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sheila o'driscoll
Director
Shannon Curriculum Development Centre
July 2002.

Chapter One Introduction

1. The Study

This chapter describes the purpose, focus, nature and structure of the research.

The Shannon Curriculum Development Centre was commissioned in the summer of 2001 by AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education, on behalf of the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science to 'examine women's and men's different learning styles and needs and the implications for provision of education and training' *(AONTAS Brief to Tenders 2001).*

2. The Rationale

This research stems from a commitment entered into by the Irish government and the social partners in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. Under its equality objectives, the Programme agreed to:

- Create a fair and inclusive society by putting in place a strategic framework for action on equality in accordance with the NESC Strategy document
- Provide a range of supports for groups experiencing disadvantage and inequality.

(Department of the Taoiseach 2000: p. 98)

In the section dealing with Lifelong Learning the Programme undertook to:

- Conduct research to examine women's and men's learning styles and needs and the implications for provision of education and training.

(Department of the Taoiseach 2000: p. 113)

3. Aims of the Research

AONTAS advertised nationally for tenders to undertake the research. The aims of the research, as advertised by AONTAS, were to:

- Explore the styles of learning adopted by men and women;
- Identify differences in these styles if any;
- Examine the differing needs of women and men in relation to access to learning;
- Identify and document models of good practice, which take account of the learner's particular needs;
- Make recommendations in relation to the implications for further education and training.

4. Focus of the Research

The research focussed on adults who had not completed upper second level education and who were currently participating in adult education.

5. The Nature of the Research

The research team adopted both a qualitative and a quantitative approach. In adopting a qualitative approach the research team sought to develop an understanding of the various processes at work in influencing adult participation in second chance education by hosting group discussions with a range of learners in a variety of settings. The study also used two learning style measuring instruments, both of which were developed in the United States. Given that these learning instruments had not been used in this country and in this context before, it was agreed to use two instruments for validation purposes. Focus group discussions were conducted with two groups of tutors, one in Dublin and one in Limerick. Telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of the following agencies and providers:

- Dublin Adult Learning Centre(DALC)
- Adult Education Organisers(AEOs)
- FÁS
- Teagasc (Agricultural and Food Authority)
- AONTAS (National Association of Adult Education)

In addition to the qualitative and quantitative research, a literature review was conducted to enable both the research team and the readers of this report to locate adult learning issues within a broad theoretical framework.

6. Issues and Findings

Two major issues emerged as being influential in relation to access to learning for both men and women:

- Level and experience of formal education
- Economic and social circumstances

The following findings were identified as being influential in the process of learning for both men and women

The experience of learning as an adult

- The first day
- Family support
- Peer support
- Transport
- Information
- Childcare
- Attitudes to tutors

The learning environment

- Atmosphere
- Organisation of classes
- Learning programmes
- Teaching resources and methodology

The learning process

- Approaches to learning
- Shared personal experiences
- Feedback on learning
- Home as a learning environment

7. Structure of the Report

This report is in six chapters including this, the introductory chapter.

Chapter Two provides a theoretical context within which the experience of adult education can be examined.

Chapter Three provides a review of participation in adult education.

Chapter Four describes the research methodology.

Chapter Five combines feedback from the learner focus groups, tutor focus groups and the service providers / agency representatives.

Chapter Six details the findings from Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) and Allinson and Hayes' Cognitive Style Index (CSI).

Chapter Seven provides conclusions and recommendations arising from this research

Chapter 2 Lifelong Learning and Gender – A Literature Review

1. Introduction

With what McGivney (1999: p. 3) calls 'monotonous regularity', the same issues emerge again and again with regard to what she calls the 'determinants of adult participation in learning'. These issues include situational, institutional, dispositional, informational and contextual factors, as follows:

- Time, income, location and disability (situational issues);
- The way in which schools, colleges and places of further education are organised and structured (institutional issues);
- The motivation needed and the perceived risks attached to returning to education as an adult (dispositional issues);
- The content of the information, the media provided to disseminate the information, and the assistance provided to potential participants to interpret and relate that information (informational issues);
- Class, gender, age, family status, peer influence and norms (contextual issues)

(Bond 1999, Owens 2000 and WRC, 1999)

Central to the 'same old issues', is 'curriculum, pedagogy and the structure of the learning experience (which) have naturally been uniform and relatively inflexible' (Taylor, 2001: p. 136). Eschewing such neat categorisation, Tett (193:p.18) argues that participation in learning is not just influenced by one issue or one set of issues, but that 'generally it results from the combination and interaction of diverse factors rather than one or two obstacles which would be relatively easy to overcome'. Access to the learning experience is also determined by issues such as childcare, ethnicity, disability, finance/income, distance, and literacy.

The Department of Education and Science's White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (2000) acknowledges the 'rigidity of the Irish education system' with a disproportionate emphasis on the young, on full-time provision and on neat entry and exit points. The White Paper has identified people from disadvantaged socio-economic groups, people with disabilities, carers, Travellers, ex-prisoners, those working in the home with small children particularly women, rural dwellers, lone parents, long-term unemployed, people with low levels of literacy, the elderly, homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers as those most likely to be excluded from this rigid system (*DES, 2000*).

Participation in adult, lifelong, community-based and second chance education – terms that are often used interchangeably – is therefore not just about what are often referred to as 'hard to reach' cohorts of the population, and their inability/unwillingness to access educational opportunities, but about how education is structured. The programmes on offer may be the determining factor in who actually participates. The WRC Report states that 'there is some evidence of some creaming, as well as a level of academic drift in programme content, such

that particular groups of people among targeted population do not become programme participants'. (1999: pp 3–4).

The Department of Education's White Paper, *Charting our Education Future (1995)*, admits that much of the development that has taken place in the lifelong, second chance, adult and community-based sector has taken place in an 'ad hoc and unstructured manner' and calls for 'a more cohesive approach' (1995: p.73). The Green Paper on Adult Education, *Adult Education In An Era of Lifelong Learning (1998)*, was the first concerted effort by the state to articulate a coherent policy on adult education and was developed in response to the hitherto unplanned and uncoordinated approach. The Green Paper adopted the definition used in the Report of the Kenny Commission on Adult Education (1984):

> Adult education includes all systematic learning by adults, which contributes to their development as individuals and as members of the community and of society; apart from full-time instruction received by persons as part of their uninterrupted initial education and training. It may be a formal education which takes place in institutions e.g. training centres, schools, colleges, institutes and universities, or non-formal education which is any other systematic form of learning including self-directed learning.
> *(DES,1998: p.16)*

The Green Paper identified three key elements to adult education:

- Promoting the well-being of all citizens
- Contributing to social and economic cohesion
- Strengthening the democratic process.

(DES,1998: p.6)

In recognition of the unplanned way in which the adult education sector has evolved, the White Paper, *Learning for Life*, recommends that adult education should be underpinned by three core principles:

- A systemic approach
- Equality of access, participation and outcome
- Inter-culturalism.

(DES, 2000: p. 12)

There would appear to have been an evolving emphasis in the way in which adult education is framed between the publication of the White Paper, *Charting our Education Future (1995)* and the publication of the White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*. The former heavily emphasised economic growth and development as the rationale for funding adult education:

> The achievement of economic growth and development is dependent significantly on the availability of suitably qualified and adaptable personnel with the necessary personal and vocational skills.
> *(DES, 1995: p. 75).*

Quoting the OECD (1989) Report, *Education and Economy in a Changing Society*, the chapter on *Further Education* in the White Paper, *Charting our Education Future*, states that adult education should contribute to 'a vocationally skilled and *adaptable* (author's emphasis) workforce' (1995: p.75).

In addition to that report, The White Paper draws on the National Economic and Social Council (1993) reports on *Education and Training Policies for Economic and Social Development* and *A Strategy for Competitiveness, Growth and Employment (1993)*; the European Union's White Paper on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* and the OECD (1994) *Jobs Study – Facts, Analysis Strategies*. Given this philosophical foundation, it is not surprising to find so many references to 'adaptable personnel', 'successful economic performance', 'the acquisition (*sic*) of high quality technical and vocational education' capable of adapting to 'labour market conditions and future requirements'. (1995 pp.75 and 76).

In this rationale, the economic paradigm dominates. The OECD (1994) *Jobs Study* clearly identifies economic objectives as paramount in asserting that 'extending and upgrading workers' skills and competencies must be a lifelong process. Education and training policies should be directed at furthering this goal' (1994: p. 47).

The White Paper, *Learning for Life*, on the other hand, puts greater emphasis on citizenship, participation and well-being. The White Paper advocated a national programme of Adult Education with six priority areas, only one of which is specifically economic in its rationale. The six principles are as follows:

- Consciousness raising
- Citizenship
- Cohesion
- Competitiveness
- Cultural development
- Community development.

(DES, 2000: p.28)

In addition to this framework, the White Paper recommends that adult education should be underpinned by three core principles:

- A systemic approach which, recognises that the interfaces between the school experience have a critical influence on learners' motivation and ability to access and progress in adult education and training;
- Equality of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education with pro-active strategies to counter-act barriers;
- Inter-culturalism, the need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one.

(DES, 2000: p.12–13)

While the primary focus of this research is on adult learning styles, the way in which people learn will be hugely influenced by the way in which adult education is structured, and by the dominant value system within which it operates. Issues such as access, barriers, participation, learning styles and outcome, will be determined by the overall context.

Gleeson (2000) argues that to be properly understood, policy and practice at post-primary level 'must be placed in its social, cultural, political and economic context' (2000 p.16). According to Gleeson the Irish context includes:

- The ideologies of consensualism which reduces the likelihood of contestation…
- The enormous influence of external agencies such as the OECD and the EU.

(Gleeson, 2000: p.16)

Consensualism and the absence of contestation is very much in evidence in the EU *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000). The Heads of the Member States at Lisbon in March 2000 agreed at the summit that 'it is possible both to achieve dynamic growth and to strengthen social cohesion' (2000: p.6). The European Council concluded that 'the move towards lifelong learning must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society' (2000: p.3). At no stage does the *Memorandum* suggest that it is the function of lifelong education to challenge or question the current model of the knowledge-based society, or question what is understood by the concept social cohesion. Non-contestation of the dominant policy paradigm is not just a recent phenomenon. O'Sullivan (1999) argues that,

> the most striking feature to emerge from an analysis of official educational thinking from the 1950s, is its insulation from competing contesting viewpoints, and the associated mechanisms such as those of editing, filtering or excluding discordant meanings through which the orthodoxy of its understandings are maintained (1999: p.311).

The EU Council of Ministers identified the following rationale in its *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000):

> More than ever before, access to up-to-date information and knowledge, together with the motivation and skills to use these resources intelligently on behalf of oneself and the community as a whole, are becoming the key to strengthening Europe's competitiveness and improving the employability and adaptability of the workforce. Today's Europeans live in a complex social and political world. More than ever before, individuals want to plan their own lives, are expected to contribute actively to society and must learn to live positively with cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Education, in its broadest sense, is the key to learning and understanding how to meet these challenges.
> *(2000: p. 5)*

Irrespective of what and how people want to learn, if the State's objective for adult education – under the influence of the EU and the OECD – is to upskill the workforce, or to promote a particular type of social cohesion, then this has implications for how and what people learn. For that reason this literature review will begin with an overview of broader theoretical debates before addressing the specifics of how women and men learn. Such theoretical debates are not just ends in themselves. According to O'Sullivan,

> 'they regulate what is to be defined as a meaningful problem, how it is to be thematised and described, what is to be considered worthy as data, who is to be recognised as a legitimate participant, and with what status, and how the policy process is to be enacted, realised and evaluated' *(1999: 311)*.

The tendency has been to 'gloss' (O'Sullivan 1999: p310) over theoretical debates or at least to present them as uncomplicated, a tendency O'Sullivan claims, that is not unique to this country. To 'gloss' over debates would at least suggest that a cursory acknowledgement is made of their importance, a view that Looney (2001) would appear to dispute. She claims that a theoretical deficit exists within Irish education and in its stead technical dominance prevails. Curriculum has moved, she claims 'from philosophy to technicality (ibid: p. 151). She calls for 'a more theorized understanding of curriculum as policy' (ibid: p. 159) and for a concerted effort to overcome the fragmentation and discontinuity that currently exists. One of the causes of this

fragmentation is the way in which sectoral interests and powerful lobby groups have come to dominate curriculum policy.

Gleeson (2000) claims that in this country, 'there has been an unfortunate tendency to treat the exclusion of ideological difference from education debate as a virtue…resulting in a kind of hegemony where…any dissatisfaction is publicly voiceless and unrecognised' (2000: p. 21). Rather than 'gloss' over such issues, this study locates the research on the learning styles of women and men within a functionalist / critical theory continuum recognising that theoretical or 'ideological issues have to be addressed' (Callan 1995: p. 110 cited by Gleeson 2000: p.26). In doing this, this research *does not* attempt to advocate one theoretical position over another.

The chapter will then examine specific issues related to pedagogy, boys' and girls' experience of schooling, empowerment, barriers to participation, international perspectives and learning theories.

2. Two Theoretical Perspectives

2.1 Critical Theory

According to Clancy (1986 and 1995) two theoretical perspectives, which occupy opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, dominate Irish educational discourse within the discipline of sociology. Critical theory – a theory that in its presentation is very often 'incredibly, extravagantly convoluted to the point of disastrous absurdity' (Agger 1991: p.105) has evolved as a reaction to liberalism – a theoretical framework that has been the dominant influence on Irish education from the sixties into the nineties.

Critical theorists see education as a process rather than a product. Issues of control and power, status, relationships, understandings of knowledge and pedagogy, and how they manifest themselves within education are central to their concerns. Equally, critical theorists contest presumptions of objectivity and claims that education is neutral in its execution. For critical theorists education *per se* cannot be presumed to be an absolute good.

Egalitarianism is central to the concerns of critical theorists. Their focus is firmly fixed on how issues like ethnicity, gender, race, disability and class impact on education. They reject traditional liberal meritocratic concerns with ensuring that the talented get the best opportunity to progress or that people from working class backgrounds, the disabled, women, racial or ethnic minorities are proportionately represented in higher education. Such mobility does not alter the inherent in-built imbalance within current structures. Critical theory is, therefore, primarily counter-hegemonic in that it questions and challenges,

> the nature of knowledge and patterns of power and control within education…(arguing) for equality of condition, focusing especially on equality of respect in the organisation of schooling itself – decision making, the organisation of curricular selection and pedagogical relations . *(Lynch 1999)*

For Agger, the challenge posed by critical theorists is to counter the 'false consciousness' that the present system is here to stay, and is the only rational way in which society can be organised. Unlike those who uncritically and fatalistically feel that there is no other option other than to

participate in the perpetuation of current dominant hegemonic values and ideologies, critical theorists 'attempt to develop a mode of consciousness and cognition that breaks the identity of reality and rationality' (Agger: 1991: pp.108-109). For critical theorists, there is no middle ground. One is either for the powerful or the powerless. All action is political action either for the advantaged or the disadvantaged, even by those who claim to act de-politically Critical theorists operate from a 'dialectical imagination' (Florence, 1998:p.77), that enables people to look beyond what is presented as the world order. It challenges people to look beyond the social, cultural, economic and normative constraints to imagine and pursue a world that is free from patriarchy, racism, classism and any other imposed constraint.

2.2 The Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective lies at the other end of the theoretical continuum. If critical theory sees itself as counter-hegemonic, fuctionalism is hegemonic. Instead of challenging the dominant, establishment perspective, functionalism seeks to identify how a particular system fits into and supports the overall structure. For functionalists, industrialisation has been the defining event in recent history and one that has transformed social relations and the way society organises itself. Drudy and Lynch claim that a 'major preoccupation of functionalists is with order – that is, how do societies remain cohesive and maintain themselves from one generation to another?' (1993: p. 30).

The concept of functionalism owes its origins to Auguste Comte, who is regarded as the founding father of sociology. He believed in the certainty of knowledge and a hierarchy of subjects. Sociology, he believed, was at the top of the subject pyramid. Comte was not concerned with the meanings, motives and feelings that people brought to certain identifiable phenomena. 'To study the *function* of a social practice or institution is to analyse the contribution which that practice or institution makes to the continuation of the society as a whole' (Giddens, 1993, p.711). Functionalists analogise social systems with the human body. Just as one cannot study the heart in isolation to the whole body, equally one cannot study any aspect of human activity without understanding how it contributes to the whole.

Porter defines functionalism as '(a) view that society is a system made up of interconnected parts, each of which *functions* to maintain that system as a whole'. (1998 p.11). The glue that holds that system together is, according to Talcott Parsons, one of the last century's greatest proponents of functionalism, is a common value or belief system. For Parsons, society 'is a moral and ultimately a religious entity whose intrinsic nature is a set of commonly held values and beliefs' (Collinicos, 1999, p. 239). Within this moral and religious framework, individual systems like the family and education have a pivotal role to play, to ensure that cohesion is maintained and that the values of each component are in harmony with the overall value system.

This common value / belief system replicates itself through a process of socialisation, which enables individuals to learn to accept the common values of society and its goals. Young people develop or are taught, from birth onwards, to develop a world view that conforms to the agreed values of their parents and elders. For functionalists, co-operation and interdependence rather than conflict and divisiveness characterise society. Such co-operation and interdependence contribute to order and stability, both of which are necessary if the common good is to be achieved. Functionalists seek conformity and all institutions, including education, must, for the overriding good of society seek a common belief and moral system.

Functionalism has many critics. Chief amongst them is the view that functionalism is nothing more than a sociological rationale for maintaining the status quo, and in particular the socially stratified system that benefits current power-holders and elites. Haralambos and Holborn (1991) state that there is 'considerable doubt about the proposition that the educational system grades people in terms of ability. In particular, it has been argued that intelligence has little effect upon educational attainment' (1991: p.234). They go on to suggest that it has more to do with reproducing social inequality. Critics also argue that functionalists overemphasise the normative element or 'the glue' that holds society together. Many of its critics argue that there is very little evidence in support of the view that there is an overarching, agreed value system. In overstating the commonality of values, functionalists' critics argue that it denies or minimises social conflict and differences.

Notwithstanding such criticisms, the functionalists' perspective finds favour among many educationalists. According to Haralambos and Holborn (1994:p. 229) functionalists ask two educational questions:

- What are the functions of education for society as a whole?
- What are the functional relationships between education and other parts of the social system?

According to functionalists the task of society is the creation of an homogenised whole and education contributes to the creation of this whole by teaching social roles, ensuring that school rules are applied and emphasising civic responsibilities. Durkheim maintained that 'society can survive only if there exists among its members sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands' (ibid: p. 230). They go on to argue that 'by respecting the school rules the child learns to respect rules in general, that he develops the habit of self-control and restraint simply because he should control and restrain himself. It is his first initiation into the austerity of duty' (ibid: p. 230).

Parsons argues that the school takes over from the family as the 'focal socialising agency' (ibid: p. 232). In order for schools to fulfil this function, they need to operate as a microcosm of society. Consequently, school performance must be measured against universal rather than particularistic yardsticks. Efficient societies are based on meritocracies and so should schools. They claim that in schools in the United States two values dominate, namely the value of achievement and the value of equality of opportunity. According to Parsons 'both the winners (the high achievers) and the losers (the low achievers) will see the system as just and fair, since status is achieved in a situation where all have an equal chance'. This has resulted according to Atkins (1998), in education becoming no more than 'an agent for the economic and cultural dispossession of people, who were already disadvantaged, with a view to creating a malleable, docile workforce (Ó Donnabháin: 2001: p. 18).

3. Implications for Education and Pedagogy

3.1 Critical Theory – Implications for Pedagogy

bell hooks' engaged pedagogy challenges and acts as a counterpoint to the traditional narrative that governs not only the transfer of knowledge but also all relationships. Ever conscious of the dominant power structures of capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy, hooks sought a new pedagogy that would result in new passionate and energised learners.

These learners would build communities of solidarity through the discovery of the 'voice' by the marginalised and the censored. hooks emphasised the importance and, the centrality for women of (re)discovering the voice in the overall voyage of (re)discovery.

Intellectually, hooks' work can be located within critical theory. She disputes the very concept of de-political education arguing that so called objectivity and political neutrality is, in reality, heavily politicised in support of the dominant ideology, thereby perpetuating 'false consciousness'. Central to hooks' project is the challenge and transformation of 'false consciousness' through a pedagogy 'that seeks to develop and nurture a critical consciousness in both teacher and students (Giroux 1998: p.xvii).

