going on stage in front of all those people and really giving it my best gave a tremendous boost to my self-esteem.

Since then I have taken part in three Christmas pantomimes in Wheatfield Prison in 1992, '93, and '94 and again the rehearsing and the acting in front of a live audience has given me great satisfaction. The whole process of drama involves a massive amount of work from everyone involved. In a place like prison, drama as an outlet is I believe invaluable for the participants involved as it is such a team effort and demands commitment from everyone.

Now and then, I have written bits and pieces of plays for radio. However most of them have ended up in the bin. Surprisingly enough, I wrote a radio play in 1993 and this time I entered it in the Listowel Writers week competition for prisoners. Would you believe it? I won first prize which came as quite a surprise to me. I wrote the play in the space of three hours one night. I had the theme in my mind for a while and when I started writing, it just seemed to flow along. I was thrilled to win the competition. It was another boost for myself and something which again was a new experience for me.

Return to Reading

I now want to return to around 1991 in Mountjoy Prison where there was not really much happening, and I began to do quite a bit of reading. Previous to this, reading was not one of my favourite pastimes, as my concentration span was quite limited and most of the stuff just went over my head. I began to take an immense interest in current affairs, reading newspapers, listening to radio broadcasts and debating issues with my fellow inmates. I was, at this stage, reading books on Psychology, Sociology and subjects which I had never heard of before, let alone understood. One of the books which really opened up my mind was Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave*. Here was a sociological analysis which really fascinated me. Until then I took most things in society for granted, without questioning their origin, function or indeed their very existence.

The Open University

At the end of 1991 I signed up for a course with The Open University, which would enable me to study in the Social Sciences. So at the end of '91 and throughout '92, I was studying the Foundation Course in the Social Sciences, and this I suppose, could be termed my first "real" introduction to adult education of an academic nature. To be honest, I had no idea what I was taking on. All I knew was that I wanted to learn about what makes society work or at least function. I might add at this stage that I was expelled from my local Vocational school at age 15, without completing any exams or gaining any formal certificates of education. In other words, I did not do my Inter or Leaving or Junior or any other formal examinations.

However, I managed to adjust to the demands of third level education through this foundation course with the Open University, which really opened up my mind to so much in society which I had previously taken for

granted. Studying with The Open University demanded a great deal of discipline and commitment at the beginning, but most of all, it took a great deal of perseverance on my part to keep studying. It is my experience that prison can induce a great sense of apathy among its inmates and I have no doubt that the decision I made to involve myself in adult education while in prison has acted as a lifeline to me and has enabled me not to get bogged down in the apathetic quagmire which prison can induce.

The Value of Learning

No matter how I may be feeling through the good days and the bad, at least I know that in the background I have my Open University studies to keep up with. That's not to say that I have been a really disciplined student who has always kept up to date with my T.M.As (tutor marked assignments) and everything, because the opposite had been the case at times and the feeling of just giving up and throwing the books away has also been very strong at times. Somehow I believe that it is in times of struggling with the studying that I become more determined to keep going. In other words, like most things in life, if there is no struggle we may never have the opportunity to explore those inner resources which studying is directly aimed at.

I know that every six weeks I have to write a T.M.A. based on the course material that I have been studying. This deadline can sometimes act as a great motivator for me because it is something that I know I am obliged to meet. Again I would like to reiterate the importance of these motivational factors which I have to rely on because in prison they are very important.

Anyhow since I started studying with the Open University in late 1991, I have managed to complete three courses. At the end of each of these courses, there was an exam to sit. I seem to enjoy working under the pressure of the exam, mainly because I find it very stimulating and I always do better in the exam than I do in the course during the year. For the three courses I have completed I have passed each one of them, receiving a grade B for each, and for someone who left school with very little formal education, I consider this a good achievement.

Never give up

I am at present continuing my studies with the Open University and this year I am studying a course entitled Crime, Justice and Society. This course includes many of my favourite topics of debate which is obviously influenced by my present incarceration. I am also doing what's referred to as a 'half credit course' entitled "Working with children and young people," another major topic of interest for me. So if at the end of this year, I manage to complete these two courses and pass them, I will have accumulated 270 points towards my B.A. degree in Social Studies. I hope to complete the course next year by undertaking two more courses which will give me the final 90 points I need to reach 360, the total amount required for the degree.

I have every intention of persevering with my studies in order to get my degree, and I am confident that I will succeed despite the struggles which no doubt may lie ahead for me. Central to my philosophy in life is the motto "never give up", and this sometimes stubborn resistance has enabled me to get this far with my studies. I know it will continue to be my navigational aid through the rest of my studies.

In conclusion, although my studies with The Open University and overall participation in the area of adult education have enabled me to develop intellectually, they have also contributed greatly to the development of my inner resources. The process has also given me a good deal of balance. So I would argue that contrary to some peoples perception of education as being mainly an intellectual journey, it is also an emotional journey, which requires one to dig deep at times into the untapped inner resources which eventually enable us students to "never give up" until our goal is achieved.

This contribution of mine would remain incomplete if I did not acknowledge the help, encouragement and support that I have received from the various teachers who work in prisons and to whom I remain indebted for unconditionally supporting me and my adult education endeavours over the past years. — Thank you.

Martin Keane is serving a prison sentence in Wheatfield prison, Clondalkin.

Returning to Adult Education

Seán O'Connor

The importance of education has never been more evident than it is today. The shortage in job opportunities has raised the education requirements for prospective employees and the C.V. has become the recognised currency even on building sites.

A recent study in England has admitted that the Irish emigrant is better educated than his English counterpart, which means that the Irish are now competing against each other for jobs abroad. Due to the calibre of present school leavers, the mature job seeker is at a disadvantage. His only prospect of acquiring a job is by raising his own standard of education. The idea of re-entering the education system is a daunting one. Memories of the old school days come flooding back and for many a lifetime on the dole seems a happier option. While this may be an indictment of the old system, it is a false assumption in the context of present day adult education provision.

Experience of VTOS

As a second year student on a Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme it is easy to appreciate the importance of adult education. Having had first hand experience of degrading dole queues and long term unemployment with its endless monotony and self-inflicted isolation, I was very fortunate to join an adult education V.T.O.S. programme in my locality. Now in my final year, I feel that my newly acquired skills will give me confidence for the years ahead.

The recent upsurge in the popularity of adult education may be attributed in no small way to the dedication of the tutors. Adult education provision has come a long way and has finally gained respectability and currency. The reasons given by students on the Tullamore V.T.O.S. programme for attending are as varied as the students themselves, but all are of the same opinion. Of all the schemes available to the unemployed, the V.T.O.S. is the best by far. It builds character, it encourages individuality and, most importantly of all, it restores dignity.

The hard work and sacrifice of the tutors and co-ordinators, in their guidance, encouragement and assistance to each student create a rapport between students and tutor which breaks down the barrier that exists within the ordinary school system. A healthy family atmosphere permeates our "school" and "friendly" debates in history and liberal studies classes are encouraged by very brave tutors, who often risk their sanity. But at the end of the day everyone is equal and everyone's view is respected.

“All for one and one for all”

The camaraderie within the group becomes very evident during organised sporting events when we compete against other V.T.O.S groups. Our victories are testimonials to our unwritten motto “All for one and one for all”. Day trips and trips to the theatre are very entertaining but the singing on the bus is most enjoyable, unless of course you are the bus driver. The noisiest person on the bus usually gets to play the lead role in our drama project, but we let him or her think it's because of their talent. We don't believe in shattering illusions.

The benefits of the V.T.O.S. far outstrip the disadvantages, which vary from student to student depending on circumstances. A married man or woman with a family may experience difficulty with study and homework. Finding a quiet, peaceful corner to work in at home may not be easy. Exams are also a strain and it is then that we appreciate the younger generation's ability to take them in their stride. But here again the old motto “all for one and one for all” becomes evident and helpful advice is always at hand. As the tension mounts coming up to exam day, you again feel part of a team and you become determined not to let the side down. You know that your success is everyone's success and your disappointment is everyone's disappointment.

I have outlined some disadvantages attached to returning to adult education but for me the greatest disadvantage of all will be parting with the friends I've made over the last two years. I've often heard it said that the happiest days of our lives are those at school. My children don't believe that when I tell them, but I've had a most enjoyable two years.