Engaged pedagogy as advocated by hooks seeks to:

- Counteract hierarchical relations and their often insidious cultural reproduction in schools. Social myths that suggest that power and privilege can be earned in schools deny the impact of race, gender and class not only within the school but also in the larger society.
- Promise greater teacher/student interaction and empowers students to assume greater responsibility for creating conducive learning environments.
- Provide students with multiple perspectives that enable them to know themselves better and to live in the world more fully.

hooks' theory of learning resonates very strongly with the theories of Paulo Freire,(1972). Her slogan 'Education as the Practice of Freedom' emerged from her reading of his work and takes its name directly from Freire's *Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Adopting this slogan has, according to hooks, significant implications for the teaching and learning process. It implies the adoption of 'a multicentric curriculum, that reflects cultural plurality…the rejection of authoritarian pedagogical orientations and hierarchies and the principle of superiority and subordination.

Both Freire and hooks reject traditional teaching approaches that locate the teacher at the centre of the learning process and where knowledge is reified. In particular both reject the 'banking' approach to knowledge and teaching. In its stead both opt for problem–posing education. 'The banking method directly or indirectly reinforces men's (*sic*) fatalistic perception of themselves, the problem–posing method presents this very situation to them as a problem…to be transformed' (Freire 1972: pp57–58).

Giroux states that hooks' objective is to 'counteract the overwhelming boredom, disinterest and apathy that so often characterises the way professors and students feel about the learning experience' (1998: p. xvi). However, hooks acknowledges that changing from the traditional transfer-of-knowledge pedagogy to a more participative and engaged pedagogy is a gradual process and will not be welcomed by everybody. Nor is it easy. Freire's educational ideals, however well intentioned and however well argued in terms of their critique of power structures in society, are notable more for their failures in implementation than they are for their successes, a point of view acknowledged by Branford (1997) in her obituary of him in that year.

Lynch (1999) questions the presumption underlying much of critical theory thinking, that change in pedagogy on its own is sufficient to bring about the level of change that is required, if egalitarianism is to be achieved. Lynch (1999) questions whether critical theorists put too much emphasis on the ability of learning or pedagogy to effect serious social change. There

is, according to Lynch 'no one line of change' (1999: p. 49). Furthermore, she questions the emphasis which critical theorists put on political emancipation and empowerment. Like the rest of humanity, the oppressed too are interested in personal social mobility and a well-paid job. Notwithstanding that, Lynch, goes on to state that 'it seems neither sociologically sensitive nor politically astute to ignore the structure and indeed the cultural context in which the education system operates (1999: p. 51).

3.2 Functionalism – Implications for Pedagogy

Hunt (1999) claims, although not subscribing to the view, that adult education is primarily located within 'an entirely economic/occupational paradigm' (1999: p.198). Work, better jobs, career advancement, individual and national prosperity is central to this model of lifelong, or what Hunt (1999 p. 198) calls, 'worklong rather than lifelong learning'. Within this paradigm, state expenditure on adult education is justified by the economic return of a more skilled and more adaptable workforce. Increased participation in the workforce draws people further and further into the system, ensuring that, at whatever personal cost, they become greater stakeholders in society, and therefore, less of a threat to social and economic order. In funding work-orientated adult education, the state's payback comes in greater economic prosperity and a more compliant citizenry.

Those who promote this model of adult education, according to Hunt (1999) collaborate in the economic colonisation of adult education. Within this paradigm, 'educators are in danger of becoming the compliant purveyors of merely useful knowledge', (Hunt, 1999). Quoting Hannan, (1987), Gleeson, (2000) argues that 'adherence to the dogma of human capital formation theory has been an important factor in the legitimation of Irish education policy since the sixties' (2000: p.18). Agreeing with this analysis and with specific reference to adult education, Mayo (1999), Doray and Rubenson (1997), Bialecki (1997), Forrester, (1997) and Allman (1999) argue that the emancipatory agenda of adult education has been subverted by the needs of capitalism and the state's desire to create a more skilled workforce. Mayo claims that 'adult education is being threatened by the dominant hegemonic discourse of marketspeak and the technical-rational paradigm' (1999: p.237) while Forrester believes that the vocational trend is 'seemingly unstoppable' (1997: p.24).

In the twentieth century as vocational education gained in ascendancy over liberal education it was strongly influenced by 'a philosophy of social sufficiency' (Trant, 1999: p.6). Reflecting this perspective, Tony Blair once said that education is the best economic policy we have. Giroux claims that schools are 'now the key institutions for producing professional, technically trained, creditionalised workers for whom the demands of citizenship are subordinated to the vicissitudes of the market place and the commercial sphere (1998: p.iv)'. Both of these views are very much reflected in the European Commission's (1995) White Paper, *Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society*.

Three of the guidelines for action in the White Paper propose:

- Encouraging the acquisition of new knowledge
- Bringing the school and the business sector together
- Treating material investment and investment in training on an equal basis.

Not surprisingly in the light of the above, vocational education is often presented as the embodiment of functionalism, although the dichotomy between vocational and liberal education is strongly contested. Traditionally, vocational education is perceived as 'putting a premium on the way knowledge is used in practice' (Trant, 1999: p.6). Trant argues that both the EU and the OECD operated in the 1970s and the 1980s on a narrow concept of vocational education, which 'over-emphasised its practical and work-orientated dimensions at the expense of its inherent liberal potential' (ibid: p.17).

In terms of pedagogy, Trant argues that initial vocational education focused on how to teach 'hand and eye skills' to future workers, and also inculcate qualities such as neatness, dexterity, diligence, perseverance, self-reliance and 'joy in labour' – in other words, all the virtues necessary for a competent and flourishing workforce'(ibid: p.51).

Drudy and Lynch (1993) and Clancy (1995) argue that this functionalist perspective has been the dominant influence on educational policy in Ireland since the 1960s, starting with *The Investment in Education Report (1966)*. The equality of opportunity model, reflecting a variant of functionalism known as human capital theory, stressed the need to identify ability and talent, to nurture it, accredit it and eventually assist in 'slotting it into appropriate positions in the social and economic hierarchy' (Drudy and Lynch, 1993: p.31). Clancy claims that both the Green Paper, *Education for A Changing World* (1992) and the *Report on the National Education Convention* (1994) reflected an 'overemphasis on utilitarian and individualistic values, its overstress on enterprise, technology and economic concerns, and its underemphasis on cultural, moral, artistic and civic elements' (1995: p. 497).

The dominance of the functionalist, human capital, model within the Irish educational landscape has resulted in consensualism, essentialism and meritocratic individualism. Drudy and Lynch (1993) define consensualism as the presupposition that there exists a universal agreement on values; essentialism as the belief that each person has particular innate talents, foremost of which are intellectual talents and that the educational system must locate and develop these; meritocratic individualism as the belief that individuals who have talent and make the effort should be rewarded.

Given the pre-eminence of functionalism, it is not surprising that the dominant model of teaching in Irish schools reflects these values. Drudy and Lynch (1993) argue that 'there is evidence of methodological and pedagogical conservatism in the adherence of teachers to didactic and individualistic approaches in the classroom' (1993: p.108). Such conservatism is not just confined to Ireland. Fullan and Stiegelbaur (1991) conclude from a review of research on teaching styles that 'the modal patterns of classroom life are not inspiring' (1991: 122). They summarise the picture as follows:

- In the early elementary years, there was strong evidence of students not understanding what the teacher wanted them to do;
- Most of the time the teacher is engaged in either frontal teaching, monitoring students' seatwork, or conducting quizzes. Relatively rarely are students actively engaged in learning directly from one another or initiating a process of interaction with teachers;
- Students generally engage in a rather narrow range of classroom activities: listening to the teacher, writing answers to questions and taking tests and quizzes;

- The teacher is virtually autonomous with respect to classroom decisions – selecting materials, determining class organisation, choosing instructional procedures.

(Fullan and Stiegelbaur: 1991 p. 122)

In the last decade in Ireland, major changes have taken place in the way children and young people are taught, and with some success, although the extent and impact of the change that has taken place is strongly contested. Gleeson (2000) and Looney (2001) question the widespread acceptance of the rhetoric which proclaims that the nineties has been a decade of unprecedented reform in Irish post primary education' (2000, p.18). Looney (2001) states that 'lower secondary has been the particular focus of the change rhetoric' (2001: p.155). Reviewing the rhetoric, Looney concludes that while 'subjects have been tweaked…much remains the same (2001:p.155). According to Looney, one of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's own papers suggests that the 'new' curriculum at lower secondary has never been experienced as intended' (2001: p. 155).

Change at senior cycle level would appear to have made more of an impact. The *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied (2000)* states that 'due emphasis was given to the use of active teaching and learning methodologies, and frequent use was made of practical work, group and teamwork, research methods and visits to local enterprises. Teachers paid particular…attention to the selection of course content and activities, taking cognisance of students' learning experiences, interests and expertise' (2000: p.48). These pedagogical principles and practices are also firmly embedded within the Transition Year Programme and the *Link Modules* of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

4. What about the Boys?

Much discursive space has been absorbed in recent times about the alleged crisis in men's lives. Books, articles, newspaper columns and letters to editors loudly proclaim that men's lives are in a desperate state, that men are much maligned and that cross-sectoral state systems are working to a feminist agenda, aided and abetted by 'patsy' males who are in thrall to their own destruction (Clare 2000, Kimmel 1996, McGivney 1999, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Mills 2001, King 2001, Marks 2000, Owens 2000, Sutherland and Marks 2001).

Anthony Clare in his book '*ON MEN Masculinity in Crisis*' endorses this view. If men listen, Clare tells us, they can hear the 'tumbrels lumbering up the avenues and the masses calling that their (men) time is up' (p. 69). It would appear that it is not just in the western world that men's time is up. Bhasin, in her account of doing gender work with men in South Asia, believes that 'men are trapped in a terrible insecurity, anguish and fear' (Bhasin, 1996: p. 57). Marks (2000) argues that men, particularly working class men, are experiencing 'existential terror', experiencing 'psychological and social difficulties as never before' (2000: p. 11). Working class males are, he states, 'directionless, disenfranchised and socially marginalised'. For many boys from working class backgrounds, their problems with school begin early. Their teachers complain that they are hard to motivate. 'Education is a process to be endured as a socially prescribed rite of passage into adulthood, and from which to escape at the earliest opportunity' (Sutherland and Marks, 2001 p.11). For those who 'escaped' early from school, their employment prospects are often bleak. The same is true in this country.

The 1998 Annual School Leavers' Survey of 1996/1997 Leavers (ESRI, 1999) reports that 'a total of twenty-five per cent of leavers whose fathers are unemployed are themselves unemployed one year after leaving school' (ibid: p.12). This compares to an overall unemployment rate of over seven per cent. These very same people are unlikely to re-enter a system from which they could not wait to escape, unless there has been some seismic change, either in their perception, or in the structures that many feel rejected them.

Agreeing with the centrality of early years educational experience, Brady (1996) argues that early schooling 'has been instrumental in forming their ideas and experiences of learning, many of which are extremely negative and damaging (1996: p.125). The extent of the negativity is evidenced in the number of young men that leave the educational system prematurely, many of them without formal qualifications and with low levels of literacy. School drop out according to Smyth (1999: pp. 97-98) is very much linked to working-class backgrounds, lower ability students, highly streamed schools, school ethos and gender. Boys are one to two times more likely to leave school early than are girls.

Lynch (1999: p.143) states that little is known about the nature of young people's experiences in schools from a gender perspective, and that 'virtually nothing is known about boys in particular'. What is known, though, is that boys underachieve at all levels. Morgan et al (2000) report that 'nearly three times as many Irish 14 year old boys as 14 year old girls were found to have serious literacy problems (2000: p. 45). Two males for every one female leaves with no qualifications (ESRI 2001). As well as leaving school early, boys are less likely than are girls to go on to Further Education (FE)/ Higher Education (HE) – 44.9% of girls/ young women enter FE/HE as opposed to 33.6% of boys.

In terms of quantitative data, the 1998 NCCA's report *A Longitudinal Study of 1994 Junior Certificate Candidates who took the Leaving Certificate Examination in 1996 Interim Report* indicates that boys are still more likely to take the technology subjects, and very few take Home Economics (S+S) and Music. Boys are less likely than girls to take higher-level subjects in the Leaving Certificate, apart from mathematics and the technology subjects. Consequently boys are more likely to get lower points in the Leaving Certificate than are girls. Two per cent of girls gained maximum points compared to one per cent of boys.

Sailsbury and Jackson argue that the secondary school, in England, is a highly gendered institution where 'male power works quietly and secretly as an institutional reality, and teaching is seen to be about control and authoritarian certainties (1996: p.18). In this setting the students sit quietly in their places as the teacher talks from the front of the class. The authoritarian ethos extends beyond the classroom, as teachers patrol corridors and students are heavily monitored and are expected to account for their movements. According to these writers, boys recognise the power around them and are conscious of the pressure to compete and succeed, 'the quality of the capitalist masculinist discourse touches them all' (Sailsbury and Jackson 1996: p.18). Given such a difficult environment, it is not surprising that boys resort to a range of resistance strategies, one of them being to leave altogether.

Mac an Ghaill begins his book with the assertion that 'in English secondary schools as elsewhere in the social world, masculine perspectives are pervasively dominant' (1995: p.1). While that is so, there is a fragility and an insecurity attached to masculine identity. Compulsory heterosexuality is the dominant and defining characteristic of masculinity, followed by misogyny

and homophobia, power and authority, aggression, and technical competence. Agreeing with Mac an Ghaill, Owens (2000) believes that the dominant schoolyard culture censures gentle, caring types of masculinity through name-calling, and through either insinuation or actual use of violence. She too argues that sexuality is central to how masculinity is constructed, not only in the schoolyard, but also in broader society, and sexuality is always constructed as polar opposites. One is either gay or straight, and such bi-polarism, according to Seidler, 'forecloses possibilities of different ways of being boys' (1996)

Of course that is not the whole picture. According to Smyth (1999: 215) while girls outperform boys in examinations achieving higher grades overall, and making greater progress relative to their ability, ultimately, the boys who make it to third level outperform girls. The significance of this imbalance for future generations of Irish graduates can be seen in a recent report from the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which indicates that men are more likely to get first class honours than are women. According to the HEA, men were awarded a disproportionately high numbers of first class and higher second class degrees with 39% of men receiving such awards compared with 29% of women (Higher Education Authority 1999: p. 27).

5. What about the Girls?

Research conducted by Smyth (1999) indicates that girls are generally more satisfied with their school experience than are boys. This higher level of satisfaction, however, masks some real difficulties encountered by girls during their school years.

Much of the current debate about girls' performance in education at second level, grew out of their low level of uptake in the technological and science-based subjects. Such was the level of concern that the European Community (1995) agreed on an *Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Girls and Boys in Education*. The measures sought to

- Encourage girls as much as boys in new and expanding sectors such as information technology
- Enable girls as much as boys to make educational and career choices in full knowledge of facts, affording the same opportunities as regards employment and economic independence.

(Commission of the European Communities: Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Girls and Boys in Education)

In a study of twelve schools conducted by Lynch a number of issues of concern to girls emerged, that differentiated their experience / expectations from boys. Girls were more interested in being involved in some decision making process within the schools. Girls appeared to be more stressed and concerned at the levels of control to which they were subjected, and this appeared to be more obvious in single-sex girls' schools (1999).

Smyth (1999) also reports that second level pupils, particularly at Leaving Certificate level, experience much higher levels of stress than other young adults, and girls are more likely to experience this stress than are boys. This high level of stress manifests itself, particularly during the Junior and Leaving Certificate, in an inability to concentrate, loss of sleep and a feeling of being constantly under strain. Unlike boys' experience, girls felt that their appearance was subjected to greater surveillance resulting in additional stress. Higher ability girls, and

girls from higher social classes are more likely to encounter stress. Competitive individualism was also evident in these schools, while still fostering the so-called traditional feminine, caring and artistic functions.

Lynch concludes that her findings on the hidden curriculum and how it impacts on students' lives from her study in 1989, still apply ten years later. In her 1989 study, Lynch reported that personal development was given more attention in girls' schools. They were more likely to be involved in dealing with justice, solidarity, compassion and human rights issues than were single-sex boys' schools. In addition to socialising girls into caring roles in the public sphere, Smyth and McCann (1999), claim that girls' educational ideology stresses 'service to their menfolk rather than service to themselves'. (1999:p.18).

Mainstream schooling, they argue, maintains the status quo. It does not in any way consider its role as contributing to the transformation of society. Smyth and McCann further claim that 'knowledge appropriate to women and men is based on deeply embedded patriarchal values within our traditional educational culture…(and) carries serious implications for how women and men know themselves' (1999: p.18). In addition to having lower self-image, Smyth (1999) reports that girls are more likely to have lower academic self-image than are boys. Boys, according to Smyth 'are much more likely to rate themselves as usually well ahead (ibid: 111).

Positive interaction with teachers impacts positively on academic self-image. Girls also tend to have lower sense of control over their lives and this lower level of control is to be disproportionately found amongst those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Smyth (1999) also found that girls have a significantly lower body image than boys, a pattern which Smith claims 'appears to be related to general cultural messages and evaluations regarding female appearance, rather than to school context' (Smyth 1999: p. 118).

Reflecting on their experiences of school, a group of women who participated in the Certificate in Women's Studies in the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre in UCD, reported very negative experiences of school. When asked about what messages and beliefs they experienced about education during their early school years, the women identified the following:

- authority of teachers
- being told that they were not bright enough or good enough to continue
- their education was too expensive
- just finish school and get a job
- gender discrimination
- feelings of shame – economic, social class, sexual
- low expectations
- gender stereotyped guidance.

(Smyth and McCann: 1999 p. 49)

Clearly there are major differences in the way boys and girls have experienced education. Traditionally, boys have been perceived as having one destination, that of waged work, while girls' orientation is more ambiguous. Despite the clarity of boys' educational goals, and the certainty with which they are socialised into fulfilling that goal, for many boys their experience

of education is marked by insecurity and uncertainty, an insecurity most are reluctant to acknowledge. In this competitive educational environment, many boys prefer to give the impression of confidence rather than acknowledge fragility or admit failure. Withdrawal from class participation either through deliberate inattention, disruptive behaviour or early school leaving are, for many boys, strategies to avoid public perceptions of failure.

Although girls have also been educated in a competitive educational environment, in order to maximise their occupational opportunities, their average earnings are significantly lower than that of their male colleagues. According to the Central Statistics Office, women in manufacturing industry earned on average €347.32 while men earned €512.38 in 2001. (Central Statistics Office 2002). In addition, they are expected to be conscious of their body shape and of their caring roles in society. Not surprisingly such competing messages result in high levels of stress for many girls. Girls are socialised into the double burden of work and care, which characterises most women's lives at some stage.

6. Empowerment and Educational Experience

The concepts of empowerment and self-esteem, principles which underpin adult education in this country are nebulous terms. Consensus on what constitutes empowerment and self-esteem and the relationship between the two is difficult to establish. Hodkinson (1994) cited in Ó Donnabháin (2001) argues that the concept of empowerment is quite a contested concept, meaning different things to different people. Hodkinson identifies three interrelated characteristics:

- personal effectiveness
- critical autonomy
- community

(Ó Donnabháin 2001 p.29)

An EU funded project on empowerment of older people involving nine different member states agreed the following definition of empowerment following a long consultation process:

> empowerment implies self-determination and the ability to assume responsibility for oneself, to express ideas, to make decisions, and to influence policy at all levels. It is concerned with all the dimensions of human activity, physical, mental, spiritual, social, economic and political. *(Jones 1997: p.9)*

The concept of self-esteem is equally contested. Ó Donnabháin (2001) claims that 'there have been many definitions of 'self-esteem', some of which are contradictory (Ó Donnabháin 2001 p.107). He equates self-esteem with 'feelings based on informed self-evaluation' (Ó Donnabháin 2001: p. 108).

The results of a study in the United States of America showed the following characteristics of high self-esteem:

- being responsible and dependable
- having a sense of direction and autonomy
- having a sense of self-assuredness.

(Ó Donnabháin 2001: p. 109)

Acknowledging that children's self-esteem is either formed or under-formed by the family before the child comes into contact with the school system, O'Donnabháin (2001) believes the impact of the school and the local community cannot be ignored. Agreeing that schools do impact either negatively or positively on self-esteem, Smith (1999) states that 'the extent of differences between schools in pupil self-image…remain(s) statistically significant (1999: p.113). Smyth (1999) concludes that the teacher-pupil interaction, is hugely influential in determining how pupils view their own ability (1999: p.115).

If people are to be really empowered, their empowerment needs to be based on a realistic assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses. It would appear that boys are more at risk from unrealistic assessment of their own strengths. Boys are much more likely to rate themselves as 'usually well ahead' of classmates than girls, and girls are at risk from 'unrealistic assessment' of one's own weaknesses (Smyth 1999: p. 111). Overstating or understating one's own strengths or weaknesses can, according to Ó Donnabháin (2001), contribute to disempowerment. The evidence suggests that those from working class backgrounds, those who have less academic inclination, and girls/young women are least likely to feel empowered by their childhood / adolescent educational experiences.

Consequently, for those returning to learning, it must require a great leap of faith that this time it will be different. With some justification, Owens (2000), observes that the 'use of the phrase 'back to education' in the promotion of the concept of lifelong learning may act as a deterrent to some potential learners…having experienced oneself as the object of public humiliation in school, the word 'back' in association with the word 'education' carries a negative connotation (Owens: 2000: p.26).

7. Theoretical Influences in Adult and Community Education

The functionalist position would appear to be the dominant, although not exclusive, perspective of the OECD. In setting out its lifelong learning stall, the OECD (1996), states that 'a new focus for education and training policies is needed now, to develop capacities to realise the potential of the 'global information economy' and to contribute to employment, culture, democracy and above all social cohesion' (1996: p. 15). As well as seeing lifelong learning as contributing to the economic life of its constituent members, the OECD also sees it as a force for stability. One role of lifelong education, according to the OECD (1996), is to maintain 'the stability of society, by socialising individuals with knowledge commonly accepted as being necessary for adult life' (1996: p.31).

Given this rationale, it is not surprising that the OECD would argue that expenditure on education and training is a 'productive investment' and enables countries and individuals to meet the challenges of globalisation (1996: p. 61). The OECD report argues that rather than trying to shape and influence the globalisation process, the challenge for lifelong learning is to 'modify and strengthen…the curricula to acknowledge the ongoing internationalisation process whereby, countries become intimately linked economically and new political structures emerge (1996: p. 102).

Within the paradigm as outlined above, there would appear to be very little space for what Leicester (2001) calls 'cultures of resistance' (2001: p. 55), a culture she argues that has developed as a result of the feminist and anti-racist movements. Feminism and other

movements including the literacy and disability movement that emerged later, challenge the largely economic foundations on which the OECD rationale for lifelong education is built, by highlighting sexist / racist oppression and exclusionary practices within existing structures.

Adult Education as it has developed in Ireland includes a number of strands which have grown both in a planned and unplanned fashion in response to emerging needs. It could be argued that one of the greatest strengths of the sector has been to respond to needs in creative and flexible ways. According to the White Paper, *Learning for Life*, adult education :

> includes aspects of further and third level education, continuing education and training, community education, and other systematic learning by adults, both formal and informal *(DES, 2000: p.12)*

The varying strands of provision are underpinned by elements of both functionalism and critical theory, some leaning more strongly towards one or the other depending on how they developed. Up until the late seventies and early eighties when both the adult literacy and women's daytime education began to emerge as movements with innovative approaches to adult learning , adopting the principles of participation and empowerment, adult education was largely based on traditional models of formal education and generally availed of by people who were better educated and better off.

Traditional education models within the adult sector have, according to Curtis (1997),

> been dominated by models of education founded on the twin pillars of luxury and remediation, and based on a traditional ideology which…cast(s) education for women in the mode of the frivolous or the remedial, with prevailing cultural discourses relating to women and their position in society translating into restricted educational provision and opportunities at local level. *(1997: p.3)*

In the eighties the growing literacy movement in Ireland began to elaborate the principles and philosophies on which its work was based. The National Adult Literacy Agency's first policy document, *Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*, (1985) located learners at the centre of the learning process as active contributors as well as beneficiaries who 'have skills, knowledge and services to offer in the work of adult literacy generally and in other areas'. It goes on to state that 'adult literacy relates to the development of the whole person and is not restricted solely to reading and writing skills. (1985)

Six years later in its revised edition (1991) NALA reiterated and strengthened the importance of the learner's participation and his/her central role in the development of all aspects of provision. These principles were based on the Freirean concepts of consciousness raising and transformation. Critical theory has also been influential within the non-formal education sector, in particular in the area of community education.

The White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*, opens its chapter on community education by noting the previous Green Paper's acknowledgement of the growth, significance and innovation of the community education sector in reaching large numbers of people in disadvantaged settings. The White Paper goes on to describe how community education has 'evolved in Ireland in recent years as an ideologically driven, highly innovative and large scale adult education provision consisting mainly of self directed women's groups. (ibid: 2000)

AONTAS in its policy document, *Community Education (2000)* describes locally-based community education as follows:

> Its structures, programmes…were rooted in the day to day experiences, interests…(of) those who were disadvantaged economically, socially and educationally as they struggled to direct their lives in the face of growing unemployment, poverty and marginalisation. It adopts a person-centred approach which is very different from the approach which centres all the power, knowledge and status in the teacher. *(AONTAS, 2000: pp.3 and 9).*

These approaches to learning have also influenced the practise and methodology of schemes targeted at unemployed people (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, VTOS) and disadvantaged young people (Youthreach). While such schemes are primarily designed to prepare disadvantaged adults for the Labour Market, there is a growing recognition that this task must involve a holistic approach to learning.

While it could be argued that employment based schemes are based more on functionalist approaches and community development type schemes are guided more by the principles of critical theory, the reality is that within each there is almost always a mix of both. In its first evaluation of VTOS in 1994 the WRC states:

> The fact that the manner of its delivery is informed by elements of the principles and practice of adult education adds a further unique dimension to VTOS. An adult education philosophy stresses a learner centred approach to the design and delivery of provision, flexibility in responding to the needs of individuals, and facilitating the development of self help and self determination among the participants. Partly as a result of this approach, the benefits which it is possible to derive from the VTOS extend beyond those directly related to the labour market.

Similarly within the women's community education sector the focus of which is primarily on confidence building and women's participation in decision and policy making in their communities, such education builds practical skills which women can use in the Labour Market. One participant in the research report, *At the Forefront*, (AONTAS/WERRC 2001) states:

> It has encouraged me to retrain myself in an ever changing society It gave me back myself. Being involved has not only built my self-esteem and confidence. It has also helped me realise that even though I am rearing a young family, it's never too late to learn or get back in the workforce. *(AONTAS/WERRC 2001 p. 74)*

What constitutes community education and by extension adult education is according to Rennie: (1990 p.1) still 'tediously the subject of long debate'. Community education itself is defined in the White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*, as 'the process whereby marginalised groups formulate a process of user-driven, learner-centred and communal education. ' (2000: p.28). According to Pilley (1990), community education promotes the principles of 'self-development, participation and reciprocity'. It is about participation 'in intellectual and cultural activities of all kinds and about making a contribution, individually and collectively to the community' (1990: p.88). For Rennie (1990: p.5) citizenship is the defining concept underlining community education while Poster (1990: p.25) sees the motto of think globally and act locally as the defining motto. In that context, development education, for

example, with its focus on global issues and local action encapsulates the essence of community education. However, at the level of policy, particularly at OECD and governmental level, the rhetoric of participation and emancipation very often gives way to what might be regarded as the pragmatic demands of the economy.

8. Gendering Cognitive and Learning Theories

The preceding two sections provide an overview of the issues which influence participation in adult education, and while they both heavily emphasise gender differences, there is a dearth of studies on gender-based cognitive and learning theories.

'In the politically charged and value laden context of curriculum reform', write Leach, *et al*, in the Series *Introduction to the Open University Trilogy on Learning*, 'an understanding of well-grounded evidence about learning theories, knowledge and teaching is essential' (1999: p. vii). Murphy (1999), in the introduction to her own book writes 'this book explores some current and influential thinking about learning' (1999 p. vii), yet, there in no mention of gender.

Rather than look at how gender impacts on learning and how learning impacts on gender, the concept of gender is buried in the generic terms of pupils / students, learners / participants. In contrast Malcolm Knowles (1998) does address gender issues, but in ways that reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes. Knowles is regarded as the father of 'andragogy', a concept that is strongly contested. The concept of 'andragogy' or how adults, as opposed children learn has not yet found widespread acceptance. It is not even a real word in the sense that it has not been given the imprimatur of the Oxford dictionary. It has been defined by Malcolm Knowles , its chief exponent as 'the art and science of helping adults to learn' Knowles *et al* (1998) claim that the art of adult education is substantially different from the art of child education, a view that is strongly debated by others, not least by the Montessori system of education.

His thesis is based on the assumption that child education is heavily dependent on the teacher, and that young children are not capable of self-directed learning. On pedagogy he writes:

> The pedagogical model assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, and if it has been learned. It is teacher directed education, leaving to the learner only the submissive role of following a teacher's instructions. *(Knowles et al 1998: p. 62)*

Knowles' *et al's* view, which is influential in the United States, is based on particular socially constructed premises about what is appropriate for particular age groups. They reflect, both in the characteristics he ascribes and the examples he uses, rigid, culturally specific, and stereo-typical perceptions of adult learners. They are reproduced here as reminders of the risks involved in reductionist, simplistic conclusions on how adults learn. Their five characteristics of adult learners are as follows:

- The need to know. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
- The learners' self-concept. Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own

decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept, they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as capable of self-direction.

- The role of learners' experience. Any group of adults will be more heterogeneous in terms of background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests and goals, than is true of a group of youths. Hence there is greater emphasis in adult education on individualisation of teaching and learning strategies.
- Readiness to learn. The importance of timing in learning is critical. For example, a sophomore girl in high school is not ready to learn about infant nutrition or marital relations, but let her get engaged after graduation and she will be ready.
- Orientation of learning. Adults learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes most effectively, when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations.

(Knowles et al: 1998: pp 64–67)

All learners, irrespective of age, need to know why they are learning something, not just adult learners. Equally, all learners are capable of self-directed learning. The evidence from sociological literature, as outlined above, does not support the assertion that background, social class, previous learning experiences are unimportant variables. To assert that people can only learn about specific issues at particular times in their lives, is to impose judgements on what learners want to learn. If the learner cannot decide what is appropriate to learn, who does? The example relating to child nutrition that Knowles et al provides is so premised on particular gendered notions, that it renders it meaningless. Finally, the application of learning to real life situations does not just apply to adults. Knowles' *et al's* work on adult learning does, at least, signal the importance of avoiding simplistic conclusions on what is inevitably a complex issue. Despite centuries of writing and reflection on education and how best to maximise learning, it would appear that scant attention has been paid to specific learning issues as they affect women and men. If this study can contribute to understanding how, if at all, men and women have different learning styles, then it will have done some small service.

9. Summary

This chapter has outlined a combination of issues that act as disincentives and barriers to adult participation in education. These include situational, institutional, dispositional, informational and contextual factors. Recent developments in education in this country, most notably the publication of the Green and White papers on adult education have sought to address these issues. However, this country is not alone in trying to address the educational deficit that many adults experience. Much discursive space has been absorbed not only in identifying how education provision can best meet the disparate needs of all adults, but also in discussing the theoretical underpinnings of various adult education initiatives and programmes.

In framing this discussion within the two theoretical perspectives of functionalism and critical theory, the intention of this research is, not so much to presume that all educational discourse operates from, or should operate from, one perspective or another, but that

educational discourse operates, as if on a continuum, within these opposing perspectives. Rather, this study suggests that educational discourse is influenced by a range of values and ideologies, that can vary from one of the above perspectives to the other, or that can be located on a continuum between the two.

These theoretical perspectives influence policy and their influence can be identified in particular initiatives. Attempting to locate educational praxis – that interplay between reflection and action – within a theoretical framework is not just an end in itself. Rather, in identifying theoretical underpinnings of any system, one inevitably is engaged in questioning the basic assumptions on which praxis is based. Nor is it true to say that the demand for such an approach comes only from those far removed from the coal face of adult education. Eileen Curtis who works as an Adult Education Organiser writes as follows:

> As someone who has worked in adult education for the last fifteen years and someone who has a particular interest in women's educational issues, I feel very strongly that this kind of analysis needs to be done. As educators, we must continually question what we are doing, how we are doing it and why. Work like this enables practitioners to situate their work in a theoretical context, and critique it and wonder about the future agenda for education. *(Curtis: 2001: pp 63–64)*

In addition to outlining two theoretical frameworks, this chapter has also examined the social construction of masculinity and femininity and how these constructions influence the earlier experiences of schooling. Many young men leave school early and without certification or with only minimal certification. However, for those men who do succeed it would appear that they are disproportionately rewarded at third level. Girls appear to do better at second level but they also experience higher levels of stress and anxiety. These higher levels of stress are partly related to the conflicting messages that many girls receive regarding their place in the workplace and their role as carers. This chapter also reviews the concept of empowerment and explores what this concept means for girls' and boys' education.

Chapter 3 Participation in Adult Education – An Overview

1. Introduction

Internationally, a growing number of people are participating in adult education and training. This trend also holds true for this country. This chapter details the participation patterns of males and females, the issues affecting that participation and the barriers they face.

2. An International Overview

There appears to be a conflict of evidence regarding participation rates by women and men in continuing education. The OECD reports that 'participation rates in continuing education and training are generally similar for men and women' in ten OECD countries for which data is available (OECD 2000: p.132). However, Belanger and Valdivieslo's (1997) study of six countries (Canada, Switzerland, United States, the Netherlands, Sweden and Poland) indicates that, with the exception of Sweden, more men are involved in adult education than are women. The same position applies in Britain, Finland and Germany (Bond 1999, Taylor 1999). Bond (1999) claims that 'among adults in Britain, adult education and company training provision is dominated by white, younger, well-educated and middle class men' (1999: p. 164). Unemployed men in Britain are much more unlikely to participate in education, than are their counterparts in Denmark, Germany, Austria and Sweden (McGivney 1999: p.12). Disadvantaged men in this country, according to Owens (2000: p. 3) appear to be more reluctant than disadvantaged women to access this adult education.

In Britain, when working class men become involved in second chance education, it is more often as a result of prodding from employers and employment / social welfare offices than in the case of working class women. The 1997 National Adult Learning Survey and the 1996 NIACE / Gallup adult learning survey confirm that women obtain information from a wide variety of sources – friends, family, education providers, but men tend not to benefit from these sources.

Apart from literacy levels, another factor identified by Fuller and Saunders (1990) in McGivney (1999: p. 65) is, that participation in adult education is not perceived to be part of normal adult behaviour. Engaging in adult education is 'tantamount to breaking ranks' and for those who do, there is often a sense of displacement from their roots and their class. Such a sense of displacement from roots and class is what Billy Elliot experienced in the film of the same name, when he left a mining town and working class area in England, to become a ballet dancer. Rita had a similar sense of displacement in the film, *Educating Rita*. Both Rita and Billy Elliot capture many of the essential tensions and conflicts that working class people encounter, in attempting to negotiate the socio-cultural implications of educational engagement and lifelong learning *.

* **Two films capture many of the debates and tensions within adult education and reflect many of the struggles those coming back to education have to confront – *Educating Rita* (1983) and *Billy Elliot* (2000). Both of these films confront issues of class, gender and education.**

Belanger and Valdivieslo's (1997) study highlights the significant growth in adult education. More than one-third of the adult population in the above countries participates in organised learning. Of the 200 million people living in the above six countries, Belanger and Valdivieslo estimate that almost 75 million adults participated in organised learning in 1994. In the United States, an estimated thirty-two per cent of the population participated on a part-time basis in adult education and training programmes (Morgan *et al*, 2000: p. 88).

What is equally clear from Belanger and Valdivieslo (1997) Morgan *et al* (2000) and (McGivney: 1999) is, that participation is strongly correlated with a higher level of initial education. It would seem that the more education one has, the more likely one is to want to have more. However, it is also true to say that the more education one has the more opportunities one gets. McGivney (1999) claims that 'labour market surveys consistently show that most employer-provided training *is offered* (*sic*) to people in higher level jobs – older and unqualified workers…invariably miss out (1999: p. 71), a view reiterated by Taylor (1999: p. 135). Given the linkage between work and adult education, it is not surprising that most adult education in these countries takes place in work or training centres.

The rationale for participation also, highlights strong gender differences. In all six countries in Belanger and Valdivieslo's (1997) study, men are more likely to return to education to enhance their career opportunities, while women are more likely to return for reasons of personal development, with Sweden again being the exception. McGivney's study (1999) in Britain identifies the same rationale. However, as outlined above, men are less likely to want to pay for their education than are women. Adult participation in education is also strongly age-related (Belanger and Valdivielso 1997 and Taylor 1999). The older one is, the less likely one is to be involved in education. People over 50 years of age are least likely to participate in education. Taylor (1999) concludes from his overview of participation rates in Germany, Finland and the UK that 'older learners, disabled students, and, particularly, working class students of all ages continue to be under-represented, especially in the higher status, higher education institutions' (1999: p.135).

Outside of the work-related educational environment, there are clear differences in what women and men opt to study. McGivney (1999) reports that of adults taking *A Levels* in Britain, women are more likely to choose English, modern languages and social sciences, while men are more likely to take mathematics, the physical sciences, technology and computer studies. Men from working class backgrounds were least likely to be involved in humanities or the social sciences. A study of working class men conducted by Bryant and Taylor (1999: p.9) indicates that motor mechanics, carpentry, bricklaying, sport and electronics were their preferred educational activities.

McGivney, (1999) in her study of the variations between women and men in their levels and patterns of participation in post-compulsory education and training in Britain, concludes that 'although women now have a strong career orientation, they are still more likely than males to have non-economic motivations in returning to learning (ibid: p. 8). However, she claims that, women in the 25–50 age groups are increasingly likely to participate in vocationally specific educational programmes. Participants view these educational programmes as pathways to promotion and greater financial reward, with corresponding higher status attached (ibid, 1999).

Grant (1998), cited in McGivney (1999), claims that 'there still exists a male culture, which exists unchanging, while everything else has been transformed all around' (ibid: p. 67). Second chance education does not, it would appear, sit comfortably with traditional masculine values. Breaking ranks is a risky undertaking. While some men may be risk averse when it comes to returning to education, it is clear that in other areas of their lives, men are not risk shy. In order to overcome men's perceived aversion to education, Jones and Swenton (2000) suggest 'sugaring the pill'. They suggest 'burying learning under something else' (2000: p. 21) so that men can access education while appearing to do something else.

Resistance among men to education is more prevalent than it is among women. The 1997 National Adult Learning Survey cited by McGivney (1999), found 'men (were) more likely than women to say that nothing would encourage them to learn' The survey also indicated that men were more likely to say that they had not enjoyed learning at school. To attract men on to second chance education, McGivney concludes that courses 'need to have a specific focus and clear self-explanatory titles' as well as having tangible work-related outcomes. She concludes that programmes targeted at men 'need to respond to this instrumental orientation…(while) programmes that set out to appeal to other motives, for example, social contacts and interaction are more likely to attract women (1999: p. 111).

McGivney also claims that the informal learning methods employed in adult and community education appeal more to women, than they do to men. As a result, those that do return to education are more likely to feel comfortable in a traditional didactic setting rather than the more discursive model favoured by many teachers and tutors in the adult and community sector. While women enjoy reflecting on broader structural issues vis-à-vis their place in society, men are generally reluctant, but not completely averse, to reflecting on what it means to be a man in society. Men appear to find methods which draw on their personal experiences unattractive, whereas women find the opposite' (ibid: 1999 p. 69). It would appear that men's reticence to draw on the personal is not just culturally specific to western society.

In Bhasin's (1996) account of working with women and men in South Asia, she encountered the same phenomenon. There, too, women appear to be more comfortable talking about their personal experiences, while men are much more guarded. Men, she reports 'strongly resisted talking about themselves as son, husband and father…and resist making a shift from the mind to the emotions, from the public to the personal (Bhasin: 1996: 57). Men, it would appear from her study, are quite happy to debate theoretical issues, or deal with abstractions, and unlike women have very little experience of talking about themselves. The growth in the men's movement and men's groups challenges Bhasin's perception, and gives credence to the view that men are interested in participating in these kinds of educational programmes, if the setting and context is appropriate. Bhasin (1996) also argues that men are reluctant to accept women as tutors, and that tutors have to resort to different tactics and strategies in order to gain men's confidence. Trainers, she argues, need to be more circumspect with men. With men she claims, 'we should not always go head on, calling a spade a spade as we do with women…we have to learn to take one step forward and another sideways (ibid: 1996: p, 58).

In summary, age, employment, status, age at which one left school, income, social class, disability, race and ethnicity are strong predictors of an individual's involvement in adult education. The same variables apply in terms of the type of adult education in which adults

choose to participate. Men are more likely to participate in work-sponsored and work-related education, while women are more likely to engage in part-time and evening-only education. The factors that influence participation in primary, secondary and third level also impact on second chance adult education.