Sean O'Connor lives in Clara, Co. Offaly. He is a second year VTOS student and hopes to progress to third level education next year.

No Regrets

Veronica McGee

I cannot pass up this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the professional people involved with the V.T.O.S. in Tullamore. I can only write from my own experiences and my own personal achievements, achievements I accomplished through the knowledge passed down to me by those who taught me. Through their help, and within a short space of time, I have gained a great understanding of each subject I studied. This knowledge is something I cherish. In return, all of those involved have gained my utmost respect and admiration.

Joining VTOS

I joined the VTOS in November 1993. My life previous to this was filled with idle thoughts. This in turn made my view of the future bleak. Would I, a single parent and unemployed, continue living a daily routine such as this? Knowing I was capable of achieving much more in life, I decided to make changes. My determination to improve my life filled me with a tremendous drive to succeed. The VTOS gave me this chance.

In the first year on this course I chose to study Business Studies, Computers, Mathematics, English and French. I was able to avail of books which the VTOS supplied for each subject. I studied the above subjects at Junior Certificate level. I decided to start studying at a lower level to build up my confidence as I had been out of the educational system for twenty years. I had to try to adjust and discipline myself to a routine of study. During the time I had allocated to study I had to try to condition my mind to blank out personal problems. I did not find my first year easy but I was not prepared to give up. This was a choice I had made. I soon came to realise that goals I had set for myself were not going to be easily accomplished.

Fear, including fear of failure, and uncertainty attacked me from time to time. Were the goals I had set for myself just mere dreams? Would it be possible for me to turn these dreams into reality? My fears and doubts were gradually conquered with the encouragement which surrounded me. I got this from my teachers and from my fellow students whose ability to study and gain good results was a great guidance. Teachers were always available to help with any problems I came across. They never hesitated in listening to me.

The Future

During my course I became fascinated with accountancy and computers. My intention is to pursue a career in this area. The V.E.C. will fund the foundation programme of the Accounting Technician programme next year. I have learned from this course that there is no substitute for hard work.

In return, the rewards are very satisfying. I have been introduced to a new world, a world where whatever I want to achieve I know can be done through a lot of hard work and dedication. For me nothing seems impossible anymore. I look forward to my future. Now the bleakness that did exist has been replaced by great expectations.

There is one person I truly want to thank and that is my father, Noel. He looked after my four year old daughter Roxanne and this gave me a chance to study. Whatever I achieve I was helped by the people that taught me and by my father's kindness and understanding.

I would highly recommend a V.T.O.S. course for anyone who is prepared to put in the work and dedication that is required and I can honestly say I have no regrets about returning to education.

Veronica McGee is a single parent with one child. She lives in Tullamore, Co. Offaly and she is a second year VTOS student. Next year she goes on to study on an Accounting Technicians course.

The Arra Ceasefire Holds

Ad Hock

For a number of years now, groups of adults known as acronyms have been holding clandestine meetings in halls, prefabs and sheds throughout the country. Until recently, not much was known about their activities but it was widely believed that their existence constituted a threat to mainstream education. An anonymous Department spokesman called Séamus admitted that the existence of these groups and their activities gave cause for concern. "These are people with attitude", he said, "and some would say that what they are actively engaged in subverting the system. These are very strange people and some of them would go so far as to say that adults are capable of studying in the daylight".

It was a great relief then when news of a ceasefire was announced by a particularly militant female group called Arra. The origin of this name is somewhat unclear but it is attributed to a member of a West of Ireland group. When asked where their meetings would be held, the member replied, "Arra sure anywhere will do". Others maintain that it has its origins in West Cork and is taken from the well known poem that begins:

*There is a green island in lone Gougane Barra
Where Aloa of sound rusbes forth like an arra...*

The ceasefire is said to have come about after months of secret talks in Hospital. Announcing the ceasefire, an Arra spokesperson called Mairin Dúirtbearliom said that she didn't like the word ceasefire herself and would prefer to look on it as just another part or piece of a process. Asked to supply details of the negotiations, she said that her lips were sealed. Because of this seal, there was some difficulty in deciphering what she was saying. Questioned as to whether the ceasefire would hold, she replied, "Ceasefire? What ceasefire? Hold? It depends what you mean by hold?" Under severe cross questioning from Charlie Sparrow of RTE, she said that they had certainly no intention of handing over arms, whatever about a leg or two.

A secret reporter who has emerged from hiding claimed that the ceasefire had come about as a result of the efforts of two secret Department officials, four robust county councillors, a suspect yoga tutor and a politically correct greyhound trainer. The secret reporter also told a press conference (hastily convened) that he had observed the activities of Arra for some months. He told of their intensive training routines during which they would lie on cold floors for hours without moving. At other times, they would stand on one leg and emit strange tribal sounds. They sometimes rubbed oil on one another before taking part in wild dancing around the hall. They also hosted talks given by strange people with strange names such as Aroma Therapy and Avous La France.

Doctor Grumpy

There has been a mixed reaction to the news of the ceasefire. The minister was cautious and said that she was glad that these people had come in from the cold and she would now consider the possibility that they might be welcome in school buildings. She would not be rushed into making any hasty decisions which she might later regret and as far as she was concerned they would have to persist with their present accommodation until a proper framework had been established. In response to this, an Arra spokesperson called Sile Durtbeanlei is reported as saying, "My lips are sealed". Another secret secretary from the Department was more optimistic. He said that the ceasefire was a momentous occasion and that, although he wasn't altogether sure about it, it should be welcomed unequivocally.

Not all commentators were convinced however. Doctor Grumpy Grouse O Cryin, a well known authority on everything, said in his column which is circulated to all the papers and printed in one: "Do not be fooled by these people. Remember that so far not an ounce of Tippex has been handed over, not a single staple gun has been surrendered, not one leotard decommissioned. Only when I see the Super Sers piled up in the middle of the floor and the Burcos and the Singers dismantled will I begin to believe that these revisionists are sincere in their intentions. All of us who believe so passionately in the democratic process should have no truck with people who have been elected consistently". These sentiments were echoed by Senator Shanes Cross, who wrote in the same paper: "Do not be fooled by these people. Remember that so far not an ounce of Tippex..."

Caitriona Brolly, a spokesperson for the umbrella organisation Aontas, believed by many to be the political wing of Arra, said today that she personally was very disappointed with the minister's refusal to meet with Arra. After all, she said, it is not an unreasonable demand that these people should be allowed to congregate in buildings of cement and bricks. Aontas, although an umbrella organisation, would not afford shelter to those working for subversion. They would, however, continue to press for the basic right to accommodation which was waterproof and the right to proper self insulation. They would be producing a framework document, giving the correct dimensions and standard requirements for new community halls. They would be visiting the United States in the near future, where they were hopeful of having a secret meeting with a secret official, who was close to the President. When the contentious issue of a visa was raised, Ms. Brolly said that the lack of a visa did not create a problem, as they always used American Express.

Meanwhile on St. Patrick's Day, the Republican congressman, Mr. Lizard McGingrach, who is not close to the President, was asked what he thought of the Aontas visit. He replied: "Juntas, is it? For my own part, I want no part or piece of a process which involves those South American revolutionaries. We

have had far too much trouble from those juntas down through the years". He ended with a snatch of an Irish revolutionary song about people getting shot in pairs comin' down the stairs.

Finally, another leading spokesperson, Aisling Dúirtbeaneile, speaking through the medium, said that she had no doubt but that it would not be long until Arra had a secret meeting with the Aire. She herself was going to Rome shortly to look for support there, so for now it's arra-vederci.

An A.E.O. as Adult Learner

Tony Downes

Adult Education Organisers, by profession at least, tend to believe in lifelong learning for everyone. In theory "everyone" includes A.E.O's. In practice, however, most of us spend so much time and energy negotiating, establishing, resourcing, administering, monitoring and supporting provision for everyone else that we seldom take 'time out' to learn for ourselves. This was my unbroken pattern for twelve years in the job until I spotted a newspaper advertisement inviting applications for a one year, part-time taught M.A. course in Adult and Community Education at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Entry requirements stipulated possession of at least a 2nd Class Honours degree and/or an Honours post-graduate diploma in Adult and Community Education from the same college. The fact that it could be taken in only one year was a major attraction - at my time of life (50+) I begrudge sacrificing more than one precious year to academe - so I decided to apply.