3. Female – Male Participation in Adult Education in Ireland

Ireland is regarded as a late developer in the provision of education for all, and many older and in particular poorer people, were educationally disadvantaged by reason and circumstances of their birth (Ó Donnabháin and King 1996). NAPS, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997) while acknowledging that poverty was a multifaceted phenomenon, signalled educational disadvantage as the first of five significant causes of poverty (National Anti-Poverty Strategy 1997: p. 8). The link between unemployment and education is one of the issues highlighted in Table 1. As education levels improve, so too do employment prospects. The following table details the current educational levels in Ireland for the population aged 15-64.

Table 1
Highest Education level attained in Ireland of the Population aged 15–64

Education	At Work	Unemployed	Not in Labour Market	Total	%
Below sec.	220,500	19,400	289,200	529,100	20.44%
Lr. sec.	294,900	16,300	225,100	536,300	20.72%
Uppr. sec.	457,600	15,700	195,500	668,700	25.83%
F. ed./training	234,600	5,900	48,500	288,900	11.16%
T.L. no degree	171,500	3,600	31,600	206,700	7.99%
Degree	266,800	3,700	35,000	305,500	11.8%
Not stated	37,200	700	15,300	53,200	2.06%
Total	**1,683,000**	**65,300**	**840,100**	**2,588,400**	

(Department of Education & Science 2001)

From this table, it can be seen that over 40% of people in this age category have less than upper second level education. The table highlights the challenge facing the whole education system in this country and adult education in particular.

In the academic year 1996/97, 175,000 people were registered on part-time formal courses in the education system. Of these, the vast majority (141,000) were on courses categorised as adult education (Fox and McGinn 2000 p. 39). The majority of these were involved in part-time day courses covering a range of artistic, hobby, practical and vocational subjects. Of the other 34,000, 23,000 were participating in third level, while the remaining 11,000 were following either vocational or academic courses at second level. Between 1986 and 1996/97 there was an increase of 27,000 in the number of students who were involved in adult education. Within the non-university third level sector, participation on vocational, technical and professional courses has increased from 11,000 in 1986 to 16,000 in 1996.

Figures for Participation in Further Education 2000/01 are as follows:

Table 2 Participation in Further Education

Course/Programme/ Training Title	Provider	Total	Male	Female
Education Provision				
Back to Education Allowance – Second Level Option	DSCFA *	883	N/A	N/A
Back to Education Allowance – Third-level Option	DSCFA *	4,431	N/A	N/A
Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS)	VTOS	5,305	1,786 (33.66%)	3,519 (66.33%)
Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs)	DES	25,410	7,211 (28.4%)	18,199 (71.6%)
Training Provision				
Specific Skills Training	FÁS	8,202	5,667 (69.1%)	2,539 (30.9%)
Traineeship	FÁS	1,089	600 (55.0%)	489 (45.0%)
Standards Based Apprenticeship	FÁS	25,775	25,656 (99.5%)	119 (0.5%)
Community Training Workshop	FÁS	2,177	1,010 (46.3%)	1,167 (53.7%)
Community Youth Training Programme	FÁS	3,676	1,428 (38.8%)	2,248 (61.2%)
Return to Work Scheme	FÁS	1,624	174 (10.7%)	1,450 (89.3%)
Enterprise Training	FÁS	201	89 (44.2%)	112 (55.7%)
Job Training Programme	FÁS	436	172 (39.4%)	264 (60.6%)
Elementary Training for Tourism/ Catering Industry	CERT	1412	593 (41.9%)	819 (58.1%)
Rural Tourism & Food Enterprise Programmes	TEAGASC	394	79 (20%)	315 (100%)
Other Agricultural Courses†	TEAGASC	4,583	2,520 (54.9%)	2,063 (45.1%)
Overall Total		85,559	46,985 (54.9%)	33,303 (38.9%)

(Sources: VTOS Co-ordinator, CERT, Teagasc, FÁS, DES, DSCFA. 2002)

* **Data for academic year 2001 – 2002. While the female / male breakdown is not available for each of the above categories it is available for the combined categories. Of the 5,314 people who availed of the Back to Education Allowance, 2,430 were male and 2,884 were female.**

† **Other included agriculture, environment, farm and business management, information technology, forestry, alternative enterprises, horse production, farm viability.**

Statistics for participation in part-time adult education courses for the year 2000/2001 show that 145,263 adults attended a variety of courses in vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Of these 106,364 were female. *(DES 2000/2001)*

No statistics were available at the time of the research for participation rates in secondary schools. In addition the numbers of clients catered for by the literacy service rose from 5000 in 1997 to 22,733 in 2000. *(DES 2000)*

While many adults participate in community based programmes, there are no official statistics available as yet. However, more women than men avail of provision within their communities. The following table is an estimate of the numbers of women participating in such programmes.

Table 3 Department of Education Estimates of the Number of Women Participants in Community-based Education

Year	No. of Groups	No. of Participants / users	Average No. per group
1991/2	96	8,723	91
1999 – countrywide funded by DSCFA	7	350	50
2000 – countryside	1,000	30,000	30
2000 – 6 southern border counties	57	5,900	57

(AONTAS/WERRC 2001 p. 33)

In Ireland, work is a significant factor in motivating people to return to education. Morgan *et al* (2000) claim that 'of the 30% of Irish adults, who had been involved in education/training in the previous year, the vast majority did so for reasons related to career and work (Morgan *et al* 2000: p.xi) as the following table indicates:

Table 4 Percentage Indicating Reasons for Participation in Adult Education/Training

	Males	Females	All
Career/job related	82.2	69.7	75.7
Personal interest	11.8	25.5	18.9
Other reason	6.0	4.8	5.4

(Morgan et al 2000: p.91)

Apart from workplace career-orientated education and training, men are still less likely to participate in educational programmes, or indeed to pay for such programmes than are women. Morgan *et al's* study indicates, that 'almost half of females paid their own fees or were supported by their families, while this was true of only one-third of males' (Morgan 2000: p.89). If men are to participate in any educational programmes, the expectation is that they will get paid for their participation. Men are willing to be part of government sponsored and paid education and training programmes. Table 5a has the details.

Table 5A Percentage Indicating various Sources for Financial Support for Courses Undertaken

Source of Financial Support	Males	Females	All
Self/family	33.7	49.0	42.5
An employer	34.4	22.1	27.3
Government	22.6	17.4	19.6
Union/professional organisation	3.1	1.3	2.1
Other agency	1.7	1.8	1.8
No fees	4.2	7.4	6.0

(Morgan et al 2000:p.89)

Younger people are more likely to participate in adult education than are older people. The early disadvantage that older people experienced appears to be replicated in their adult life. Table 5b has the details.

Table 5B Age-group and Participation in Adult Education Training

Age	Yes	No
16–24	47.9	52.1
25–34	28.1	71.9
35–44	25.4	74.6
45–54	18.6	81.4
55–64	9.1	90.9

(Morgan et al 2000 p.93)

The majority of both women and men are more likely to come back to education of their own volition. However, family and employers play a bigger part in men's decision to return to education than is the case with women. Table 6 has the details.

Table 6 Percentage of participants in Adult Education indicating Initiative to take Course

Influence	Men	Women	All
Respondent's own suggestion	58.8	70.9	64.6
Suggested by friends/family	10.3	4.5	7.2
Employer's suggestion	23.6	18.8	21.0
Other employees' suggestion	0.3	0.3	0.3
Part of a collective agreement	2.1	0.8	1.3
Trade Union suggestion	0.0	0.0	0.0
Legal or professional requirement	0.4	0.3	0.3
Suggested by social services or welfare	1.0	0.8	0.9
Other	4.5	4.6	4.5

(Morgan et al 2000 p.92)

Men may be less motivated than are women in their desire to return to education but their need for further education would appear to be greater. Men would appear to be more educationally

disadvantaged that are women. Morgan *et al's* study highlights the extent to which men's education lags behind that of women in the key area of literacy. Table 7 has the details.

Table 7 Percentage of Irish Males and Females at Each Level of Literacy

Literacy	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
Prose (texts from newspapers, magazines and advertisements)				
Male	24.2	29.1	33.7	13.0
Female	21.0	30.4	34.6	14.1
Documents (timetables graphs, charts, maps and forms of various kinds)				
Male	23.6	30.7	32.8	13.0
Female	27.0	32.8	30.3	9.9
Quantitative (arithmetical tasks)				
Male	22.0	26.4	32.5	19.1
Female	27.7	30.3	32.5	13.2

(Morgan et al 2000:p45)

In Morgan *et al's* study, men were more likely to name work or being too busy as a barrier to participation than were women, thereby reinforcing the higher status of work over education, and were less likely to identify family responsibilities as a barrier than were women. Table 8 has the details.

Table 8 Percentage of Non-participants in Adult Education Indicating Reasons for not Participating

Reasons	Men	Women	All
Too busy	31.9	20.8	26.2
Work demands	11.7	9.1	10.4
Course not offered	17.7	14.3	16.0
Family responsibilities	5.9	23.9	15.9
Too expensive	19.7	22.8	21.3
Lack of qualifications	4.0	3.3	3.6
Lack of employer support	4.9	0.8	2.8
Course time inconvenient	6.9	7.4	7.1
Other reasons	2.8	2.6	2.7

(Morgan et al 2000: p.92)

Morgan *et al* (2000) conclude that traditional classroom instruction is the dominant form of education/training in their study – 'remarkably, this form of instruction was dominant in four-fifths of courses' (Morgan *et al*, 2000: p.90). Table 9 has the details

Table 9 Methods of Instruction in Adult Education Courses.

Method of Instruction	Men	Women	All
Classroom instruction/seminars or workshops	77.9	83.1	80.6
Education software	1.3	1.2	1.2
Radio or television	0.3	0.3	0.3
Audio/video cassettes	2.6	1.4	2.0
Reading material	2.2	1.3	1.7
On the job training	9.0	8.9	9.0
Other methods	6.7	3.8	5.2

(Morgan 2000: p91)

In summary, older Irish people lag behind many of their OECD counterparts when it comes to higher levels of education. While many were excluded from the limited educational opportunities that existed in the past, more and more are accessing second chance education. Work and career advancement, particularly for men, are major incentives for people in this country. Morgan *et al's* study highlights some gender differences in the way men and women experience education. Employers are more likely to fund male access to education, and men are less reluctant than are women to fund their own education. Men are also more likely to require some outside stimulus before returning to education and are more likely to cite work as a barrier to returning.

4. Barriers to Participation

The barriers facing adults seeking second chance education have been well researched, and broad agreement exists on what constitutes these barriers. Age, social class, gender, educational background, qualifications, income, are all significant predictors of participation in second chance education. In a review of the literature on barriers to second chance education Owens (2000) and the WRC Report (1999) summarise five conceptual barriers to education:

- institutional
- informational
- situational
- personal/dispositional
- contextual.

With regard to institutional barriers, the WRC Report (1999) states that the primary focus of third level institutions is on young adults, and notes that 'among the reasons for the lack of participation by men in further education was, that both participants and non-participants shared the view that further education is set up for kids. (Consequently), many adults are wary of school buildings, formal enrolment procedures, traditional and classroom settings' (WRC 1999: p.22). Other institutional barriers that were identified in the report include lack of childcare, the need for continuity of attendance and the structure of the academic year.

In terms of informational barriers, the WRC Report (1999) citing the European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit (1998), highlights the lack of information, and the problem

misinformation plays in hindering participation. The WRC Report points out the importance of distinguishing between 'the content of the information, the media used to disseminate information, and the assistance provided to potential participants to interpret and relate the information' (WRC 1999:pp23-24). The Department of Education and Science's pilot initiative on adult educational guidance, was seen by the Report as a particularly important development in enabling participants and potential participants gain a greater understanding of the educational process.

The Report claims that the situational barriers of adults were often poorly understood. It states that 'up to the recent proposal to introduce a training bonus for the long-term unemployed, to participate in FÁS training and more recently VTOS, there was little recognition of the severe constraints that being poor placed on the participation of unemployed adults in education and training courses' (WRC 1999: p.24).

Personal / dispositional barriers according to the WRC Report 'include gender, age, initial educational levels and a range of experiential, attitudinal and motivation factors' (WRC, 1999: p.24).

Finally the contextual barriers identified in the WRC Report refer to 'class, peer norms and the prevalence of concepts of masculinity based on earning rather than learning'.
(WRC, 1999: p.26).

The WRC Report concludes its review of these barriers by stating that 'these barriers overlap, creating powerful disincentives to participation in education and training programmes. In addition to the above, Owens (2000) identifies 'this macho thing' and homophobia 'as the most commonly cited barrier' (Owens: 2000 p. 24) in her own research. Owens strongly argues that men are servile to what Kimmel (1996), calls other men's 'evaluative eyes'. These eyes survey, regulate and confine what other men do with a very tight construction of masculinity.

Evidence from the OECD suggests that men and women are equally likely to participate in adult education but this view would appear to be challenged by other commentators. In Ireland, there are not only clear differences in who accesses adult education, but also in the influences on those who access it.

Chapter 4 Research Methods

1. Introduction

This study, which was researched by the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, was commissioned in the summer of 2001 by AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education on behalf of the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science. The purpose of the study was to 'examine women's and men's different learning styles and needs and the implications for provision of education and training' (AONTAS brief to tenders 2001: p.1).

2. Aim of the Research

AONTAS advertised nationally for tenders to undertake the research. The aims of the research were as follows:

- To explore the styles of learning adopted by men and women;
- To identify differences in these styles, if any;
- To examine the differing needs of women and men in relation to access to learning, effective outreach, teaching styles, recruitment, guidance and programme design;
- To identify and document models of good practice, which take account of the learner's particular needs;
- To make recommendations on access to learning, effective outreach, teaching styles, recruitment, guidance and programme design and their implications for further education and training.

AONTAS specified the researchers' role as follows:

- To conduct desk research; including a detailed and specialist literature review, on relevant Irish and international data on the participation rates and barriers to learning for marginalised men and women;
- To identify, select and observe a number of models of good practice, to compile case studies;
- To plan and conduct focus groups with learners and tutors;
- To conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with key agencies at local and national level
- To produce a report on the findings of the research and make recommendations for policy direction
- To plan and conduct a feedback seminar on the results of the research
- To report to the AONTAS research advisory group.

3. Shannon Curriculum Development Centre Personnel

Sheila O'Driscoll is a second level teacher presently on secondment as Director of Shannon Curriculum Development Centre. She has worked in curriculum development since 1989

with particular responsibility for European and national projects. She is also a trained facilitator for Whole School Planning and Development and is Co-ordinator of the Leaving Certificate Applied Support Team as part of the Second Level Support Service.

Peadar King is a former second level teacher and member of staff of the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, currently working as a freelance researcher. He has recently been involved in research for the national Drugs Task Force, the National Council on Ageing and Older People and the Southern Health Board. He co-ordinated the 'Girls into Technology (Futures)' programme and the 'Exploring Masculinity' programme for the Department of Education and Science. He is co-director of KMF Productions.

Stephanie Holden is a second level teacher. She has conducted post-graduate research on learning styles of second level Leaving Certificate Applied students, and is currently continuing to research this for the Educational Studies Association Ireland (ESAI) 2002 conference.

4. Overview of the Research Methodology Employed

4.1. Quantitative Research

The team adopted two approaches to the research. The first of these involved the administration of questionnaires developed by Kolb (1985) and Allinson and Hayes (1996) to ascertain information on learning styles. This is the first time that such instruments have been used with Irish adult learners.

The use of instruments to measure learning styles is the subject of some debate. Conscious of these debates and concerns amongst academics in relation to the reliability and appropriateness of such instruments, Shannon Curriculum Development Centre proposed using both Kolb (1985) and Allinson and Hayes (1996) to counter whatever perceived limitations are attached to each.

David A. Kolb is widely accepted to be the founder of learning style instruments. Kolb developed his Learning Style Inventory (LSI) in 1976, which he revised in 1985. Kolb's LSI is widely used in educational contexts. The second instrument used in this study was the Cognitive Style Index (CSI). This instrument was developed by Allinson and Hayes in 1996 and was based on the ideas of Kolb. Its predominant use has been in organisational and work related contexts.

The use of Kolb's LSI was thought to be relevant to adult education due to its wide use in international educational fields. Allinson and Hayes was used in this study as a backup to Kolb and also for its organisational and workplace focus. It also appeared that these two instruments would compliment each other as they share similar characteristics. A detailed description of both instruments is contained in Chapter 5.

4.1.1. Learning Style Instruments – An Overview

For centuries educationalists and philosophers have been classifying people according to their preferences, particularly their learning preferences. The earliest example in 500 BC is the Greek philosopher Hypocrates, who classified individuals as one of four personality types:

melancholic, choleric, sanguine and phlegmatic. Each of these personality types had very specific learning preferences. We now refer to these preferences as 'Learning Styles' and for the purpose of this report Learning Styles will be defined as 'the cognitive, affective and physiological factors that serve as indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to their learning environment' (1992: Association of Secondary School Principals).

The concept of Learning Style acknowledges the fact that each individual has his or her unique learning requirements and preferences. Learning Styles are not rigid personality traits, but rather flexible structures of processing and perceiving information and experiences. The theory that underlies Learning Style instruments is, that individuals with similar requirements and preferences can be amalgamated together.

Kolb developed his theory as a professor of Organisational Psychology. He noticed that students' attention varied greatly during the course of a lecture. Within his own classes he began to vary his teaching methods, and make observations on the students' reactions to each of the teaching styles used. Kolb based his work on his own observations and the work of previous educational psychologists e.g. Piaget, Dewey and Lewin. Although Kolb (1981) claims that his Learning Style Inventory has proven to have adequate stability over time, others remain sceptical.

His critics claim:

- A lack of stability – Sims *et al* (1986) determined, after conducting a longitudinal study of 619 Business Studies students, that the learning styles identified by the LSI varied over time. Kolb, however, makes no allowance for this as he states that learning styles are not fixed personality traits, but rather preferences that are shaped by one's experiences.
- The approach requires further study – Atkinson (1988) also questioned the test-retest reliability of the instrument and called for further stability studies.
- It has surface appeal - Ruble and Stout (1994) conclude after an assessment of the LSI – that, on the surface, it is a reliable instrument. However a similar result may be obtained by simply asking people to place themselves in a particular quadrant.

In support of Kolb, the following assertions have been made:

- Ferrell (1996) factor analysed four different learning style inventories, and found Kolb's LSI to be the only one to empirically support the theory underlying the instrument. A similar result was produced by Cornwall *et al* (1991).
- Cornwell and Manfredo (1994) in their study showed a high degree of internal validity associated with Kolb's Learning Style Inventory.
- Garner (2000) added to the question of the stability of the LSI by showing that the total score achieved (CE+RO+AC+AE) is quite stable over time. He also suggested that this might be proportional to IQ.
- Kolb's instrument has also been widely used for designing classroom models and teaching packages e.g. Svinicki and Dixon (1987), McCarthy (1987), and Heywood (1997).

While the debate about Kolb's method is ongoing, it has been successful at another level. Other theorists have developed similar instruments based on his work, the most recent being the Cognitive Style Index developed by Allinson and Hayes in 1996. Given the concerns expressed earlier in relation to Kolb, and in an effort to establish further validation, Shannon Curriculum Development Centre decided to also use the Allinson and Hayes Cognitive Style Index (CSI) for this study.

Like Kolb, Allinson and Hayes is also based on the ideas and theories of Lewin, Dewey and Piaget. Cognitive Style is defined as 'the possibility that different people may carry out thinking, knowing and processing, differently' (Armstrong, Allinson and Hayes 1997). Allinson and Hayes define Cognitive Style as 'consistent individual differences in preferred ways of organising and processing information and experience' (1996).

4.2. Using the Learning Instruments in this Study

In using the Learning Style Instruments, Shannon Curriculum Development Centre was acutely aware of the need for sensitivity in the use of testing instruments. Many adult learners have a deeply felt sense of failure at tests. Consequently, the research team emphasised that using instruments to identify learning style in no way implied that there were good or bad learning styles, no right or wrong learning styles. Rather each person had a particular learning style that was appropriate for her/him.

Identification of Learning Style using Kolb requires the mapping out of scores on a graph. An example of how this works is given in Chapter 5, Figure 3. However, in relation to the Allinson and Hayes Cognitive Style Index (CSI) individual learning styles are scored. Given that learners associate scores, be it 30 or 60, with success or failure, the research team emphasised that in this context a score did not carry any association with success or failure. These explanations were offered as confidence-setting measures so that participants would feel comfortable completing the questionnaires. Such measures were in fact successful as none of the learners expressed any doubts about completing the questionnaires.

With regard to the two instruments it appeared that the learners found Kolb's LSI easier to complete. This may have been because it is much shorter than Allinson and Hayes, and was laid out on one page only with very short sentences. Allinson and Hayes' CSI is much longer than Kolb incorporating 38 statements, spread over three pages. The language of the CSI is also more difficult and the statements themselves are quite long. Many of them are similar, which made some learners wonder if they had already answered a specific statement and how they had scored it.

4.3. Qualitative Research

The team also adopted a qualitative approach to the research primarily because of its experience of this method in previous research it has conducted.

Qualitative research operates on the principle that the people involved in an activity should be heard, and their voice should be influential in shaping the direction of the enterprise in which they are involved. The role of the qualitative researcher is, according to Rubin and Rubin (1995) 'to listen to people as they describe how they understand the world in which they live and work' (1995: p.3). The Centre is conscious that not only is it important to listen to people as they describe how they understand their world, but also believes that *how* one listens is hugely important. Consequently the Centre agrees with Zweig (1965) cited in Brookfield (1990) that 'the art of interviewing is the art of conversation' (Brookfield 1990 p. 333).

Qualitative research, in the opinion of the Centre, involves the interviewer and the interviewee becoming conversational partners with scope for personal biographies, motivations, experiences, understandings, values, and preferences. The interview also provides opportunities to identify success and failures, give explanations and theories, and offer opinions of possible

outcomes. Flexibility is the key to the qualitative approach. In many respects, interviews are similar to ordinary everyday conversations. However, the raison d'être of the research conversation is very different. It is to increase all the conversational participants' understanding, knowledge and insights.

In adopting this stance i.e. interpreting qualitative research as an open-ended conversation, the Centre is aware of the delicacy of the relationship between the interviewer and the group, and the importance of not driving the conversation, pushing particular points of view or orientating the conversations towards particular conclusions. While qualitative research is based on a conversation amongst equals, the interviewee's opinions are the primary focus. While maintaining the primacy of the conversational relationship as one between equals, Shannon Curriculum Development Centre agrees with Brookfield (1990) that the purpose of these conversations is to 'enter the existential reality of learners so that assumptions, reasoning, processes and belief systems informing their perceptions of the world can be appreciated and understood' (Brookfield: 1990 p. 330).

In order to do this, participants in the study were invited to reflect not only on their early schooling and learning patterns, but also on broader structural issues like poverty, exclusion and identity. Given the sensitivity of this task and in an attempt to find a balance between the considerations outlined above, considerable time was given to agreeing the conversational agenda for the discussion groups (Appendix 3). Questions were framed in a conversational open-ended way to ensure that participants could not only respond to the questions asked, but also take the conversation in directions that the interviewer had not planned.

In drafting the questions, consideration was also given to allow conversational participants to gain insights not only into their own participation in education, but also into their own learning journey ,and in the process contribute to building a sense of solidarity between the learners. It was envisaged that this reflection process would be one of the returns for the conversationalists' participation in the study.

The qualitative approach makes a number of demands on the researcher. Foremost of these is the obligation to honour confidentiality, and to report honestly to those who commissioned the research on what people had to say, and on the findings from the learning style instruments. In addition, the researchers were very much aware of the importance of establishing that the people interviewed were clear on who commissioned the research, who the audience for the research would be, and the need to respect the good will of the participants who agreed to be involved in the research. The approach of the researchers was to be as transparent as possible, and to build and sustain good relationships with all concerned.

5. Protocol and Obligations of the Research Team

Conscious of these obligations, the team agreed a set of protocols to which each interviewee would have access. Shannon Curriculum Development Centre understands its commitment to emancipatory research in the context of this study as follows:

- Each participant will be notified in advance of the research and will be given an overview of the purpose of the research, the target audience and how it is envisaged it will contribute to overall understanding of adult education;
- The research team will, at all times, be respectful towards the views and experiences of everybody involved in the research;
- Each participant will be given a copy of the research protocol or will have its contents explained prior to the commencement of the research. The protocol will deal with issues such as confidentiality, clearance for quotations, audience and publication.

The protocol was as follows:

- It is our intention to promote a fair and respectful relationship with everybody involved in this study. Our aim is to produce an honest and informative report that will help to promote a greater understanding of how women and men learn
- Permission to audiotape interviews will be sought. The audiotape will be turned off for a time should any of you ask.
- All interview data will be treated in strict confidence and will only be used to prepare an honest report.
- All information collected by us will not be shown to any third party and will be stored securely at all times. Nobody's name will be used in the final report
- Unless otherwise stated, it is assumed that all conversations between us are on the record.

6. Location of Research

In consultation with the Research Advisory Group it was agreed that the research would be conducted in the following locations:

- Dublin – Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC)
- Kilkenny (VTOS Centre)
- Limerick (Adult Education Centre)
- Monaghan (Community Education)
- Leitrim / Donegal (one Men's Group and one Women's Group)

These locations were selected to ensure a regional spread, ranging from dispersed rural to concentrated urban populations, and also to incorporate representation from a variety of adult education programmes.The research would involve a total of 50 men and 50 women. Eligibility for participation in the study was confined to adult learners who had not completed upper secondary education.

For a variety of reasons it was not possible to conduct the study in all of these locations. In consultation with the Advisory Group the study was eventually conducted in the places outlined in Table 12:

Table 12 Details on Location of Research with Adult Learners

Location	Programme	Women	Men
Kilkenny Adult Education Centre	VTOS	13	12
Limerick Adult Education Centre	VTOS	8	8
Drogheda Partnership	Community Youth Training Workshop and Second Chance Education	9	5
Leitrim Men's Group	Community Education	0	7
Ballyphehane CDP, Cork	Community Education	0	4
Newport, Tipperary Adult Education	FÁS/VEC	9	0
Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC)	Basic Education Programme	17	7
Kilrush, Co. Clare (Teagasc)	Community Education	0	10
Total		**56**	**53**

7. Research Process

Having agreed the above settings for the research, the Director of Shannon Curriculum Development Centre and other members of the research team made contact with the Adult Education Organisers (AEOs) in each of the following VECs.

- Monaghan;
- Kilkenny;
- Limerick;
- Tipperary North.

Contact was also made with:

- Director, Dublin Adult Literacy Centre;
- Co-ordinator of the Leitrim Men's Group;
- Co-ordinator of Drogheda Partnership;
- Co-ordinator of the Letterkenny Women's Group;
- Co-ordinator of Men's Groups within Cork City Partnership;
- Teagasc Education Officer, Midleton, Co. Cork;
- Teagasc Education Officer Limerick;
- Teagasc Education Officer Co. Clare.

Prior to embarking on the study, the research team met to agree procedures for the group discussions. The research team was particularly concerned to ensure that an agreed and consistent approach would be adopted in the administration of the questionnaires. The team agreed a set of definitions and explanations as to what might be potentially difficult words and terms in the Kolb and Allinson and Hayes questionnaires.

7.1. Meetings with the Adult Learners

The format of the meetings with the adult learners was as follows:

- Introduction to the research including protocol;
- Administration of Learning Instruments;

- Break for participants during which the research team scored the Allinson and Hayes questionnaire;
- Meeting of adult learners in single-gender groups where individual findings of the Allinson and Hayes questionnaire were given to each person;
- General discussion and recording of conversations on a range of issues. (Appendix 3).
- Close of meeting followed by lunch for participants.

In administering the learning instruments the procedure for each was outlined. The first of these was the Kolb (LSI). Participants rated themselves in relation to the preferences given allocating 4 to that which was most like them, 3 to the next most like them, 2 to the next and 1 to that which was least like them (Kolb's LSI, Appendix 1).Clarification was given on the fact that 4 was the figure to be used for the statement that was most like them. When the learners had completed this inventory, they were asked to check each time to ensure they had only used one set of preferences on each line.

The completion of the Allinson and Hayes (CSI) required the participants to identify True, False or Uncertain for each of the 38 statements in the Cognitive Style Index (Allinson and Hayes CSI, Appendix 2).

Discussion groups with the learners were broadly based on the discussion questions (Appendix 3). Findings from the Allinson and Hayes (CSI) were fed back to the groups in the course of these discussions. The researchers selected Allinson and Hayes (CSI) for feedback, as it was relatively fast to score and the results are based on a continuum of Intuitive and Analytic. This continuum (see Chapter 5) was drawn on the board/flip-chart so that the participants could mark their own point on it, and therefore identify their individual Learning Style. Scoring for Allinson and Hayes ranges from 0 to 76. Total scores related to the continuum, which is intuition and analysis, and not as mentioned earlier, to success or failure.

The seating arrangements for the meetings with the learners varied depending on location. In Kilkenny, Drogheda and Limerick, people were sitting behind desks in a half circle. In Dublin and Cork people were sitting around circular tables. In Leitrim the learners and the researcher were seated informally in a circle without tables. In Kilrush they were seated around a table.

7.2. Discussions with Tutors

In addition to the research with adult learners, two focus group meetings were held with tutors, one in Limerick and one in Dublin. Tutors were invited from the range of groups involved in the research. Each of the tutor focus groups therefore brought together representatives of a variety of programmes, VTOS, CTW, Adult Literacy/Basic Education, FAS, Teagasc and Youthreach.

Table 13 Details on Tutor Discussion Groups

Location	Women	Men
Limerick	5	4
Dublin	5	4
Total	**10**	**8**

Prior to the tutor focus groups the research team drew up a list of sample questions (Appendix 4). Both of the tutor focus group discussions were recorded.

7.3. Interviews with Service Providers/Agency Representatives

Five questions were agreed by the Advisory Group (Appendix 5) for Service Providers and Representatives of Agencies.Individual telephone interviews were conducted with the following.

- Mary Beggan, Manager of Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities, (FÁS).
- Thomas Woulfe, Director of Education, Teagasc, Co. Clare
- Eileen Curtis, Adult Education Organiser (AEO), Co. Kilkenny
- Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS,
- Mary Maher, Director of DALC

8. Research Analysis

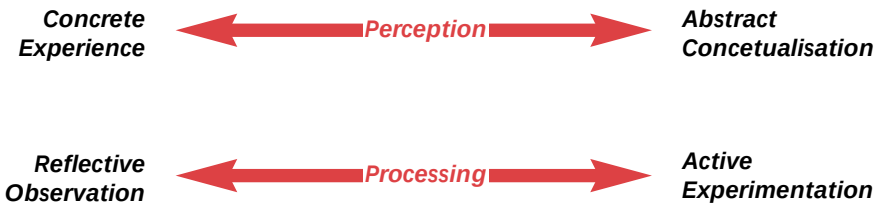
Discussions with both adult participants and tutors were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts, as in keeping with the commitment detailed in the protocol, were limited in circulation to the research team and the research secretary who undertook the transcripts. Analysis of the data was influenced by Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) methodology. Data was categorised under a range of headings. These headings emerged over the course of the study as the research team reflected on the conversations that took place, and sought to identify dominant themes, from the recurring words and phrases of the study participants. In attempting to capture and identify these themes, the research team sought to enter what Brookfield (1990) calls 'the existential reality of learners' (Brookfield: 1990 p. 330).

1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb assumed that learning is a cyclical process, involving four distinct stages, each of which must be present in order for learning to be complete. The first step of the cycle is the learner's direct personal interaction with the learning material (*Concrete Experience*). Following this the learner reflects passively on the experience (*Reflective Observation*). From this reflection, the learner assimilates the new experience with previous experiences. This reflection also allows the learner to draw conclusions. (*Abstract Conceptualisation*). Based on these conclusions, the learner uses the new experience to guide further actions and decisions *(Active Experimentation*) and the cycle continues. Kolb then analysed each of the four aspects of the Experiential Learning Cycle and postulated that the cycle could be further broken down into two dimensions: *Perception and Processing*.

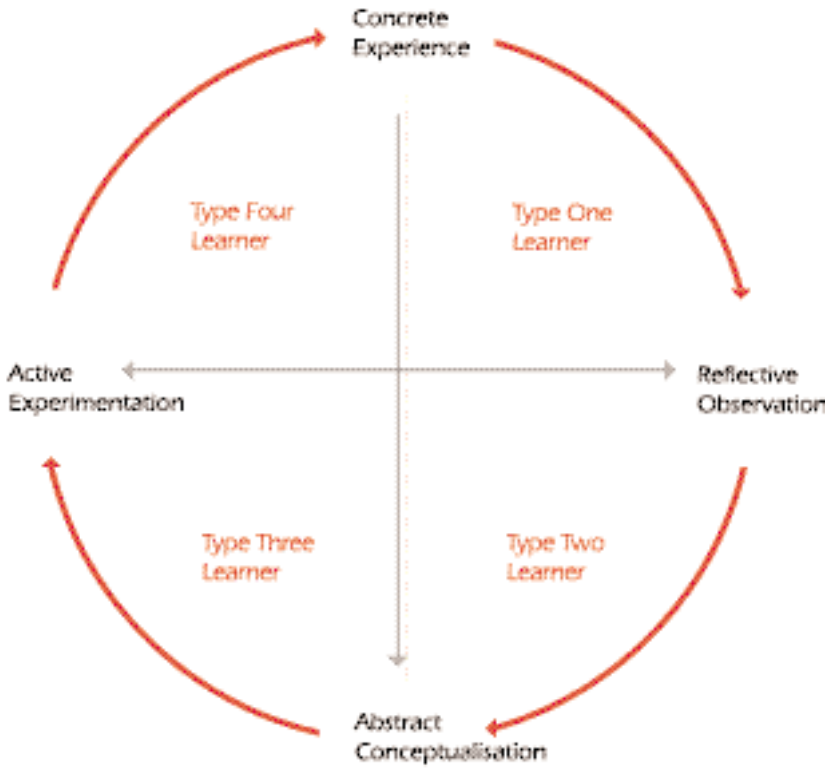
As can be seen below, *Perception* ranges from *Concrete Experience* to *Abstract Conceptualisation* and *Processing* ranges from *Active Experimentation* to *Reflective Observation*.

Figure 1 Dimensions of Learning



When these two dimensions are combined as outlined below, the four resultant learning styles are composed of a strength in one particular mode of perception and one of processing. When these axes are inserted into the cycle it results in four distinct learning styles, one present in each quadrant of the cycle as in Figure 2. below.

Figure 2: Kolb's Learning Cycle

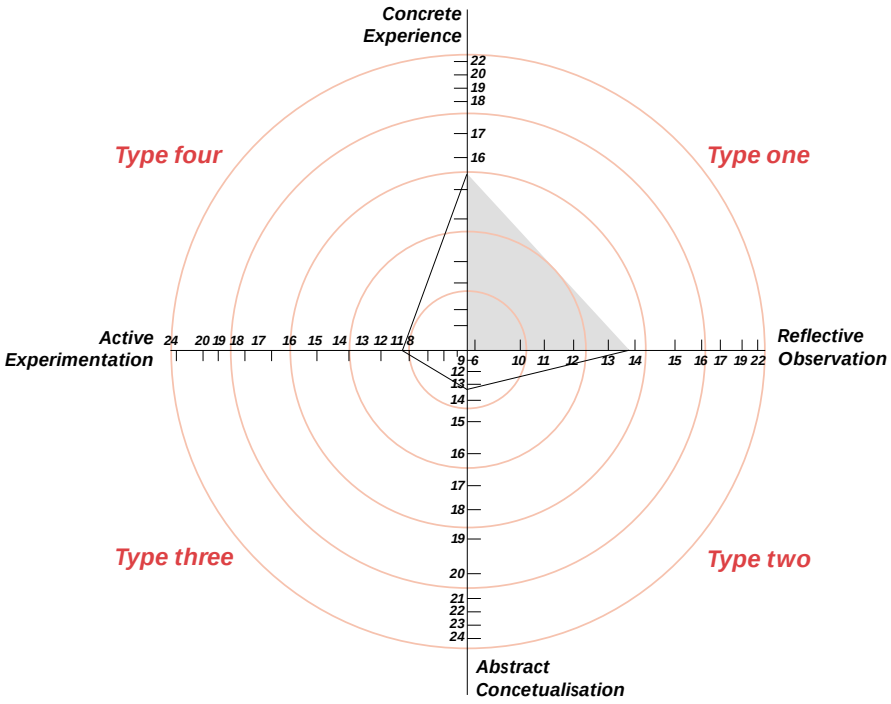


(Kolb: 1984 page 42)

1.1. Identification of Learning Style Based on Kolb

Kolb's LSI requires learners to rank themselves according to the preferences given (Appendix 1). When the learners responses are scored and mapped, as in the following example , particular learning preferences can be identified based on the predominant quadrant. This shows the Learning Style as predominantly Imaginative (shaded quadrant), but not exclusively so. This person therefore would be classified as a Type 1. Imaginative Learner according to Kolb's analysis.

Figure 3 Sample Diagrammatic Representation of a Learning Style Based on Kolb's LSI



1.2. Kolb's Types of Learners

In 1985, Kolb revised the initial inventory he had devised in 1976. This revised edition was tested using a sample population of close to 1,500 individuals. Four Learning Styles were defined. These were:

- *Type 1* Imaginative Learners
- *Type 2* Analytic Learners
- *Type 3* Common Sense Learners
- *Type 4* Dynamic Learners

Each of these four types has his/her own particular learning strengths and preferences.

Imaginative Learners, (Type 1 Learner), perceive information concretely and process it reflectively. They learn best by listening to the ideas of others, sharing their own ideas and participating in discussions. They are imaginative thinkers who rely heavily on their own experience. They need to view new situations and experiences from a range of different perspectives. They need to be personally involved and seek complete commitment from others who are involved. They like to generate ideas and thrive on taking the time to develop good ideas.

They tackle problems by reflecting alone, and then brainstorming with others. Before they can effectively learn, they must personalise the new information or experience. They exercise authority through group participation. Their learning strengths are in innovation and developing ideas. Their favourite question is 'Why' and they will often ask 'Why do we need to learn/know this?'. It is suggested that Imaginative Learners are most likely to enter professions in humanities and the liberal arts.

Analytic Learners, (Type 2 Learners), perceive information abstractly and process it reflectively. They are eager to learn. They are thorough and industrious and think through ideas. Their learning is driven by goals and attainment – usually of an academic nature. They integrate experience into what is previously known, in order to formulate theories and concepts. They are logical learners and excel in situations that require attention to detail and sequential thinking. Analytic Learners respond best in a traditional classroom setting where the main teaching methods used involve lectures and reading. They need continuity and certainty. They are objective learners and personal involvement makes them uncomfortable. They exercise authority with principles and procedures. They are concerned with facts and the work of experts and their favourite question is 'What?'. These learners tend to be found in areas of employment that require research and planning. In study analytic learners prefer basic sciences to applied sciences, and they also excel in Mathematics.

Common Sense Learners, (Type 3 Learners), perceive information abstractly and process it actively. Their learning is driven by utility and usability. They need to know how things work. They 'tinker' with things and resent being given the answer. They are down to earth, and in relation to problem solving their modus operandi is 'if it works – use it'. They have a limited tolerance for fuzzy ideas and theories. They edit reality to fit into their previous experiences. They require hands-on interaction while learning. They thrive on plans and time lines, and they often act impulsively without consulting others. They exercise authority on a reward and punishment basis. Their favourite question is 'What can this become?' Common Sense Learners tend to pursue studies in the physical and applied sciences and are often employed in engineering and ecological areas.

Dynamic Learners, (Type 4 Learners), perceive information concretely and process it actively. They learn by trial and error and will often reach conclusions in the absence of any logical or rational thought. They are strong believers in self discovery. They are flexible, and adaptable and excel in situations where they are required to manage change. They create exciting informal environments and they encourage independent thought in others. They are open to new ideas and experiences, and are often seen to be risk takers. They have a high ability to sense positive, new directions. They enrich reality by adding their own ideas and experiences to it. They rely heavily on emotions and feelings, and sometimes tackle problems based on their intuition. They exercise authority by demanding that people continually live up to their potential. They relish the opportunity to teach others what they have learned. These learners do not respond well in traditional classroom settings. Their favourite question is, 'What if?' Dynamic Learners tend to choose areas of study involving some sort of social aspect, and may follow this through in careers such as medicine, psychology and education.

1.3. Kolb's Findings on Learning Styles

Smith and Kolb's (1986) study of 1500 undergraduates in the United States using Kolb's (LSI) revised inventory provided the following information:

- Imaginative – 23.0%
- Analytic – 31.1%
- Common Sense – 17.4%
- Dynamic – 28.5%

For the random population involved it can be seen that there was a relatively low percentage of Common Sense Learners (17.4%) while the majority of the learners were either Analytic (31.1%) or Dynamic (28.5%).

Disaggregated by gender the following picture emerged for women and men learners in the Smith and Kolb's (1986) study.