My application was rejected. The reason, the letter advised, was because the College Registrar "deemed" that "I did not meet the necessary entry requirements". This was the first challenge to overcome. True, my basic qualifications amounted to possession of a modest Pass B.A. and H.Dip Ed. as well as a post-graduate Diploma in Catechetics (Distinction) - all dating from the early seventies. I appealed this decision in writing, basing my case on the latter diploma and arguing that this, together with considerable experience of work in the field, eminently qualified me for acceptance on the M.A. Course. Eventually, after further personal representations on my part, this appeal was successful and I was allowed to start some weeks after my colleagues. This encounter with regulatory obstacles to academic access raised questions concerning the legitimacy and appropriateness of third level institutional entry requirements (reinforced for me on being awarded a first at the end of the course). Such requirements appear to be based exclusively on academic outcomes (and in my particular case on outcomes which occurred decades previously) which take no cognisance of maturation and relevant work experience. They are certainly open to question in the context of any enlightened adult education perspective. One wonders how many excellent potential candidates for higher post-graduate or other studies have been denied access by the "objective" application of such narrow, rigid and inadequate criteria in the interests of maintaining standards of academic excellence?

Learning Group and Tutors

Nevertheless, once accepted, I threw myself enthusiastically into the course with my colleagues. There were ten of us in all, comprising four women and

six men with ages ranging from early/mid twenties to fifty plus (myself). We all came from various educational settings, primary and second level teaching, career guidance, training officers, former teachers, development educator, librarian and myself. The taught course entailed twice weekly sessions from 6.30 p.m. - 10.00 p.m. dealing with human development and research studies in modular format which included group dynamics, counselling, oppression and leadership theory and Jungian psychology/learning types. In addition, course requirements included written papers on each module (3,000-5,000 words), a seminar paper to the group on the proposed thesis and finally submission of a minor thesis by August 31st 1993. In short, a rather demanding and gruelling commitment when added to a busy 'day job'.

It was a novel experience to find myself sitting among a group of fellow learners - it was a great feeling to sit back, relax and enjoy the sense that someone else had to do the work for a change. I decided to 'go with the flow', be open to the various inputs and enjoy the experience on offer. To my surprise I found it both stimulating and exciting although this didn't stop me 'nodding off' with exhaustion from time to time! As a group of individuals united in a common pursuit, we gradually bonded well together although we never became, nor sought to become, a personal development, therapeutic or encounter group. Group cohesion and bonding developed as we became variously involved in dialogue, discussion, ideas sharing, experiential group work and creative/expressive activities. It also manifested itself in sharing notes, books, transport and occasional gatherings at a local hostelry - essential social lubrication in any adult education endeavour!

The varying styles of the module tutors were interesting to note. These ranged from the extremely didactic through the participatory and discursive to the almost laissez faire. Some appeared more concerned with product (content), others with process (experience). The former tended to minimise, if not actively discourage, group discussion and participation. The latter either sought to achieve both or focussed entirely on process, supplemented with copious handouts and extensive reading lists.

At least one module tutor had us (almost) reduced to the role of passive receptacles (in the jug and mug tradition!) while another invited us to express our feelings and hopes in art, potter's clay and even dreamwork notebooks! We opted in or out according to our preferences. Consternation was evident when one tutor left the room and us to our own devices as a group. Each module in its own way offered learning opportunities which were enlightening in their diversity.

Essay assignments entailed deadlines and intensive bursts of application to reading and writing schedules as we discussed among ourselves and supported each other on topic selection and approaches. Looming over all, however, like the proverbial sword of Damocles, was the need to come up

with a thesis topic, since this was the major task we all had to undertake individually and introduce to our peers and mentors by way of a seminar paper before early January '93 at the latest. The accessible support and expertise of the course supervisors, Drs. Tom Collins and Ann Ryan, ensured that we all met the requisite deadline. After some preliminary reading, reflection and consultation with Tom, I settled on the title "Pedagogy of the Processed" with obvious indebtedness to Paulo Freire. Since I enjoy a 'captive' audience, I outlined in broad brushstrokes what it was about in the seminar paper with a degree of enthusiasm that, with the benefit of hindsight, now appears to me as somewhat 'over the top'.

Learning Journey by Thesis.

The great thing about writing a thesis - as Mike Cooley put it in a radio programme around that time - is "that you get to write your own questions as well as the answers". It was certainly the only examination I ever sat which offered such an opportunity. The underlying core question, although I barely realised it at the time, centred on an exploration of the actual and potential role of adult education set against the backdrop of a contemporary world in a ferment of change, contradiction and crisis wherein the new has not yet emerged and become clearly delineated. This exploration launched me on a journey that was simultaneously daunting and exhilarating in its challenge and scope, giving rise to many doubts, questions and anxieties. How to describe effectively our contemporary world, the origins of our world view and its consequences for people's lives? Is there an emerging alternative? What are its salient characteristics?

Where and how does adult education fit into all this or does it? Would I be able to make sense of the wide diversity in the field and pull the whole thing together in some meaningful way? Would I get bogged down in the detail or get lost in metaphysical speculation? Was the topic too ambitious? Would I have time to fit in all the reading required?

Despite these anxieties I gradually became absorbed and excited as I became immersed in the process of reading, thinking (often while driving to various meetings or doing the shopping), filing and writing on the topic. Christmas, Easter, Summer holidays and week-ends ceased to have any meaning as the tyranny of blank pages requiring apparently endless script (since I am computer illiterate!) held sway. It was the first time I fully appreciated the advantages of living alone as my lifestyle became increasingly eremitical and a cascade of books, journals, articles and notes flooded and colonised my living space. Again, notwithstanding the work load, time constraints and the pressure of deadlines, I found that I was actually enjoying myself - despite the apparent masochism involved. Motivation was spurred and maintained both by the stimulus and excitement of exposure to new ideas, perspectives and insights on the one hand and the ongoing support and encouragement I received from Tom and Ann, together with their positive responses to draft chapters.

Conclusions

So, what have I learned from this safari into hitherto unknown territory? There is so much it is hard to know where to start or end without a re-write of the entire thesis - a fate worse than death both for me and for even the most indulgent reader. The following points indicate some aspects of my learning experience from this journey.

- Our Western world, ruled as it is by market forces, consumerism and technology, ends up treating people as things. This is true in personal, general, societal, national and global terms. Increasingly it results in exclusion, alienation, oppression, poverty, unemployment, famine, preventable death for many millions of people and environmental destruction. Our world, lives and lifestyles are fundamentally unbalanced.
- Confronted with these realities, many respected contemporary writers and thinkers refer to the dying industrial age and the emergence of a new age from its ashes which puts people before things. They see a newly emerging world view, characterised by balance as opposed to imbalance, holism as opposed to fragmentation, integration as opposed to alienation, co-operation as opposed to competition, spirituality as opposed to materialism, femininity as opposed to masculinity, community as opposed to individualism.
- The central questions this poses concern the role of adult education/educators against this backdrop of the contemporary world. Are we confining or should we and can we confine our efforts to merely shoring up a dying world view or are we putting or should we or can we put our efforts into promoting the emerging new world view which seeks to put people first? Toffler puts the challenge starkly "For in our personal lives and in our political acts, whether we know it or not, most of us in the rich countries are essentially either Second (i.e. Industrial Age) Wave people committed to maintaining the dying order, Third (i.e. New Age) Wave people constructing a radically different tomorrow, or a confused self-cancelling mixture of the two". 1. (1980:30)
- The dominant model of adult education practice today appears essentially preoccupied with maintaining and reproducing the status quo in society. This tradition in adult education is essentially conservative, top down and institution based, favoured by most governments as is evidenced by its lion's share of available funding. This is true of mainstream provision in the U.K., U.S.A., Australia, the E.C. and in our own country. The literature also reveals a long-respected social change tradition in adult education which is dominant among adult education theorists. This tradition asserts that

adult education's mission is essentially concerned with the social realities of people's lives and included reformers such as Grundtvig (Denmark), Lindemann(U.S.A.), and those committed to radical social transformation such as Freire (Brazil), Gramsci, Gelpi (Italy) and Lovett (Ireland). Its devotees tend to operate mainly in the non-institutional sector at local community level where most exciting innovations in adult education occur today.