Women

- Imaginative – 25.0%
- Analytic – 27.5%
- Common Sense – 14.8%
- Dynamic – 32.7%

Men

- Imaginative – 21.2%
- Analytic – 34.7%
- Common Sense – 20.0%
- Dynamic - 24.1%

Smith and Kolb's findings show the majority of women were Dynamic Learners (32.7%), while the majority of men were Analytic Learners (34.7%). In relation to both women and men the minority were found to be Common Sense Learners. However, Smith and Kolb's findings do not show very marked differentiation, especially for the men. For the men involved, the range of learning styles is fairly evenly spread over the 4 types of learners.Much greater differentiation was found in relation to the women involved. Only (14.8%) of the women were found to be Common Sense Learners as opposed to (32.7%) of the women who were Dynamic Learners.

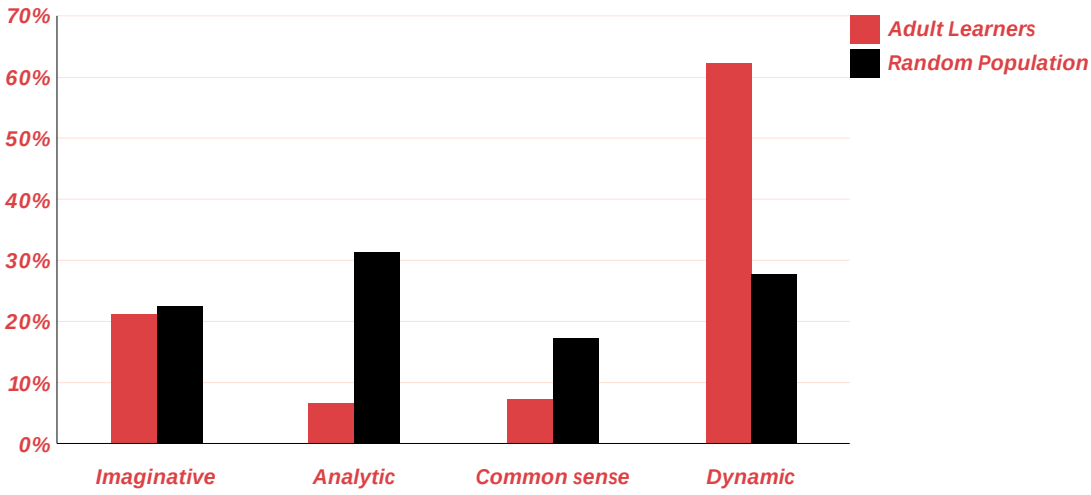
2. Findings from this Study of Adult Learners Based on Kolb's LSI

Applying Kolb's LSI, it would appear that the majority of adult learners in this study are Dynamic learners and the minority are Analytic learners.

- General Findings
- Imaginative Learners – 21%
- Analytic Learners – 7%
- Common Sense Learners – 8%
- Dynamic Learners – 64%

The findings from this study can also be compared to the findings from Smith and Kolb's study of a random population. There would appear to be a significant difference between the findings in this study compared with the general findings from Smith and Kolb (1986). It would also appear that there is a much higher percentage of Dynamic Learners present within the adult learners that participated in this study than in Smith and Kolb (1986). The proportion of Imaginative Learners in both samples is roughly the same. The adult learners in this study contain much fewer Analytic and Common Sense Learners than is present in a general population. These differences are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Learning Styles of Adult Learners in this Study compared to Learning Styles of Random Population



2.1. Findings for Men in this Study

The findings for the men who participated in this study using Kolb's LSI are as follows:

- Imaginative Learners – 24%
- Analytic Learners – 12%
- Common Sense Learners – 10%
- Dynamic Learners – 54%

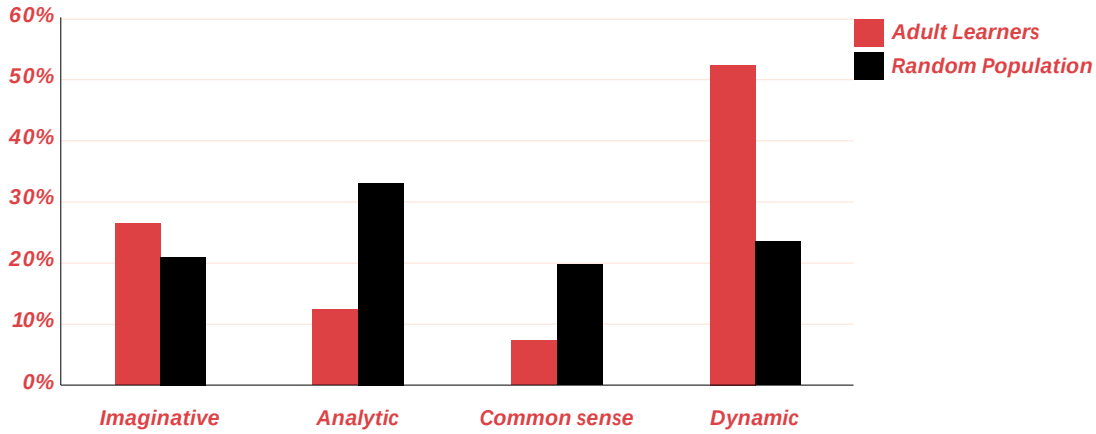
The findings from this study in relation to men can also be compared to findings from Kolb for a random sample of men. When compared to the learning styles present within a random sample of men, there is a notable difference between the two populations. Within the men participants there is a higher ratio of Imaginative and Dynamic Learners than in a random population of men. These differences are illustrated in Figure 5.

2.2 Findings for Women in this Study

The findings for the women who participated in this study using Kolb's LSI are as follows:

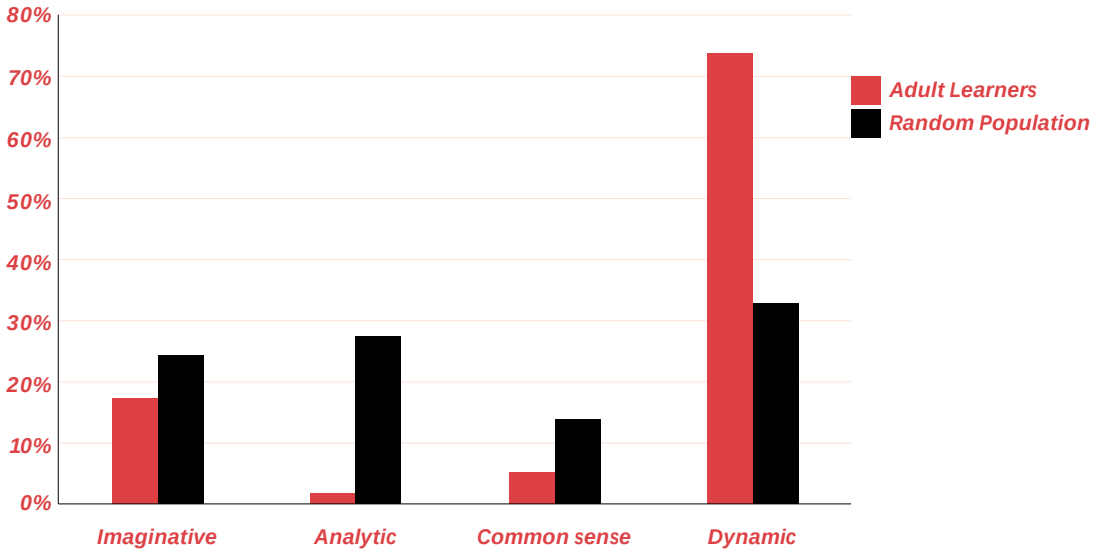
- Imaginative Learners – 19%
- Analytic Learners – 2%
- Common Sense Learners – 5%
- Dynamic Learners – 74%

Figure 5 Learning Styles of Men Learners in this Study Compared to Kolb's Findings for a random sample of men



The findings for the women in this study can also be compared to Kolb's findings for a random sample of women. The women learners in this study contain a higher percentage of Dynamic Learners than a random population of women as can be seen in Figure 6. Among the women participants there is also a significantly lower number of Analytic and Common Sense Learners. The comparative findings are illustrated in Figure 6 below.

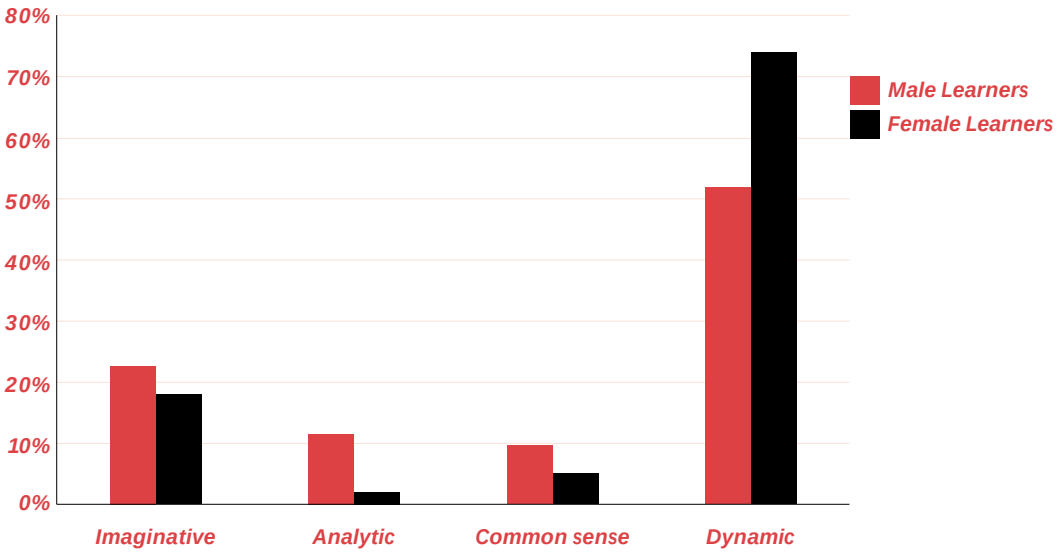
Figure 6 Learning Styles of Women Learners in this Study Compared to Kolb's Findings for a Random Sample of Women



2.3 Summary of Findings – Women and Men in this Study

Based on Kolb's LSI, when one compares the learning styles of men and women in this study, there appears to be no substantial difference in the findings based on gender. Figure 7. shows a comparison of the Learning Styles of the men and women in this study.

Figure 7 Learning Styles of Male and Female Learners in this Study



From the findings for the women and men in this study it would appear that:

- the majority of both women and men are Dynamic Learners, with more women than men demonstrating this learning style;
- the second most common learning style is the Imaginative Learner with more men than women demonstrating this learning style, albeit by a smaller margin;
- both Analytic and Common Sense Learners were very much in a minority in this study.

3. Implications of the Findings

The quantitative results can be practically applied in two ways. Firstly, the dominant learning style of the learner can be used in order to provide suitable teaching methods and an appropriate learning environment to enhance learning in adult education. From the evidence gathered, the majority of both male and female learners are Dynamic Learners, as can be seen in Figure 7. This learner does not respond well in traditional classroom settings.

The recognition of Learning Styles has implications for the provision of Adult Education. Tutors and teachers of adult education courses should be trained in appropriate teaching methods to encompass the wide range of learners in adult education. The learning environment can also have a huge impact on the standard of learning. The physical locations where adult education courses are offered should be constructed in a flexible way so as to accommodate the diverse needs of the learners.

Considering that the Dynamic was the dominant learning style, in this study, teaching methods, should therefore contain a lot of discussion, project work, work experience and independent research. The physical environment should be arranged to facilitate discussion and social interaction between the learners themselves, and between the tutors and learners. There should also be a range of multimedia resources to facilitate independent study and research.

The second way of using the learning styles of participants is to develop the holistic learner. This can be done by teaching a specific type of learner using teaching methods suited to the other three learning styles i.e. teaching a Dynamic Learner using methods suited to Imaginative, Analytic and Common Sense Learners. This will allow the learner to develop a wide range of skills, aside from the ones they already possess. In order for this to be practically applied, tutors must be informed of each learner's dominant learning style and must be trained in a wide range of teaching methodologies.

The knowledge of learning styles is vital to tutors for organising practical classroom activities e.g. groupwork. Groupwork can be facilitated in one of two ways. The first approach is to organise individuals into groups that contain one of each type of learner. This allows each individual to observe things from a range of different viewpoints. Alternatively, learners can also be organised into homologous groups i.e. all groups contain the same type of learners. This would allow the learners to work more easily together.

As stated previously, the majority of learners in this study are Dynamic Learners. The findings in this study show a minority of the learners are Imaginative, Analytic and Common Sense learners. Therefore courses need to be designed in such a way as to attract these other types of learners. If one was to target Analytic Learners, courses should be factual with minimal social aspects. In order to attract Common Sense Learners, courses should be designed to be pragmatic and related to practical, everyday life to which the learners can relate.

Another implication in relation to learning style is the need for tutors to use a range of types of questions. The detailed description of Kolb's types of learners earlier in this chapter includes specific questions to which the four learner types respond. Tutors therefore need to be made aware of the types of questions involved and they need to incorporate the full range in their teaching so that every learner's needs are met in terms of the questions being asked.

The fact that the results of the quantitative research show no real difference in the learning styles of men and women implies that there should not be any difference in the approach to learning based on gender.

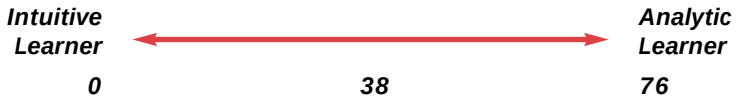
3.1. Limitations of the Instrument

Due to their quantitative nature, both instruments offer very little insight as to the learners themselves. Another important limitation of Kolb's Learning Style Inventory is that individuals are classified according to the quadrant that had the single largest area, whereas the combined areas of the remaining three quadrants may be greater than the single quadrant. This may indicate that only a proportion of their learning is carried out by their dominant learning style. The study is also limited in that there is no longitudinal evidence gathered for comparative purposes. If, for example, learners were taught to their styles and then re-tested, their preferences may be somewhat different.

4. Allinson and Hayes Cognitive Style Index (CSI)

The Allinson and Hayes CSI was developed in 1996 due to a general dissatisfaction with other instruments. However it was based on the ideas of Kolb. Almost 1000 participants were part of a study that resulted in the development of the Cognitive Style Index. It is based on the theory that cognition is a single dimension that ranges from *Intuition* to *Analysis*. This instrument views Cognition/Learning as a continuum.

Figure 8 Allinson and Hayes Cognitive Style Index (CSI)



Within the Allinson and Hayes Cognitive Style Index, there are two extreme types of learner based on one dimension only i.e. cognition. The scale, encompassing both organising and processing information, ranges from *Analytic* to *Intuitive*. Analytic learners are individuals who achieve a score from thirty eight to seventy six, while Intuitive learners range from zero to thirty eight. Individuals who score thirty eight are neutral and can learn using both intuitive and analytic modes. However, this scoring system should be seen as a continuum rather than a bi-polar indicator.

The CSI consists of 38 statements which learners respond to as being True, False or Uncertain (Appendix 2). Within the Cognitive Style Index individuals are rated on a scale that determines their Analytic/Intuitive abilities. Marking the total score from the CSI shows the learner's predominant learning style

4.1. Types of Learners according to Allinson and Hayes

Analytic Learners

According to Allinson and Hayes individuals who score themselves as Analytic on the CSI continuum pay a great deal of attention to detail. They focus on facts and 'hard data' and rely on what experts say. They are logical in their approach to learning and do things in a step-by-step way. They excel in structured, well-organised learning situations.

Intuitive Learners

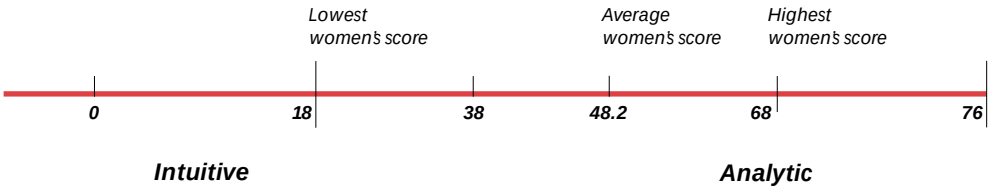
Those who score themselves as Intuitive, on the CSI continuum, according to Allinson and Hayes are less concerned with detail. They have an open-ended approach to solving problems and work best without strict guidelines. They are in touch with their feelings and require a personal input into their work.

An *analytic learner* possesses similar characteristics to Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) Type 2 (Analytic Learners) and Type 3 Common Sense Learners). An *intuitive learner* is quite similar to Kolb's Type 1 (Imaginative Learner) and Type 4 (Dynamic Learner).

4.2 Analysis of Cognitive Style Index Findings in this Study

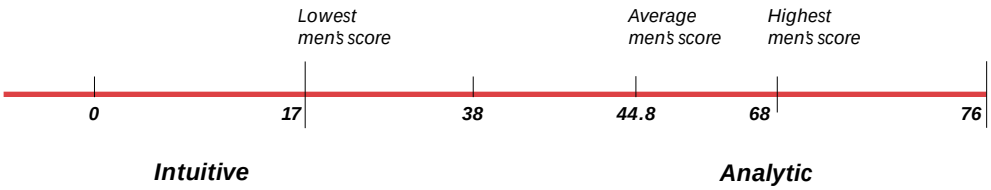
The average Cognitive Style Index score for the entire population of adult learners in this study was forty seven. This is slightly higher than would be expected in a random population where one would expect the average score to be neutral at 38. The women learners in this study obtained an average score of 48.2 with the lowest score being 18 and the highest score at 68.

Figure 9 CSI Findings for Women Learners in this Study



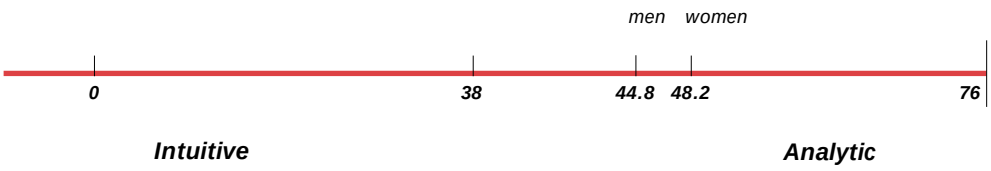
The average CSI score for the men in this study was 44.8, while their lowest score was 17 and highest 68.

Figure 10 CSI Findings for Men Learners in this Study



In relation to both the men and women learners in this study, the highest CSI score was 68 for both while the lowest score was quite similar also (18 for women, 17 for men).A comparative analysis of the total CSI scores for all of the men and women involved shows an average score for women of 48.2 and an average score for men of 44.8.Both men and women in this study were found to be Analytic Learners.

Figure 11 CSI Average Score for Men and Women



4.3 Implications of Cognitive Style Index Results

In this study both women and men were found to be Analytic. Analytic learners according to the Allinson and Hayes CSI, prefer learning activities that are laid out in a step-by step fashion. They also are quite logical learners. Similar to the implications from the findings of Kolb the findings here have implications for tutors involved in Adult Education.

4.4 Gender Analysis of CSI

Few studies have been conducted in gender analysis using the Cognitive Style Index. Currently studies are in progress in relation to the Cognitive Style of female managers. To date findings show that within this population there is a significantly higher proportion of *analytical* individuals. To date, no studies have been conducted in relation to males and the Cognitive Style Index.

5. Analysis of learning style in this study according to age

Participant learners were asked to indicate their age before completing the Learning Style Instruments. The age ranges given, the overall percentage within each age range and the breakdown according to gender are given in the table below.

Table 14 Analysis of Learning Style in this Study according to Age

Age Breakdown			
AgeRange	OverallPercentage	% Female	% Male
18–24	15%	21%	9%
25–39	33%	34%	32%
40–49	30%	24%	36%
50–64	21%	21%	21%
Over 65	1%	0%	2%

When each age range was taken separately the proportion of Learning Styles present within each category was quite different.

5.1. Analysis By Age Based on Kolb's LSI

Age Range 18–24

The 18–24 Age Group contained 100% Dynamic Learners, with no Imaginative, Analytic or Common Sense Learners present.

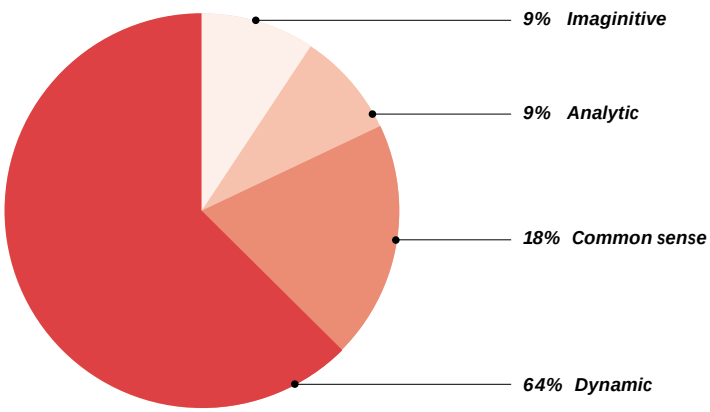
Age Range 25–39

Within the Age Range 25–39 the following results were obtained.