- Some implications from the above considerations include the need for adult educators to reactivate, develop and extend our 'social mission' tradition if we wish to help shape the future as we enter the coming millennium. We need to commit our energies to promoting personal, social, political, and economic change if we believe the present dispensation is increasingly alienating for more and more people.

In summary, my return to learning gave me many exciting challenges, exposure to stimulating ideas, the opportunity to read lots of books, make new friends, a new understanding of adult education, a re-charging of batteries and a M.A. in Adult and Community Education. Not a bad return for a year's work!

Tony Downes is an Adult Education Organiser with Co. Dublin VEC and he is a member of The Adult Learner Editorial Board.

1. Toffler. A. 1980. The Third Wave. London: Pan/Collins

Starting Again

Maria Egan

It was 1993, I had just turned forty and I felt the time was right to take that big step. I decided to enroll in an adult education course. I'd been thinking about it for years, but I always got cold feet because I was afraid of other people's reactions, as the only formal education I had was primary schooling and two years of secondary school. My memories of those years were not happy.

The day of reckoning had come. I made myself look pretty and got myself to my local library to keep my appointment with the literacy scheme organiser. As I walked into the library, I prayed that nobody would see me and, God forbid that the person I was about to meet from the V.E.C. was somebody who knew me. At one point the thought struck me to make a quick turn, go home and forget the whole idea. Just then the door opened and I was invited by a lady, who introduced herself as Mary, to come in and sit down. Her warm smile and gentle hand shake made me feel at ease. We talked and I told her all she needed to know. She answered all my questions about the course and assured me that the tutor would be helpful and understanding. We decided that I was in fact ready to do one of the advertised courses, the City & Guilds Communication Skills, Level 1. It would commence in three weeks from that time.

First Steps

The morning that the course was starting I felt panic. What was the tutor going to be like? Who were the other people in the group going to be? Was I going to be able to cope? On meeting the other students, it transpired that we all had similar fears. The six other people in the group were all people from Edenderry that I knew at some level. Some of them I knew quite well and others I just knew to see. Very soon we all became very good friends. We offered encouragement, support and help to each other and we came to enjoy every minute of our two-hour, once-a-week class.

To describe the tutor Geraldine as wonderful would be an understatement. She has the patience of a saint and she manages to bring out the best in all of us. Her job is to teach us and help us to do our work to the standard which would enable us to receive our City and Guilds Certificates. This all seven of us did.

A sense of achievement.

In October 1994, all of us in the class and our partners were invited to a formal presentation of City & Guilds Certificates in the headquarters of the V.E.C. in Tullamore. This is what I had worked towards. It is hard to describe the feeling of pride that I felt as I walked up to receive my Cert.

This was my very own achievement and I had, by now, developed a hunger for learning. Returning to education has been one of the best things I have ever done. It has restored my confidence, made me more assertive and I know that my family are very proud of me. At the moment I am doing Level Two of the City & Guilds Certificate Programme and in 1996 I will sit my Junior Certificate Examination.

Maria Egan is a mother of four children and lives in Downshire, Edenderry, Co. Offaly. She heard of the literacy scheme through a local women's group which operates in conjunction with Co. Offaly VEC.

The Wednesday Class

Carol Doherty

It was January 1992 when I first took the plunge and joined a part-time adult education class at the local Adult Education Centre here in Waterford. The class I joined was Creative Writing. It was a class I had always wanted to join, but due to work pressures, I never seemed to find the time. Also, to be completely honest, I was never able to muster up enough courage to do so.

However, there I was, I had finally made it. I was approaching my 29th birthday, I had one school-going child and a toddler at home and I was just recovering from a long illness. I hadn't many interests outside my children and home, so I decided it was time to be courageous and to do something I had always wanted to do.

Courageous? I felt anything but courageous as I anxiously eyed up the other members of the group. There were six of us altogether, which was quite small, but because of the way I felt, I was grateful for that.

Our tutor, Mark Roper, immediately helped put us all at ease by getting us to introduce ourselves and to speak a little about ourselves. This broke the ice and I was beginning to feel more relaxed. There was another young mother like myself, an older woman with teenage children and the remaining three were retired people. One of these was an Englishman, who had retired from the British Army and had served all over the world and the other lady was a retired school teacher.

As you can see, we were of different age groups and varying backgrounds and I did wonder how we would get on together as a group. However, we were all there because of the same interest and I think that this is one of the important factors in part-time adult education classes. There is nothing like the sharing of an interest amongst people to help form a bond and to give a sense of security and belonging to an individual. The class ended two hours later which, I hasten to add, absolutely flew and I came away with a definite spring in my step and looking forward to the next week.

Go ahead, you can fly!

Each week we looked at different poems and short stories by well-known poets and authors and before long we were tentatively putting pen to paper ourselves. The joy and sense of personal freedom which this gave to me was and still is, something special. I suppose I could describe it as someone giving me a pair of wings and say "Go ahead, Carol, you can fly!"

I looked forward to the times I could be alone with my pen and paper and even though my humble scrawlings were immature and unprofessional, they were very much my own and what it meant to be me. Mark, through his gentle guidance and nurturing, helped bring out the best in all of us and with that came the reward of a growing confidence and self-esteem.

Before long, the ten weeks were over and we broke up for the summer vacation. Come September, we were all back, plus a few newcomers, delighted to see each other again and eager to get down to writing. This time round, I and indeed most of my class mates joined for the entire year and Wednesday (the day of the class) became a favourite day of the week for me.

With a lot of practice on my part and encouragement from Mark and the rest of the group, my writing steadily improved and last year I actually succeeded in being published twice in "The Waterford Reviews", which is a locally based magazine that publishes writers from all over the country.

My confidence was steadily growing now and when my youngest child started play school, I took on two more classes. Those classes were in Aromatherapy and Personal Development and they proved to be very interesting and enjoyable even though my preference was, and still is, Creative Writing.

Joining part-time adult education classes has done much for my own personal development. Looking back today at that January three years ago, I've certainly come a long way and I have learned a great deal on the road which I have chosen to follow. It was definitely the turning of the tide for me.

As a result of those classes I have just finished my first year in full-time adult education, doing a Creative and Expressive Arts course. Where do I go from here? Well, I'm not quite sure yet, but it's not the end for me with adult education. As they say, it might be the end of a chapter, but not the end of a book!

Thanks to the Adult Education Centre for making it all possible.

Carol Doherty is married with two children. She lives in Viewmount in Waterford.

The Long Distance Learner

Alan J. McMillen

There's nothing new about correspondence courses. They have been around, in one form or another, since the Mid-Victorian period. However, since the early 1990s, a number of foreign and home based educational institutions have been offering a range of third level, long distance learning courses to students in Ireland.

I have been an undergraduate with one of those institutions, the Open University, since 1992 and I would like to share with you my experiences as a long distance learner and to offer a personal view of the strengths and weaknesses of this type of learning.

Motivation

There are many reasons why people embark on adult education courses. Some may wish to pursue a subject that is of personal interest to them. Others may be seeking qualifications which will enhance their career prospects. I, on the other hand, was motivated by a sense of failure. I have had my chances in life. I had grown up in a loving and stable home, and had been offered the best of education. I was regarded as the bright spark of the family, the one who was destined to succeed. However I was also immature and lazy. Instead of building a career for myself, I embarked on an aimless, frivolous life of wine, women, and song. I had, of course, one hell of a good time; I enjoyed every minute of it. However, as I grew older and took on responsibilities, I became more and more aware of the opportunities I had thrown away, and with this growing awareness, came a deep sense of failure. A challenging education course seemed the obvious answer to my problem. It would give me a chance to use my brain and to restore my pride.

O.U. Choices

My decision to select a correspondence course was largely determined by circumstances. I had a young family so that I could not afford to return to full time education. Moreover, shift work ruled out any prospect of attending night classes. Long Distance learning seemed my only realistic option.

I had known about the Open University for many years. I had watched many of its television programmes and I had friends in Northern Ireland who had been O.U. students. I knew that the courses on offer were tough and demanding. However this suited me. I wasn't looking for easy options. I was looking for a chance to test myself.

It is impossible to be precise about the time scale of an O.U. degree. It varies from one student to the next. Some students, for instance, elect to opt out of studying some years, while others may take on less time consuming, half-credit courses if their outside responsibilities become too demanding. However, most students take about six years to complete the six full credit courses that are needed for a degree.

Foundations

All O.U. undergraduates are required to study one, and not more than two, foundation courses, in either the arts, social science, technology, science or mathematics. They provide what is often a first step into third level education. An emphasis is therefore placed upon the development of study skills which will serve students well in future years.

After foundation level, students can choose from a wide range of second and third level modular courses. Some of these courses focus on one subject, while others are inter-disciplinary, but either way, the study becomes more demanding at these levels.

Most students study for only one foundation course. However I elected to study for two years at this level; first in the arts, and then in social science. This I feel, was a good decision for me. The extra year gave me a chance to find my academic feet and to discover which subjects I was good at and which ones I should avoid. I developed an interest, for instance, in art. I also became fascinated by philosophy. I discovered, on the other hand, that economics and music bore me rigid. However, eventually I decided to concentrate my efforts on sociology and political science, two subjects which I thoroughly enjoy. They both help me to make sense of an increasingly complicated world.

Challenges

An O.U. degree should never be taken on lightly. The university itself recommends that students should devote about seven hours a week to a half credit course and about fifteen hours to a full credit course. However, these figures can be deceptive. In my experience, they only represent the time needed to cover a normal week's work. Extra time is always needed for monthly assignments. The marks from these assignments represent half of the total marks for a year, so students tend to invest a lot of time and effort in them. Moreover extra time is always needed for attending tutorials and revising for end of year exams.

There is nothing easy about any type of adult education. It often takes courage to return to the classroom after many years away from it. Moreover, it is often difficult to balance the demands of a busy life or a career with the demands of learning. Distance learning, however, carries its own particular difficulties. In my opinion, most of these difficulties can be placed under one

heading - isolation. Students, of course, need time alone to develop their own ideas but they also need opportunities to meet for discussion and debate. However, distance learning, of its very nature, does not lend itself easily to a free exchange of ideas. Students often find it difficult to motivate themselves under these conditions.

Student Supports

The O.U has a better record than most other similar institutions in helping students to overcome isolation. It organises tutorial and week long summer schools, where students can meet to discuss course issues. Tutorials, however, tend to take place in large towns and cities and rural students can often find it difficult to attend. Furthermore, after foundation level, tutorials only occur about once a month and it is difficult, therefore, for students to build up relationships with each other.

Many students, in my opinion, do not do enough to help themselves to overcome the problems of isolation. Many of them seem reluctant to form close working relationships with course tutors and fellow students. Seeking help is not always easy but in my experience it can reap tremendous rewards.

I have been extremely lucky in my relationships with other students. Every year, so far, I have been fortunate enough to meet at least a few students, with whom I have managed to connect. I was particularly lucky during my two foundation years, when I was a member of two extremely good tutorial groups. I made a number of close friends during these years and their friendships have continued to sustain me in the succeeding years. I have also been very fortunate with my course tutors. Each tutor that has been assigned to me has been extremely sensitive to the problems of a long distance learner and each one has encouraged me to grow and develop within the learning process. Not all tutors, however, are as sensitive as mine have been. Most of them are products of the conventional education system and many students complain that these tutors do not fully appreciate the particular problems associated with distance learning.

Benefits

However, in spite of the problems, distance learning courses have the capacity to reach far more people than can be reached by conventional adult education courses. They can enable employers to keep abreast of new developments within their chosen careers without having to take time off work for retraining. They can help young mothers, who have elected to remain at home, to develop new skills, while their children are growing up. They can offer new interests and challenges to those who have chosen to retire early. They can give residents of remote rural areas an opportunity to study without having to travel long distances to attend lectures. Moreover, in my opinion, the development of advanced computer software and computer

networks is likely to make these courses an increasingly attractive option in the future. We may well see the day, when distance learning is the norm, rather than the exception, in adult education.

Of course I am biased. Distance learning has done a lot for me, so I admit to being something of an evangelist on the subject. It has helped me to discover new interests and develop new skills. It has given me an opportunity to make new friends. Most of all, however, it has given me a chance to rebuild my character and my confidence. This new found confidence has, I think, made me a better man, a kinder and more understanding one. This article is a testament to what adult education has done for me. Four years ago, I would have had neither the skill to write it nor the confidence to offer it for public consumption.

I still have a few rivers to cross before I complete my degree, but I now know that with hard work, I will get there. After that I plan to study for a high level degree, possibly in education. Eventually I hope to become involved in adult education in some capacity. Adult Education gives people second chances and I like the idea of second chances.

Alan McMillen, a native of Belfast, now lives in Kilnamanagh in Dublin. He is in his fourth year with the Open University and he is reading Democratic Government and Politics.

Fitter for Life

From a Guinness Pint to a Decimal Point

Vincent Sisk

In the early fifties one could not become an apprentice in any of the crafts without having attended a Technical School and passed the Group Cert. The "Tech" was my first experience of what education truly should be - absorbing knowledge and being hungry for more, sorry when classes were ended and no fear of corporal punishment. I had a genuine respect and liking for my teachers. They treated all students as fellow human beings.

Having been an apprentice with Guinness for five years, I worked there as a fitter and eventually became part of the supervisory group. In the early 1970's, there were 4,500 people working in Guinness. By the year 2,000 they expect to have reduced that number to a mere 400/500, such is the effect of automation. Over a period of thirty-eight years I had a rewarding career until....

A particular word came into general use in the 1970's and has lingered in the vocabulary of many companies. It is that dreaded "cure" for declining profits - "rationalisation". I am a product of it. But as one door was closing, another one was opening and that was the door to further education. Where should I begin to describe what I found inside this door?

First Course

Some people advised me to do my Leaving Cert. at first, but I thought it better to start on a lower rung of the ladder. So I settled for an intermediate grade of English and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. For me it was a pathway back into the world of education which had changed greatly from my early school days. It was a daunting prospect, venturing into a second level school with nearly fifteen hundred full-time pupils. Our teacher, Paul Carroll, helped to make this transition easier by treating us as adults in a democratic manner. What seemed at first a reluctance on his part to answer our questions proved to be his manner of empowering us, as most of the time the answer was elicited from the class rather than presented to us. This approach helped to increase our confidence in our own abilities.

I became friendly with a student who was a member of Rush Dramatic Society. We attended a production of *Da* by Hugh Leonard which we discussed at such length that I had a feeling I could have been an understudy for the main actor. Neither would the director's job have given me any problems. Six years later I am still a patron of that society and enjoy their annual production.

Leaving Certificate.

When the end of the course approached, I was already looking forward to a follow-up class the next year. I was now ready to tackle Leaving Cert. English which took place twice a week. This gradual build-up of structure in my retirement was just what I needed. This class was more demanding than the previous one; expectations were higher and homework was a regular feature. I enjoyed this discipline in my life. Freedom is O.K. but a little structure in my day-to-day living suits me better as an individual.

The other people in the class were mainly female. Some were similar to me in having grown-up families. Others had children in the school creche. I could visualise them passing examinations and being better equipped to face the labour market once their children were reared.

The Mayor of Casterbridge was read avidly. Just when was Henchard going to get his comeuppance? The same might be said for the unscrupulous Lady Macbeth. Both works were enjoyed and were the cause of much lively discussion. Written homework was encouraged and regularly done.

That year a trip to Stratford-on-Avon was organised. We attended three plays and visited Warwick Castle and Ann Hathaway's house. We also spent a few hours in the city of Coventry where the highlight of our tour was a visit to the cathedral.

I did not sit my examination that year.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

This scheme was designed for long-term unemployed people over the age of 21. It consisted of full-time education on a Leaving Cert. level over a period of two years. This scheme was very suitable for me, as it gave me a number of hours daily in a class. The little structure I welcomed the previous year had expanded considerably. The make-up of the class was also different from the previous one. There were more men and the age profile was lower. Some of the students had been previously employed but had lost out to redundancy. Others had only been in short-term employment. But the combination worked and in between classes, study groups were organised.

At the end of the programme I was delighted when I passed some subjects at Leaving Cert. level. Some people carried on to Post-Leaving Cert. courses and a few were accepted in third level. I was intrigued by Maths and even today my favourite occupation is being involved in teaching and learning more about this fascinating subject.

Tutoring VTOS Students

Maths is now a great source of enjoyment for me. It matters little whether my involvement is at Foundation level, Junior or Leaving Cert., the buzz is there. Students consider me their problem solver. I certainly have to prepare my classes. I like to sit amongst the students. This ensures a level of equality and causes inhibitions to quickly disappear. The solving of problems is a team effort. I have a pretty well-worn path of conversation:

"What's the first step?"