- Imaginative Learners – 9.1%
- Analytic Learners – 9.1%
- Common Sense Learners – 18.1%
- Dynamic Learners – 63.7%

This is illustrated diagrammatically by figure 12.

Figure 12 Learning styles present in the 25–39 age category



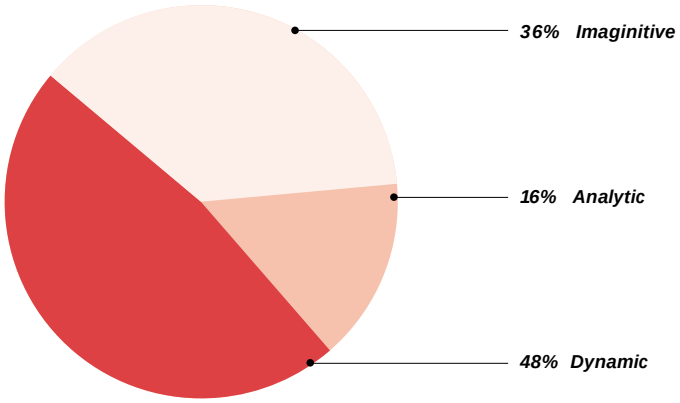
Age Range 40–49

The 40–49 group of participants showed the following proportions.

- Imaginative Learners – 36%
- Analytic Learners – 16%
- Common Sense Learners – 0%
- Dynamic Learners – 48%

This is illustrated diagrammatically by figure 13.

Figure 13 Learning styles present in the 40–49 age category



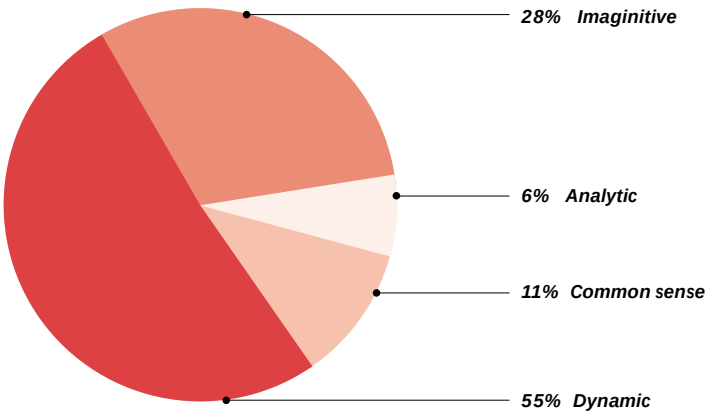
Age Range 50–64

The 50–64 age category was made up of the following learning styles.

- Imaginative Learners – 27.8%
- Analytic Learners – 5.6%
- Common Sense Learners – 11.1%
- Dynamic Learners – 55.5%

This is illustrated diagrammatically by figure 14.

Figure 14 Learning styles present in the 50–64 age category



Over 65

As there was only one participant who was over 65 years of age, it is not representative of this age group.

5.2 Analysis By Age based on Allinson and Hayes

With regard to Allinson and Hayes the average scores obtained by the participants in each of the age groups tested were as follows.

- 18–24 category – 42.8
- 25–39 category – 46.6
- 40–49 category – 44.3
- 50–64 category – 47.3

6. Conclusion

In proposing this study of the learning styles of men and women, Shannon Curriculum Development Centre suggested using two learning style instruments – Kolb's LSI and Allinson and Hayes CSI. It was hoped that the use of two instruments would give greater validity to the study. The overall findings using Kolb's LSI show 64% of the learners involved were Dynamic. The findings using Allinson & Hayes's CSI show the learners in this study are Analytic. The results from using both instruments are therefore contradictory.

The two instruments used give conflicting information in relation to the learning preferences of the adult participants in this study. However, it should be noted that both males and females answered questions in both instruments in the same way. This may very well suggest that there is no significant difference between the male and female learners who participated in this study. That is the only tentative conclusion that this research team believes can be drawn from its analysis of Kolb's LSI and Allinson and Hayes' CSI learning style instruments.

Taking each of the instruments separately the findings indicate that the similarities in the learning styles of the men and women participating in this study outweigh the differences. If the findings from the learning style inventories are examined in this way, it would appear that they have more in common in their learning styles than real clear differentiation.

The findings from the learning style inventories have implications for teaching in adult education. Firstly, tutors need to be trained in an appropriate range of teaching methods so that they can cater to the learning styles of all the learners. In this tutors need to be aware of specific strategies that best accommodate all learners. Learning styles also have implications for classroom organisation and resources.The fact that the results of the quantitative research show no real difference in the learning styles of men and women implies that there should not be any difference in teaching approach based on gender.

Chapter 6 Missing Soaps for Maths – Issues and Perspectives in Adult Education

Section 1 The Views of the Learners

Introduction

A range of issues have emerged in the course of this study and these will be detailed in this chapter. In chronicling these issues, this chapter will provide as many different perspectives as possible. In reporting on the findings from the Kolb and Allinson and Hayes questionnaires and on what is heard and witnessed in this chapter, it is important to remember that learning styles are in themselves complex and multi-faceted and therefore are not amenable to simplistic analysis and superficial categorisation. This chapter describes the learning from the discussions with focus groups of adult learners in particular locations on particular days.

In reporting these findings, the primary concern is to tell the reader what the researchers sought to measure, and what they heard. Structurally, this chapter is divided into three sections i.e. the views of the adult learners, the views of the tutors and the views of service provider/ agency representatives. All original names have been changed. The names used in this chapter have been taken from O'Corráin and Maguire's 'Irish Names' (1990).

1. Level and experience of formal education

Social class and age rather than gender would appear to be the stronger predictors of how the study participants perceived and experienced their initial education. The experiences of working class men irrespective of whether they lived in the city or the country and of older men was noticeably different from the experiences of younger men and those from more middle class backgrounds. The experiences of people from Inner City areas was certainly bleak. From the descriptions of schooling, it would appear that boys in inner city areas had even fewer chances than had girls.

Niall

No interest in school. Well I learned nothing. I left school without learning to read or write so you were just in the class, the back of the class and you were left sitting there all day. Most days I was holding the door so it wouldn't blow open, that was my job. In the classroom that was my job. The breeze used to come up the corridor so I was put up there and told to hold that door.

According to Niall, the students were divided according to social class and those from the more middle social classes got the better teachers.

Niall

Right from the beginning when I look back I think we were just from the flats: half the teachers were Christian Brothers and half were ordinary teachers. All the boys from the flats

were given the teachers and the people from the houses were given Christian Brothers so we were separated from the beginning and we weren't expected to do well.

Senan

It was relative to the times. You had sixty to a class they doubled up, thirty odd and thirty odd. I don't think much was expected of us only of the few. There was only a certain amount because it was only the first two lines or the first line and the rest it was like you weren't there at all. They dumped the dunces back to the back and it was like the good fellows up to the front rather than the reverse.

It would appear that schools and teachers had very different expectations for boys from working classes as opposed to boys from middle classes. Working class boys were often used as runners or were given manual tasks to fill in the time before reaching the cut-off age for compulsory schooling.

Terry

I spent my last two years backing the horses for the monks, collecting the meat in the market and picking gooseberries for their dessert and I went to no class and then I went down to the kitchen and then I worked, did the messages and all that. And that went on for two years and then there was no more classes there…

Looking back on their educational experiences, the men felt that the teachers just were not interested in them.

Declan

The teacher we had would send us down to the shop. We would be an hour down there and he wouldn't even ask (where we were).

Niall

The master when we'd start school would be over an hour reading the paper before he would start and we were all sitting down.

Physical punishment was part of the school experience for many of the older adults.

Maurice

A clip around the ear if you looked up or a lash of the cane from one teacher or another. Another teacher could catch you by the locks and lift you up and throw you out the door.

Senan

Being beaten all the time.

Enda

And another thing about classes if you were late or anything for school in the cold weather you used to be punished and people didn't look forward to that. If I thought I was going to be clattered around or smacked hard because I came in late or something, you would be afraid to go to school or be late.

For some men, at least, their anger at the way they were treated in school was palpable. Not surprisingly many of the men were scathing in their criticisms of their schooling.

Killian
School? It was bloody awful. I hated it. It was go to school or go to borstal. Teachers didn't give a shit, you were target practice for 99.9% of them.

Charles
I hated the teachers. I just didn't like the authority they had.

Given these types of experiences, it is not surprising that many sought exit strategies.

Barry
I went on the hop for a good while, all the time. I used to just run off anytime I had the chance really. I would just go into town, rob in town.

Cormac
The only teaching they knew was caning or bullying, very little about the subject they were supposed to be teaching. So there was more money to be made in a strawberry field than listen to imbeciles who didn't know exactly waht they were talking about. So during the summer monthe the strawberry fields were more attreactive, a little bit of money for night-time

However, that is not the whole story of men's education. As indicated at the outset, for some young men in their early twenties and from working class backgrounds their educational experiences were very positive.

Louis
It was great. All my mates and that…Oh, Yeah I enjoyed that. Maths and History and Geography.

Fergal
Well, I mean the first half of it was a mad laugh I was dossing. The last few years I took it seriously though and I had a pretty rough time the last few years.

The experience of education for rural men was very mixed. It would also appear that they were offered very traditional education.

Eoin
I actually liked school, and I had to leave before I did my Inter. Cert., I was in 3rd Year but my father got sick and I had to stay at home for about three weeks and I missed out then so my chance was gone. I actually liked school and I liked national school. My favourite subject was Irish and Maths.

Saul
I liked it too but I was desperate at Latin. I think it had something to do with the teacher. And it turned me completely against school. I just hated it after that. I just couldn't make a hand out of it. I mightn't be good at English now but I liked it.

Mark

I was pretty much like Saul there. I ended up in the same Christian Brothers school. Latin for me was a major problem and French was another major problem because I'd never make any use of it. Overall it was negative enough.

The experience of education for working class women was very similar to their male counterparts. Like the men, social class rather than gender would appear to be the critical factor in determining whether the women did or did not like school. Many were fearful of school.

Moira

It was too strict. I used be terrified going in. I was taught by nuns. I was sitting down the back of the class because I couldn't do Maths. My school bag was emptied out and put over my head and my hands were tied behind my back. So the fear of that alone. Even though I went into second year education it still did no good because the fear was there.

Oonagh

I didn't go on to secondary school, I stayed in primary school. I went to secondary for two days but I didn't like it. The teacher petrified us when we got into school.

Janice

I think it is fear, if you haven't got your homework done its pointless going into the class because the teacher is going to start roaring at you.

Vivian

I was 14 when I left school. But like that I was in the secondary education but I didn't feel I got anything out of it, there was more fear of being in school.

The women too were physically punished.

Judith

I don't hold the pen the right way, well I hold it this way and the nun hit me one day with a ruler. When I went home my knuckles were all burst. I hated it.

Sabina

Reliving the school again it was miserable. Get a smack with a ruler for spelling that wrong or anything then. But we are kind of reliving it again now and it is good craic with the girls.

Class size was also an issue for the women.

I always thought there was too much people in the one classroom years ago.

Classes were also segregated according to ability and according to one of the women, the weaker classes were not given any attention.

Sabina

The first group knew everything, the second group were OK and the third group were just left.

One of the women focuses on the lack of recognition they received for their work:

Gerti
I remember when I made an apple tart in school the teacher would come over and put a fork in it and it used to sink to the bottom. You'd be there very proud of the tart. They would put a fork in it and it looked lovely before she touched it and the minute she touched it the whole thing just sunk. I was sick.

Many of the women just gave up or were resigned to the fact that they were not going to learn much.

Bess
Everyone has different ways to do things and in school I used find I wouldn't ask questions. If I didn't understand I just wouldn't ask.

Fiona
I didn't learn much.

Many of the issues the urban women spoke about were reflected in the comments of some of the rural women also.

Nicola
Never liked it! Going to school at St. Veronica's, it was a good school but they moved too fast and I found it hard to keep up.

However, the more middle class women from rural areas were less likely to be critical of their early school experiences or to apportion blame.

Mabel
I'm not knocking all the teachers I had in the past. I suppose in my childhood you didn't ask questions you sat in your class and you behaved.

2. Economic and social circumstances

The women in the study spent longer in school than did the men. The average school-leaving age for the women was 15, while the average for the men was 13. While the level of disenchantment of women's and men's school experiences differed, they were factors in influencing the decisions of both women and men to leave school. However, the need for a job and money featured high on the reasoning of both women and men.

One urban woman's comments on the situation at the time.

At that stage we had no choice really, the older ones. We had to actually leave school and go out working or we actually had to stay in and look after the kids. You had to stay out of school and that was just a routine thing and everyone had to do this to help.

Another urban woman had more short-term personal reasons for opting out.

I needed money for going to a dance on Friday night.

For some of the men, the reasons for leaving school were specifically financial.

Colin
I left about 14. Basically my brother left school and he got a job and he had loads of money so I went away to get loads of money as well. Besides that I used to like the outdoor life, I hated to be stuck in all the time. That's when I was younger.

Manus
I wanted to make money.

The need for a job was central to the women's decision also to leave school. However, that decision to leave was regretted by some at a later stage.

Eileen
I mean I suppose I was 18 months away from doing my Leaving Cert, which is a huge regret. My ultimate goal at the time was to get a job and have a wage.

Breda
I left school when I was nearly 13, I stayed in school until 2nd year and I wasn't out of school 6 months and I wanted to go back but I had to work

Pregnancy and what others called 'family circumstances' or 'personal stuff' were also factors in early school-leaving.

Fergal
I left when I was sixteen. When I got into secondary school it got a bit rough ... it was just personal stuff and that

Oonagh
I didn't go on to secondary school, I stayed in primary school. I went to secondary for two days but I didn't like it but then I left and then eventually I got pregnant.

Rossa
I left when I was twelve. Well at the time it was family circumstances.

It was not just the older adults that left for financial reasons.

Louis
No, I left in fifth year. I had got a job then, I was getting good enough pay so it was the money Yeah.

None of the women said they were asked to leave or were expelled. Two of the urban men were.

Ben

Fifteen, sixteen, after my Junior Cert. I got thrown out of school. Messing too much.

Bertie

I left school at 15. Troublesome in school. No other choice. So I wouldn't give them the pleasure I just left.

However some of the women who were troublesome in school gave the following reason:

Judith

They had their favourites too in the class in the school

Sabina

Then (we'd) be looking for attention, flicking things. That was your way of hiding things that you couldn't do. You weren't letting people know that you couldn't read and write. So you would start trouble in school. …You didn't mind getting into trouble because you weren't getting taught.

Ability to keep up with the others was also cited.

Sabina

I felt when I was in school, that I was on a different level and I was always left behind because I couldn't keep up. So, I left.

One person cited parental values. Education was not valued in the same way as was work. This was particularly the case with parents who were farming or who had a restricted view of education.

Terry

I was just about fourteen but the strange thing about it was I was the youngest of seven and I honestly think that when I came along my parents were saying thanks be to God we are nearly finished, so they weren't really that interested then, there was going to be a job in C.I.E. for me, my father worked in C.I.E. and that was that.

Ultan

I think that there was a sense then that the sooner you got through school and maybe got through Ag. College then start real work the better. So in a sense then education for those inheriting the farm was never as valued or prioritised as those who were going to go off the farm.

Eoin

Yes, I left school at Inter. Cert. That was it then. I didn't go to Agricultural College. I missed out on that. I feel I should have gone another bit. That's the way it was.

One man living in a rural area cited particular barriers for rural students.

Malachy

I didn't like national school. It was hardly open at all. Travel was also a problem. Then the teacher got another job. The school was closed for ages.

One man living in the border area mentioned 'the troubles'.

Aidan

From the time of the troubles, I never went to school. Was wrapped up in the troubles. Now, I regret it.

3. Motivation to return to learning

There appears to have been two main motivations for both women and men returning to education. One of these was centred on enhancing their own educational levels, and the other was linked to their children. These motivations were common to both women and men. .

Rory

The kids would be coming in with homework and I didn't understand it.

Michael

It was myself and the kids, the two of them together.

Barry

To help the kids with their reading and writing.

Dennis

I would usually say ask your mother or ask your older brother.

Jacqueline

Even my daughter with certain Maths I was able to help her last week, it's a great achievement for me. That was brilliant.

Aidan

I've kids and you need to read bedtime stories. They like to have stories read but I don't do it.

Breda

For years I always did want to come back to school and it's just like people say when you have children. I have two young children now. People think when you have children that that's the end of it, you can't do any more. But I think in my case, it's quite the opposite. My children are my motivation because if I hadn't got children I wouldn't be here.

Breda also said that education was her way of breaking the sense of isolation she felt as the full-time homemaker or that the family was raised and it was now time to move on.

Breda

... and then its getting out of the house and you are meeting new people which I find is quite good. Because I was inclined to stay at home quite a lot.

Nanno

Like Moya, my youngest son was doing his Leaving Cert. so I decided it was time I got out of the house and started to do something.

For others, it was something they wanted to do for themselves.

Kate

I wanted to come back to education not only for work but for myself.

A desire to learn and to prove that they were capable of learning was also a reason for returning and staying on now.

Ann

I'm here two years now. It's the fact that I'm learning.

Declan

I wanted to improve myself really personally. I have been wanting to do that now for a number of years and I realised that you definitely need it.

Jean

This is my first year and I looked at it as a way of improving myself and improving the way I would approach other things as well and I wasn't good at certain things. I like learning but I didn't know how to go about learning the proper way.

Charles

I only wanted to do it as a thing I always wanted to prove to myself since I missed out the first time around and I always said it because of the fear factor of the teachers that I couldn't take in anything. It is hard to learn under fear. I just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it. Hopefully it will lead to something better.

Many wanted to find work or a better job and to challenge themselves more.

Vera

Yeah, I left after my Inter Cert. I was 16, but I enjoyed what I was doing, I was working for X Company. I worked in one or two other jobs and looking back now I don't know why I ever done them and I know now that I am capable of doing a lot better.

Biddy

I thought I'll never get a job. I'll never work again unless I came back.

Bertie

The way I look at it, it's building the basis for the future if you want to get something in Wood Craft or Woodwork. If you want to start the apprenticeship or something, you are learning the basics, and so building the foundation.

The desire to improve literacy was also an important factor for both women and men.

Vivian
Well I run a Youth Club so I had to go to all these different meetings and I was sitting there and if I was to write down something I was passing the book to someone else and saying you write it down and that's when I felt I needed more education to do what I am going to do in the future.

Two women came back to education because they saw it as a stepping stone to third level.

Ailbe
The course that I am doing now is a stepping-stone to third level. No one has chosen the career or path that I am going on, cause as I said just doing the Leaving Cert was the ultimate.

Deirdre
I haven't decided what I want to do either. I wanted to do architecture that was just an idea I had in my head but you can only do it in a large city.

Two of the men came back to education because of a disability they suffered in workplace accidents.

Angus
As I said it was not by choice. I was told that I had to change that I cannot go back to the building trade anymore and because the hip replacement can shoot out at any given time, like getting up on a ladder, getting up on a stool, getting up on scaffolding that I have done every day for the last forty years now I can't do it anymore so, what options were there only in computers really.

Donagh
I did my Inter and then I went to FÁS and qualified as a plasterer, I was in an accident then, there is to be no lifting or carrying boxes. So, I came here 'cos I can't do that any more.

Boredom was a factor in one man's decision to return to education.

Rossa
Well, I just wanted to do something because I was bored, because I was used to working all my life. Then when I became idle I just was browned off.

One man came at the behest of his wife while another man was conscious that he had less education than his wife.

Garret
It wasn't me that heard about it, it was the wife. She told me to go in the summer. But I was minding the kids for the last five years, she was working. I did want to do something anyway.

Ultan
I couldn't pin-point it. My wife went to third level education, she's a teacher. In my opinion I was every bit as good as her. Now she might be better than me, I don't know.

Those in the farming group said that education was not as valued for those remaining on the land as it was for their siblings. While some went to agricultural college, completing second level school was not viewed as very important.

Ultan
It's only now that I think I should have stayed at school a bit longer than I did. I didn't think that way when I was 17 or 16 whenever I left school. I know that's the reason I left school. I know my mother and father thought 'he doesn't need any more'. He's at home now. He'll do'. And I did.