A chorus of voices responds:

"Write down the formula."

"And the second step?"

"Fill in the given information."

This is our system and it works. Students who thought they were at the base of a mountain, now find they are at a respectable distance towards the top and still advancing. Naturally such achievements give me great personal satisfaction.

National College of Art and Design

It is an error to think that only the young, long-haired students attend the National College of Art and Design. There is at least one grey-haired, not-so-young person with short back and sides attending there as well. Yes, I am a student on the site of the renowned Powers Distillery but now the N.C.A.D.

I first saw a demonstration by a glass design artist and immediately had a hankering for the craft. I enrolled and found there were two avenues in the glass discipline open to me. One was a leaded panel end, the other was copper-foiled and soldered. I worked at each one but had a preference for the copper-foiled type.

The part-time students of the college exhibit their work in the R.H.A. annually. I remember the joy I felt when I had a stained glass leaded panel of my own design on display in the exalted abode. "Not for sale" was printed after my entry in the programme. Now I don't know if anyone would have purchased my creation, but one thing was certain, they were not given the opportunity. I have made several lamp-shades and terrariums and each in turn gave me a special buzz of satisfaction.

When viewing the exhibits in the R.H.A. Gallery, the Calligraphy pieces caught my eye. I knew then what my next class would be. I am now completing my third year, one evening weekly, in Calligraphy. When I attend the annual display in the R.H.A. this year, I will be particularly interested in viewing others' exhibits, on the look-out for my next artistic interest.

Dublin Institute of Adult Education

Being a tutor in the Dublin Institute is another interest for me. I have worked with students in a one-to-one situation. I am always impressed by the efforts of students to overcome their reading and writing difficulties. A highlight of the year is the Reading Evening. Here students read their own pieces from the Institute's "Print-out" magazine. A proud moment! Some students accept this level as a satisfactory achievement. Others progress into group classes and on to achieve City and Guilds certification. There is a constant supply of students each year with varying literacy problems. The core of the problem obviously still exists.

Numeracy Tutoring

A new door is about to open for me. It is numeracy tutoring. Coolock Reading and Writing scheme plans to offer this service in the coming year. Now here is where I will welcome a training programme which is also being planned. I expect that my involvement in Maths tutoring and as a literacy tutor will stand to me in this new venture.

To conclude, learning is a pleasurable and enriching experience. I did not find any easy method of absorbing knowledge. My experience in the adult education scene has left me with a deep-rooted desire to coax or cajole any adult who may have a slight regret for misspent school days back into the fold.

Go for it! The sooner the better.

Vincent Sisk is an adult education student and Maths/Numeracy tutor on the north side of Dublin city and is also involved in a number of community activities.

Life After VTOS

Liam Delaney

The title "Life After V.T.O.S." prompted me to ask myself a few pertinent questions. Why did I become involved in V.T.O.S? Did I gain anything from the experience? Has it affected or changed my life or thinking in any way? I will try to answer these questions and at the same time, illustrate developments that have taken place in my life after V.T.O.S.

Personal Background

I am from a working class environment and, like so many of my peers, left school in my early teens without having had the opportunity to do my Leaving Cert. Starting work at fourteen was the norm in my day. Some even left at a younger age. Like most other kids, I felt that leaving school at fourteen was like being released from jail. God bless my innocence! Since then, however, life's experiences have taught me differently. I now realise the importance of education as a basis for occupational achievement and upward social mobility. Education is not merely preparation for life, it is life.

Involvement with V.T.O.S.

This programme gave me the opportunity, at last, to do my Leaving Cert. Who would have thought that almost forty years down the road, V.T.O.S. would bring me back to "jail", let me pick up where I had left off and shape me to sit the exam. Preparing for the Leaving Cert, presented many challenges, social disruptions and homework. I will never forget the countless essays handed to Sile for correction. Perhaps dissection is a better description.

I do feel, however, that it was this "commitment" which provided the answer to my second question. Did I gain anything from the V.T.O.S. experience? It gave me a great sense of achievement for having stayed the course and having the courage to sit the exam. It does take courage, but, believe me, the "after" feeling of inner pride and exaltation makes it all worthwhile. Of course, V.T.O.S. was not just about schoolwork, homework and exams. It also had a very human side, a camaraderie which was warm and fulfilling.

I was a member of the class of '93, a mixed gathering of males and females, young and old, large and small, thick and very thick persons who came together as a group of strangers and finished up very close friends who proved to be not so thick after all. Doing the Leaving Cert. was a very rewarding experience for the group as a whole, insofar as it involved making an effort and putting yourself in the firing line, so to speak. "We never fail an exam, we simply postpone passing."

Is There Life After V.T.O.S.?

Yes, The two year preparation provided by this programme allowed the class of '93 to pursue many opportunities, which up to that time, had been denied to them. Further educational development proved to be just one of those opportunities availed of by my class. Some went on to take courses in Art and Horticulture, others did Post-Leaving Cert. courses in Social and Community Work and Child Care, while others, including myself, went on to university.

Maynooth College - in and out

I applied to do an Arts degree in Maynooth and was accepted. My chosen subjects were Sociology, Greek and Roman Civilisation and Philosophy. Unfortunately, Maynooth and Philosophy proved to be a bad choice for me. Maynooth is a fine college but the time spent travelling and attending lectures and tutorials made my day very long. I left home each morning at 7.45a.m. and arrived home each evening at 7.45p.m. faced with having to organise my notes and prepare essays.

Something else that I hadn't realised at the outset was that each subject incorporated four disciplines. Philosophy embraced Ancient Philosophy (mainly Greek), Moral Philosophy, Epistemology and finally Logic. I passed my first year exams in Sociology, Greek and Roman Civilisation, Ancient and Moral Philosophy but came unstuck on Epistemology and Logic, along with 57% of the class. I could have repeated my Philosophy exam as it is necessary to pass in all subjects to progress to second year. However, after long deliberation and taking into account the travelling factor, I decided to leave Maynooth.

I found Sociology most enjoyable and felt that my interests lay in that direction. I searched for other colleges nearer home who might accommodate me and my chosen subjects, but to no avail. However, I discovered that The International Foundation for Adult Education, in the Hague, The Netherlands, were offering diploma courses in Social Science. I duly applied and was accepted. I take my exams in October and can then go on to do an advanced course. I have also applied to do a degree in Social Science through the Open University and am awaiting a reply.

When I joined V.T.O.S., I had no idea it would lead me down the road on which I now find myself. Thanks to V.T.O.S. I am now committed to taking a degree in Social Science. I also find myself much more interested in current affairs and the many social problems that threaten the very foundations of our society. I have a much broader understanding of the many different peoples and cultures that make up our world.

More importantly, I have discovered that learning, just like personality development, is a life-long process. Education is much more than an

accumulation of knowledge; it includes the passing on of culture, social heritage, values, morals and beliefs. Some might argue that society places too much emphasis on education, but many factors, such as personal circumstances, urbanisation, industrialisation, secularisation have changed and continue to change our way of life. The rules and educational requirements for living are more complex. We must continually learn how to adapt to on-going social change. Education is an integral part of everyday life, a diverse process of development and learning (socialisation). We spend our lifetimes simply learning how to live and survive in a world which is in a constant state of flux.

Conclusion

Life after V.T.O.S. has given me broader values. I now feel that the importance of education cannot be over-emphasised. For us to live together, we must first learn to understand each other. This requires taking the time and the trouble to learn the ways and cultures of the many peoples who share our world. Whether through V.T.O.S. or the hallowed halls of Maynooth, it provides all the essential ingredients necessary for our development as individuals, fit to take our place in adult society.

Liam Delaney was a student on the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme in Coolock on the northside of Dublin City. He is now pursuing a degree through the Open University.

Book Reviews

Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (London: Polity, 1991). 276pp., £11.95

Until recently it was clear that radical meant breaking away from the past and having a particular vision of organising history for the benefit of all. Adult educators too were clear what radical meant and looked to writers like Paulo Freire to help clarify the theory and practice of becoming agents of history and social change.

But something amazing has happened to the idea of taking things by the roots. Reagan and Thatcher were triumphant and radical agents of change. Their New Right celebrated the demise of Keynesianism in the West and the decline of Socialism in the East. The 'end of history' was declared. The struggle was over, the Western system of organising affairs had won and all that remained for the Left was to defensively protect the welfare state.

If both the Left and Right are redefining what they mean by radical and democratic and if adult education uses the same language, then this has implications for us. Giddens' book is not about adult education but it is rich in provocative ideas if we are worried about this change of language. The classic Anthony Crossland book *The Future of Socialism* has been a bible for many in the British Labour Party and Giddens' new book echoes that title and looks to go *Beyond Left and Right* and plot the *Future of Radical Politics*.

Even in a brief review, we too need to look *Beyond Left and Right* to the *Future of Radical Adult Education* for this reason. Because if the language and concepts we use to articulate our vision are constantly changing in the arena from which we borrow them, this has implications for the way a theory, policy and practice of adult education is articulated.

In two early chapters, Giddens outlines clearly the current situations where conservatives have embraced radicalism and socialism has retreated from radicalism.

The ingredients of conservatism are well described - the primacy of the market place, the pursuit of profit and the need for the moral regeneration of individuals, family and the nation. The ownership of property through privatisation enhances personal energy and adventurousness and promotes the well-being of the family. The regeneration of the family is to be achieved through a dogmatic stress on traditional values. The paradox for the New Right is that their unconditional endorsement of market forces actively furthers the detraditionalisation of the family.

Socialism on the other hand finds itself in an extraordinary situation - in retreat. It has always stood for the values of freedom, equality, community, social justice, co-operation and peace. It has in equal measure been against oppression, exploitation, inequality, war, violence, poverty, dehumanisation and misery. Socialism is the pursuit of ideas of social co-operation, universal welfare and equality - ideas brought together by the critique of the injustices of capitalism and its emphasis on individualism. It is this set of values which leads adult educators to find so much that is attractive in the core values of the Left.

What has changed? Increased globalisation, the change of status given to tradition and increased social reflexivity are among the most far reaching changes.

Another development is the rise of *manufactured uncertainty*. This refers to our own intrusions into history and nature which have created risks. These include global warming, pollution, desertification, large-scale wars, global economic disruptions, population growth and illnesses produced by technology. These risks challenge our ability to cope with problems of our own making. If we get it wrong the outcome may be cataclysmic. There is no guarantee that we know how to solve them. They cannot be dealt with by traditional remedies of more knowledge and control.

What else has gone wrong? For instance, many *legal rights* so important to the Left have not yet been won. Whole sections of the population, especially women, have not in law broken away from traditional statuses.

The *welfare state* has problems. It has not been effective in combating poverty as the better off seem to benefit more from increased public expenditure. The welfare state is too closely tied to the two tiered traditional family system of male wage earner and a second tier of household dependents. The awareness of the debilitating effect of welfare dependency as a set of attitudes and culture has led to the alienation of welfare recipients from the broader social order. Welfare state bureaucracies have become inflexible, impersonal and unresponsive to the needs of its clients. Demographic changes increase fiscal problems for the welfare state.

If these are the problems, what are the solutions? The remaining chapters of Giddens deal in detail with a six item agenda for a reconstituted radical politics drawing both on conservative philosophy and the core values of socialist thought:

1. *Repair damaged solidarities.* Many people are worried about social disintegration but this could also offer new possibilities for generating solidarities. The individualism of conservatism which is the self-seeking, profit maximising behaviour of the market place is egoism and not the autonomy required to survive and forge a life in the

modern world. Autonomy implying reciprocity and interdependence may be the way of relating which promises an alternative to the threat of disintegration.

He illustrates his case with the example of the family where the threat of disintegration may be overcome by strengthening commitments and obligations, when these are based on active trust. Social solidarity could be enriched rather than destroyed by, for example, recognising the rights of children and our responsibilities towards them.

2. *Life politics* is about how we should live in a world where everything that used to be natural or traditional now in some sense has to be chosen or decided about. Ecological and feminist concerns are of major importance in life politics.
3. *Generative politics* is a politics which seeks to allow individuals and groups make things happen rather than have things happen to them. It works through providing material conditions and organisational frameworks for the life-political decisions taken by groups and individuals in the wider social order. Generative politics involves fostering the conditions under which desired outcomes can be achieved, generating resources which enhance autonomy and decentralise political power.
4. In a world of clever people new forms of democratisation are needed. *Dialogic democracy* is Giddens solution. For some, democracy is a vehicle for the representation of interests. Giddens suggests it be a way of creating a public arena in which controversial issues can be resolved (or at least handled) through dialogue rather than through pre-established forms of power. It is here that Giddens, it seems to me, has interesting ideas of some consequence for adult education.

He talks too about a democracy of the emotions in family relations which would have major implications for public democracy. If all relationships were ordered through dialogue rather than embedded power we would then have integrated autonomy and solidarity.

5. Rethink the *welfare state* in a fundamental way.
6. Confront the role of *violence* in human affairs from gender, family and community to regional and global wars. It is here that dialogue has its greatest potential as it is against the 'gender fundamentalism' of violent men and indeed against all fundamentalisms.

The Future of Radical Adult Education

Democracy in Ireland is being re-defined in a number of areas. Firstly, it seems to me that the Presidency of Mary Robinson has re-defined democracy by identifying a constituency which the political parties of the vested interests are not capable of representing. It is the constituency of the socially active, community based educators and workers who work with communities, the disadvantaged and marginalised. This constituency now has a voice.

The second area is adult and community education which, to a great extent, includes in its constituency many of the same groups and works towards the same agenda of inclusion and learning for social action and change. What democracy means is being discovered and tested in the learning processes and procedures of these groups.

Giddens outlines how personal development involves developing personal relations in which active trust is sustained and mobilised through discussion and the interchange of views. But adult education has known this for some time! And individuals who have a good understanding of their own emotional make-up and who have learned to communicate with others on a personal basis are likely to be well prepared for the tasks and responsibilities of being members of political democracy. Personal development is political activity - education for citizenship.

Giddens is arguing against a concept of democracy that is simply representative. This involves ruling by a group distant from the ruled and governed by petty party-political concerns. And interestingly, he is also arguing against the participatory democracy that has been one of the seminal ideas of adult education. Paulo Freire inspired participatory methods of community development and Jack Mezirow in his transformation theory indicates the central role of open and uncoerced discussion based on Habermas' ideal speech situation.

What Giddens is proposing is dialogic democracy. It is not necessarily oriented towards the achievement of consensus and the most contentious issues may remain unresolved. It involves the capacity to maintain active trust and tolerance while not necessarily achieving consensus.

Giddens outlines how dialogic democracy is today advancing in individual lives, in self-help groups, even corporate giants and the international arena. Self-help groups open spaces for public dialogue by forcing into the discursive domain aspects of social behaviour that were fixed, traditional or previously unproblematic. The women's movement and feminist adult education is typical in that it has problematised male definitions of gender by making them matters of public debate. Many self-help groups inhibit fixed hierarchies, provide a maximum of discursive space for its members and contribute significantly to their development. The self-help movement in adult education literature and research has known this for a long time.

It does seem possible that the future of democracy is being invented, tested and fine tuned in some parts of the adult education field. What Giddens is suggesting as the future of radical politics may be already at the testing stage in many groups and courses in adult education and community development.

This will not become a textbook in adult education. It attempts to work out major contemporary issues about the kind of politics that are needed now. This book is also important for adult education as it helps us think out issues, processes and procedures which so often mirror, reflect and borrow from contemporary discussions. What would adult education look like if it had a radical vision including the repairing of damaged solidarities and encouraging dialogic democracy?

Do not be surprised if these ideas of Giddens are behind the rhetoric of the British Labour Party as it attempts to redefine itself for a post-Thatcher government. It is quite clear that this work is going to inform Labour Party rhetoric for some time.

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Making Connections - Women Developing Links for Change.
Compiled and edited by Therese Caherty. Published by Banúlacht.

Making Connections is a training handbook for tutors, adult educators, community development workers and development educators. The handbook is published by Banúlacht, a network of women from development organisations and community groups committed to linking the struggles of marginalised groups in Ireland and in the third world, through the perspective of the women involved. The book is based on training courses run in 1991-2 and addresses both gender and development issues. Topics include Understanding Development, Health, Work, Debt, Food and Trade. The handbook also contains a reading list and addresses of resource agencies.