For those who did not make it to Agricultural College there was a perceived gap in their education.

Mark
I left before the Leaving Certificate. I never got a chance to go to agricultural college either. That's one thing I would have liked to have gotten. One of the reasons for coming back now was I got a chance of getting involved in a discussion group and as Diarmaid says the opportunity came up locally for the computer course so I was able to do that.

One woman came back to education because she wanted to get to grips with the technological revolution with which her children had become so familiar.

Moya
I will tell you now, why I came. To familiarise myself with modern technology, to understand what the kids were doing in the bedroom when they would go in there to the computer, to learn about the internet, what the hell was this internet that they were talking about on the radio and e-mailing. I hadn't a clue what they were talking about.

A number of men said that they felt that they had no option but to attend if they were to continue signing on for welfare payments.

Charles
Well the reason I came here was that I was called in on the dole and they said you'll have to do something now. So I decided I would take up a FAS course or come into VTOS. So that's why I came.

Declan
Why did I come here? The Labour Exchange.

Cian
Keep the dole off your back.

Colm
If you didn't come here you wouldn't get your Labour.

4. The Experience of Learning as an Adult

4.1 The First Day

In an effort to capture the feelings of the adults about returning to education, they were invited to reflect on how they felt on the first day they came to the adult education centre. Fear, anxiety and embarrassment characterised many of the men's feelings on the first day.

Niall

Hard, very hard. To actually walk up to reception and walk in the first day was very hard. You kept putting it off, I will go this week, I will go, I will go. It took me a few months to actually come here. As I said my friend is working here and he said come and I said 'Yeah' I will go next week.

Cyril

That was the worst day the first day. The day you had to cross the front door to come in here. Actually coming in to the building. And once I crossed the door it didn't matter a damn I just saw people in the same situation.

Dermot

When I came down I thought everyone would be very brainy and I was going to be the worst in the class, that was my one big fear. That's why I didn't open my mouth.

Charles

The first day Yeah. It is just like when you don't know anyone when you come into a strange place, how you are going to take to and relate to people. Am I going to stand out as being the worst? I won't be able to keep up. Anyone that filled in a form before me when they got up and handed it in, I would say Jesus, there is a brain, I am in trouble here. There would be a lot of negative thoughts in my head when I came in.

The women while acknowledging that it took a lot of courage to come back to education were very much less fearful and more likely to accentuate the positive. This was particularly so amongst the more advantaged women living in urban areas. Even for the women who were fearful, on their first day, this did not appear to carry the same level of intensity as for the men. Unlike the men, the women when asked about their feelings on the first day, did not dwell on that question but went on to talk about what they were actually learning.

Nora

It took a lot of courage…ring up, ring up, ring up so eventually the opening came I said I would chance it. It took a lot.

Maeve

I suppose we have good guts to come in here at our age.

Gertie

I was very nervous. But once I got talking, I had plenty of confidence in myself and actually I only built that up through meeting people and doing what I am doing but when I came in

here I had the fear first I was shaking but I was still able to speak but now I just talk and I have no problem.

4.2 Family Support

All the adults, with one exception, were supported by their immediate families in their decision to return to education.

Celia

Yeah I would give him my homework and he helps me with it because he is bright and I am not that good at it.

Gertie

They are giving you the encouragement as well to stay there.

Anna

Before I came here I was at home with my oldest daughter for seven years and then I came here. What does she think of it? Great.

Colin

My partner was really supportive. Yeah, great with me. She even got up in the mornings and made me breakfast.

Sam

I got a bit of slagging all right at home first. I just push that aside.

Bertie

Yeah, I got a load of support there from the girlfriend and her family and my own family.

Thomas

My son is coming up to nine, last year when I was sitting my Leaving certificate he told all his tutors, his friends and everything. He was very proud which made me quite pleased.

Christian

They can't believe it. I just told her its another step for someone who dropped out of school.

One man's partner would prefer if he were working as opposed to studying.

Donagh

She (partner) would prefer I was at work but knows the change, she worries will it be productive. The only thing about it is that there isn't any IT jobs company in the area so whether it will be productive or not…

4.3 Peer Support

Friends were less supportive, particularly the men's friends. The men were reluctant to talk to their male friends about their decision to go back to education.

Charles

Some of them knocked me for it and said what the hell are you doing going back doing your Leaving you should be out there working away. They just couldn't get a grip on why I was doing it. I didn't bring the subject up much to them. They just thought at your age what would you be doing going back to school, didn't you already go through that. Try and explain it and you are digging a bigger hole for yourself so they are going to come charging at you. You don't need that when you trying to enjoy a couple of pints.

Rossa

All my friends were wishing me well but they were slagging me as well.

Barry

I wouldn't talk to anyone. I wouldn't bring it up myself.

For a small number of men, peer approval was a non-issue.

Sam

A few encouraged me alright to come back but in my own way I wanted to come back for my own initiative and to try to help myself and move along.

Colin

Nobody said a word to me.

When the women were asked about the reaction of friends and the kind of support they were receiving from their friends, they tended to talk about the other women on the course.

Eileen

Everybody in here is willing to help. If I have a problem with something, Vera would give me her time and help me out or vice versa. I don't think there is any competitiveness between the students in the class. And I think that makes a huge difference because if anybody feels they are getting any way bogged down even if the teacher isn't there or at lunch time, you go through it with one of the girls.

Ailbhe

I think we encourage one another. If someone is stuck on something, you will ask and they will explain to you and then you'll say now I understand.

Vera

And I think we credit one another too, if someone does something good we will say fair play to you. We wouldn't envy them we would say that's a great job, take it, a pat on the back, you deserve it.

4.4 Barriers to Access

Some noticeable differences emerged in the kinds of barriers people experienced. Firstly, the lack of information is a problem. Adult learners in general find it difficult to get information about adult education, as there is still no one central information or access point, and there is a lack of co-ordination between agencies responsible for providing programmes. Adult learners find out about adult education opportunities in a variety of ways, including education, training, and welfare agencies. However, generally, this research shows that most women and men heard about adult education through friends or relatives. A number of men heard from their local social welfare office. None of the women heard about adult education in this way.

Declan

I always wanted to do something like this. But (I) never knew where to go or what to ask for or where. So when Labour said it I said Yeah I will come up 'cos I always wanted to do something for my reading and writing.

Locational barriers and distance from learning centres were identified by people living in rural areas. Cost and bureaucracy were also identified as barriers. Men were more likely to identify barriers than were women.

Malachy

Travel is a problem. I don't have a car.

Diarmaid

Another point about the computer class was the opportunity was there for us locally. If we were to continue in any sort of education, time would be a problem and our location would be a problem. The fact that there was a course locally, if it was in a town or city you wouldn't be going.

Some of the travel problems related to work experience.

Moya

On our work experience we had to go in every morning. It took us an hour and a quarter some mornings to get into the city, and then find parking.

Cost both in terms of real costs and opportunity costs are a problem for many of the adults.

Mabel

Not getting a wage in and you find you are struggling.

Bertie

Budget and paying for things. That's why I think people drop out of classes like this. Drop out of Interior Design, Art and Woodcraft because maybe they haven't the money to pay for the materials that they need? So what are we getting £100, £85, £115 a week? Some people only get £85. Materials like upholstery may come to £60, £70 to get the materials. Sure you can't live off that.

For some of the learners, particularly women who were working full-time in the home, this was their first paid work in a long number of years, if not the actual first time they got paid.

Mabel

Well I suppose the other good thing is I mean we get a salary every week for training and me, I am not a bit embarrassed. It was the first time in my life and I am fifty years of age that I ever got anything for nothing, yet I am learning and I think that is great. It was a great incentive……

Two men said they encountered a lot of bureaucracy in attempting to return to education and they had to negotiate with the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs to ensure they could return to education and retain their welfare entitlements. Both expressed fears that their entitlements would be cut off.

Angus

Yeah I am married, the difficulty arose while I was going to have to get permission to the do the course from social welfare. Technically you have to write and get permission to do these courses because you are on disability that is the only problem I had. The family were a bit concerned, (that I) could be cut off while (I was) doing these courses. Something I didn't know was that I could be in trouble and I could be cut off and money could be held back.

Garret

I found the same thing there that Angus had because my wife works and gets children's allowance and I don't get any dole or anything like that. When I went down to FÁS you had to be six months unemployed. Me I am unemployed three or four years. I had to mind the kids and I didn't receive the dole and no one says to me well you are not entitled to it or anything. You are caught in a catch twenty-two. They are not giving you a chance at the whip at all.

Peter

They put up barriers. They told me I am not entitled to because I am not getting the dole and I mean what do they want me to do? They are more or less telling you to go out and get a job and then come back in six months.

One middle-aged man said that confidence or lack of confidence is a barrier.

Tadhg

You're off the system so long your brain is gone a bit rusty. You're inclined to say that I've left school and I'm at home. Just lack of confidence.

4.5 Being back

Without exception the adults were well pleased to have made the decision to come back to education.

Dermot

Great, from day one. I find a difference inside myself from last year with Junior Cert. Now Leaving Cert I never thought I would be able to do any of that but I think it was just the fact

that I was an adult, things have now quietened down. I can now read things, I understood things more. And I am flying it now . It is completely not like school now, it is just a more relaxed feeling and you want to learn. You know it is for your own benefit.

One man said that he has gained in confidence as a result of participation in his group.

Eoin
I would have to come back to the discussion group again and I have to say that I have gained an amount of confidence from it and it has been a major influence ...

The women were equally positive.

Gráinne
I think this is a marvellous course.

Kathy
The time that I'm here compared to when I wasn't in school. Well I like (it here) more now than when I was in school, but here its something more relaxed altogether…the attitude and that…

May
I would think the general relaxed atmosphere, you are learning and you don't really realise you are learning. There is no major pressure.

Moya
It is just unbelievable. I just cannot describe it, after eighteen years at home and thanks to this group here and this little small prefab office. Maybe some day the Government will think of a little place like this and put proper facilities and maybe put funding into it.

4.6 Attitudes to Tutors

While the men were reluctant to work in single-gender groups, their reluctance to work with women did not extend to having women tutors. While some men were strongly in favour of having women as tutors, others were of the opinion that gender was not an issue.

Rossa
Women are easier to approach and they are better able to understand the situation. I find the women teachers better than men and I got more from them.

Dermot
I wouldn't like a woman teacher to teach me Carpentry or Woodwork and then again I may be wrong. There is so much women can do that we are not able to do.

Charles
It doesn't really matter as long as the teacher is explaining stuff to me.

Rossa

I was just thinking in general that women are more understanding by nature. They are more sympathetic. More patient I would say.

Younger men were more likely to say that the gender of the tutor was irrelevant. In general, the learners were very happy with the standard of tutoring and their relationship with the tutors.

Gertie

They encourage us. They make us feel comfortable and at ease.

Monica

They are on the same level. They don't treat you as a student

The age of the tutor was not an issue for most of the women. Some, but not all of the men expressed a preference for older tutors as they felt that they would have more experience.

Angus

You can't beat experience, experience comes with age, and you cannot put an old head on young shoulders.

Some men expressed a preference for having tutors from the same social class while others felt this was not an issue. The issue of social class did not emerge in any of the women's discussions groups.

Garret

I think working class teachers have more experience. I would like the teachers to be like me.

Colm

I'd rather working class teachers because that's the class I'm from and they know what would be interesting to you. From my own experiences most middle class teachers automatically assume that everybody living in the flats is the same and you will find that's not so where I lived…

Some interviewees identified the following characteristics in a good tutor:

Rossa

Tolerant, understanding, one thing the teacher should have is belief in the pupils and that works both ways and if you feel that your teacher believes in you, you are more inclined to react and put more effort in. But if you get a negative vibe from a teacher, you turn out working in a negative manner.

5. The Learning Environment

5.1 Atmosphere

Both women and men spoke about the importance of learning in a non-pressurised, non-judgemental environment, the need for a sense of humour and in general the need for a relaxed, non-intimidatory atmosphere. They also were very much of the opinion that the onus is on the teacher / tutor to create a good learning environment.

Aengus

What is very important in terms of learning is the atmosphere and the environment and if it is any way intimidatory or bullying… A caring environment.

Derval

You're not treated like a child and if you didn't come to a class they weren't asking where were you, they left it up to yourself.

Being able to learn in a non-pressurised environment was identified as a prerequisite in practically all of the groups.

Moya

It is important to me anyhow and what I like about here is you work to your own ability. No one pressurises you.

Eileen

You make choices about the course but the fact that its such a nice atmosphere it makes it easier to come in on a Monday morning. You know you are coming into a place where you know you are going to meet up with the girls and have a cup of tea before you start your classes.

The adults also emphasised the importance of not being compared to other learners.

Doreen

You don't have to be as good as Moya or Nora or be as good as anybody else. You do what you can do yourself and you get merit for that. Whereas in school, my experience of school was that you were always compared to somebody else, you were judged on somebody else's ability. It was why can't you do it, this one can do it…

Moya

Or a sister before you…

Mabel

…or your Grandfather.

Humour was regarded as hugely important in ensuring that the setting was conducive to learning.

Colm

We are all having a bit of craic with each other and we are getting on well and that's really important.

Senan

Do you know what I mean, the men now they are just, laughing and joking maybe about the computers or that…

5.2 Organisation of Classes

Between ten and fifteen was the preferred class size of both women and men.

Dermot

What helps me to learn is the small classes. For some reason I find it harder if there is 14 in a class but if there is about 4 or 5 I can fly away. I feel less self conscious about your answers. There is less there. For me that works anyway.

There was no gender difference in the preferred length of class. The preferred option was classes of about one hour with flexibility within that time. Both women and men said that they preferred informal classroom settings.

Diarmaid

The layout of the room is very important. I think people sitting behind you doesn't work at all. Like when we're grouped it works perfectly.

One group said that it was important that the room is warm and comfortable. The days of sitting in drafty halls are over.

Luke

You don't want a big hall any more – a room like this is all you want, warm comfortable.

The demand for single gender education was striking. Older and more working class men were particularly vociferous in support of single-gender groupings. When invited to be more specific, the learners responded as follows:

Colm

Our group is only men and I would prefer it anyway. Men would be more embarrassed with women there, I don't mind asking questions if there is a man there…

Rory

We just want to be with men. The fact is that we don't feel comfortable in the same room as women learners. As you are coming more and more you start saying hello to people and you realise they are the same as you.

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Terry

I don't like that situation. And in most of the groups I will tell you the thing there about the CDPs they are all ladies and things get complicated with ladies…..They talk afterwards, they talk to their neighbours, they talk to their whoever. Men keep things to themselves.

Maurice

Men. I would say men. We have more trust in men, they won't repeat or if they do it won't be of any importance. Maybe the younger crowd, the age group might be different. Either being shy or whatever, if you make a fool of yourself, say the wrong thing at the wrong time. If you make a mistake when there are men there they kind of understand.

Ultan

It shouldn't change it but it will – if there was a woman or five women in the group and let them be our wives or let them be farmers, in their own right, but it wouldn't change the focus of the group but it would change the interaction of the group. Course it's bound to. I wouldn't think it would be negative now in any way.

The women were less emphatic in their opinions:

Hanora

I wouldn't mind if the group was half and half, no. Five and five grand, 50-50.

Mabel

Well we are happy with what we have, more than happy but if we had men, I mean if you were in a job you would have male [colleagues]. When I was on work experience I had the company of a man, they are such different company you would have a lot of laughter as well.

Doreen

You would never get ten men to sit down and to say if one of their children was sick they either would stay out completely or they would come in and get on with what they are doing.

Most respondents preferred working in groups. However, a minority felt that group discussion slowed down the progress of the group, especially in the case of adults who were studying for exams.

Thomas

The problem here is we only have nine months to do it and you really can't hold up the class too much. In every class if you had a general discussion you would never get anywhere you have to keep moving forward all the time.

Louis

I would prefer to be in a group like this you get other ideas plus it would give you a wider range of things.

Garret

Group work. As the boys said there you tend to wander on your own. You could have a laugh. It is all part of that. You can copy learning.

Fergal

I think people will answer questions easier and they will ask questions much easier in the group because the group is not going to sneer or run them down. You can make mistakes and no one is going to laugh and then in group discussion there is teamwork, you can perform better.

Saul

Well, we're a discussion group. We learn from one another, one another's ideas.

Two people argued that while working in a group is important, that individual work and responsibility is also important.

Dermot

I think it actually works both ways because if you know you are part of a group you are happy. But you have got to be as an individual with your own ideas. You need to feel that you are part of a team and you also need to do your own work and be responsible for it.

5.3 Learning Programmes

There were some clear gender differences in the subjects / learning activities in which the adults were engaged. While computer studies were common to both women and men, men were more likely to be involved in craft and business learning than were women. For example the men in one rural area were involved in basket making, creel making, painting houses and planting strawberries. Two other men's groups were involved in painting and both are planning an art exhibition. The young men involved in the CYTW do computers, communications, drama, drug awareness. The following excerpt from the conversation on what they are studying reflects a great diversity both in levels and in subjects.

Christian

Woodwork. The first year I came I studied the Junior Cert. but I never completed it, the second year and this year now I am doing woodwork.

Fachtna

Last year I did my Leaving Cert. I am doing information technology. Diploma in computer applications. Its NCVA.

Thomas

I'm doing the Leaving Cert. I'm doing 7 subjects – History English Maths, Biology, Business Studies and German at Junior Certificate.

One group of urban women were doing computers at NCVA, Foundation, Level 1 or Level 2. Some of them also taking Leaving Certificate subjects like English, Business Studies, Geography or Home Economics. A similar picture applies to an urban men's group, where

some of the men were doing Leaving Certificate English, Maths, History, Business, while others were doing Interior Decorating and Woodwork. One urban group of women were all except two doing the Junior Certificate, mostly at Foundation level. One was doing childcare (NCVA) and the second was doing Business Studies (NCVA). One urban group of men all came to improve their literacy levels. One rural group of men came together initially as a monthly discussion group and then decided that they needed computer skills. One rural women's group started with Basic Computers (City and Guilds) then progressed on to the ECDL. They also went on a two-week work experience. They are currently doing Computerised Accounts (City and Guilds).

One of the women's groups did some work on political education. Some said that they have changed their voting intentions as a result. Others have registered for the first time. The women were very positive about this part of their work. The men felt very differently about voting and politics in general.

Oonagh
I never voted before. I just never bothered I wouldn't know anything about it but I got a thing in the door last week and I started to fill it out so I posted it off to get a voting card.

Vivian
I used do that all the time I used to go with my Granddad. And every time he ticked a box I would just tick it just because he was ticking it. I never knew what I was doing. And now I know what they are for.

Eamonn
I wouldn't go out of my way to vote. If I had something to do then I would rather do the thing instead of going to vote. It wouldn't bother me if I did or didn't.

5.4 Teaching Resources and Methodology

Both women and men felt that they did not learn very well in formal lecture situations. With regard to the use of technology, the men were more likely to have access to technology and to use it.

Dermot
I find videos a great help. If you don't understand it you just rewind it and watch it again. You can't ask the teacher to repeat it over and over again, so I think they are a great help. You can replay it as often as you want. So that appeals.

Bertie
Yeah, I would like to be on computers for 2, 3 hours messing around with it myself on the Internet or whatever.

Charles
I only started to get on the Internet here about a week ago and I mean I am getting addicted to it straight away. You can find out just about anything on it. Any information on anything it's there for you.

One man felt that he was too old to learn computers.

Eugene
I haven't a clue what it is all about and I am too old now to learn all those things. I can hardly turn on television.

Those with literacy difficulties were least likely to use computer technology or the Internet. The women tended to see computers in a functional way, rather than as a tool for learning. None of the women spoke about the Internet. Two of the men said they had used computer packages to help them in learning how to spell.

Dillie
There is loads more to learn about computers.

Declan
I find it very interesting. As you said benefiting the spelling, but you are also learning to use them, I like that.

With regards to note taking, the women learners were much more likely to write out key points and summaries than were men. Only one man said that writing something down helps him to learn.

Brigit
If I went into a classroom and the teacher allowed no notes I would need to write them down on my hand no matter. I'd learn from the notes, when it's written down.

Charles
If you write it down you will never forget it. It helps you to remember. Sometimes you get stuck on what you are writing about and get frustrated and worked up about it and you feel like getting up and walking out especially if you can't relate to the teacher. They might just tell you, you have 15 minutes to write down stuff and you are not sure what you have to write down.

6. The Learning Process

6.1 Approaches to learning

Many of the learners said that they require a step by step approach and that they do not like having to absorb large chunks of information. This was common to both women and men.

Jean
In