This book has emerged from the process of running courses and is clearly based on good adult education practices. The early pages give good practical advice on planning and running the programme. The first unit has useful exercises designed to speed up the "getting to know you" process, as well as practical pieces of advice like "don't force anyone to join in". In general, participant exercises are clearly presented, logical, adult and purposeful. Tutors are encouraged to adapt and improvise. "Be guided by your instincts" we are told on page 57.

The issues addressed in the handbook are well chosen. The readings are generally clear and easily understood. I particularly liked the "Seven Deadly Sins of Development" (p19) and the graphical presentation on work patterns in the North and South (p.38). The "Social Analysis Spiral" is part of the theoretical base of the programme. There is, the theory claims, a direct and progressive link between personal experience at the centre of the spiral and the social, political and economic systems. This perspective informs the entire programme.

The handbook is sprinkled with "energiser" exercises, so useful in keeping up concentration over an extended period. Numerous methods including drama, role play, group work and silent reading are used as ways of communicating with the group. The handbook itself is designed for easy use. The binding allows it to remain flat open or bent back on itself for easy photocopying.

I did feel that some of the content was too heavy to be absorbed by a typical group within the recommended time. The Common Agricultural Policy, for example, is meant to be covered in thirty minutes. The material on the IMC, the Work Bank, GATT, LOME, while interesting, seemed to me to require considerable extra knowledge if the topic was to be confidently and competently dealt with by the author.

This is a useful handbook, particularly for anyone working in development education or with women's groups. It might also be useful for church groups or second level schools in terms of increasing awareness of basic third world issues. We need more handbooks of this nature, coming out of the practical experience of working with groups on specific topics. Much good work is being done all over the country by individuals and groups. Little, however, finds its way into general circulation. This means that the good work is confined to the individual and his/her students and never finds a wider audience.

Banúlacht has shown all practitioners how to go from a good course to a well written handbook. I learned a lot about both development and good adult education practice from this very useful publication. It deserves to be widely used.

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Commitment, Educative Action and Adults: Learning programmes with a social purpose. O'Sullivan, Denis. (1993 Avebury, Aldershot pp 210) £35 sterling

This work marks an important contribution to clarifying our understanding of the often hidden assumptions and complex power processes underlying socially committed adult education programmes and their providers/initiators. The author's declared purpose is to pose critical reflective questions concerning such assumptions from the point of view of the 'clients' of these programmes. In so doing he offers a conceptual framework to interrogate socially committed programmes by posing six key questions about seeking to change people in a socially committed way. It is these six questions, systematically analysed and critically reflected upon, which determine the book's structure and content.

Although the language throughout is formal, technical and academic (not making for an easy read) and the tone correspondingly dispassionate, detached and apparently "objective", there is no mistaking its central message for adult educators committed to and involved in promoting learning with a social purpose viz. we need to identify our own hidden motivations/assumptions and critically reflect on our practice to ensure that we are not merely manipulating, controlling or exploiting participants and thus covertly diminishing their autonomy while overtly promoting their 'emancipation'

Socially committed programmes are essentially identifiable through their "desire to bring about social change through educative action" in line with the 'social mission' tradition in adult education. The opening chapter outlines some twelve examples of such programmes including An Irish Workers' course (O'Rahilly U.C.C.), the Antigonish Movement (Coady), Highlander (Horton), Thailand (immigration and social integration), Cuba & Tanzania (education for revolutionary change), Charismatic Renewal (Catholic Pentecostals). It then poses the six key questions as follows:

- How do people come to be committed to the active pursuit of a particular kind of change?
- How visible is the underpinning logic of the motivation to bring about change.
- What is the epistemic status (substance/nature) of the desired change (in people)?
- How is the legitimacy of the programme established?
- What is the associative character of the interaction?
- How is dysfunctional response on the part of participants coped with?

The approach adopted by the author to each of these questions is interdisciplinary, drawing with impressive erudition on the disciplines of philosophy, psychology and adult education. His entire analysis is governed and informed by his professional background and perspective as a sociologist which enables him to effect detailed analysis while retaining focus on core issues. Such issues include analysis and reflection on the unequal power

relationship between providers/initiators of socially committed programmes wherein he refers to the inherent structural inequality in some programmes concerned with illiteracy, environment, peace education and social action. He points out that these "lie uneasily with even a hint of inequality" although "initiators... find themselves with more control over the participants than they can immediately recognise". The biographies of socially committed people, he adds, point clearly to recurring processes of "desiring, seeking out, establishing and maintaining power" as they attempt to fulfil their "wish to regulate the development of others and re-shape society or some aspect of it." Thus the expression of commitment appears inextricably linked to the need for power. To those of us involved in promoting and facilitating change through personal community, social action, economic and political development and who would instinctively reject such an implication, O'Sullivan would argue that any such contention "may well be ideological" (i.e. based on a particular social vision).

Another core issue addressed is the nature, and variety of change sought through socially committed learning. According to O'Sullivan, research findings do not support the assumption that participants in such programmes "are necessarily taking control over their lives and using the programmes learning opportunity to move forward according to some personal development or social action plan which they formulated". He refers to Brim's comment that "the most important, most difficult question about adult socialisation is how much change can take place in adult personality". His discussion of three types of psychological change - segmental, role/identity and interpretive - is essentially sociological. He concludes that the emancipatory function demands personal change affecting the individual "in a deep, experiential and comprehensive manner" (i.e. interpretive change) and adds that "the more pervasive the interpretive change (which embodies a persuasive imperative for action...) the more the transformation assumes... characteristics... which diminish the adult status of the individual." Segmental change alone will be inadequate to achieve the objectives of socially committed programmes while role/identity change can be quite invasive for the individual. The nature of the change and the type of learning outcomes sought carry major implications for providers in terms of method, content, process if social change outcomes are to be achievable.

A central question underpinning this entire work centres on the still unresolved sociological debate concerning the power/autonomy of the individual in society - whether the emphasis should reflect PEOPLE in society or people in SOCIETY. One school assumes that people are not unthinking agents of other's designs, the other (structuralist) explains behaviour in terms of external social forces on people. Echoes of this debate in adult education are raised by O'Sullivan with reference to Freire, Brookfield and Mezirow, among others. Freire is sometimes criticised for appearing to inadequately respect his students' viewpoints, and Mezirow for the apparent lack of a theory of social action by his emphasis on the personal autonomy of

participants vis a vis social action. The basic issue remains unresolved by O'Sullivan whether personal perspective transformation can or should lead to action for social transformation or not.

Perhaps of more practical interest to adult educators is O'Sullivan's discussion (in chapter seven) of providers' responses to participant unresponsiveness, doubt, dissent or resistance (dysfunctional responses) to socially committed programmes. Programmes claiming to be emancipatory cannot sustain even a hint of elitism or dogmatism or risk participant perception of the programming as oppressive, manipulative or threatening their autonomy. He outlines instructive examples of providers' responses in this situation and indicates some coping strategies which to one reader at least smack of disingenuity.

In conclusion, this book, while always stimulating, challenging and frequently illuminating, is obviously highly academic. Nonetheless the many issues raised, and the conceptual framework outlined, raise questions for practitioners which are too important to be left to academe. Despite reservations on the accessibility and density of much of the language used, irritation at the pervasive Americanisation of the spelling of "ise" words such as "socialization", "compromize", "surprize", "modernization", this book is well worth its apparently exorbitant price tag.

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The Adult Learner is produced jointly by AONTAS and the Adult Education Organisers Association. Now in its eleventh year, it is the only journal which deals exclusively with issues in adult and community education. It is produced annually and covers a wide range of topics and issues, which are of concern to all those involved in adult education.

It contains information on the latest developments and initiatives in adult learning in this country, north and south. The book review section gives notices of the most recent and relevant publications in the field.

The current issue is devoted mainly to adult learners who describe their experiences in different adult education situations. There are contributions from adult learners involved in:

- VTOS programmes
- distance learning
- day-time learning
- community education
- prison education
- the rural experience

A retired man tells of his journey from 'second chance' education to Maths tutor.

A member of a voluntary adult education group in Galway describes how a thriving local adult education programme was forced to close through lack of support.

The recently published White Paper on Education is critically examined from the perspective of adult and community education. Ad hoc makes his usual telling contribution and there are reviews of interesting new publications.

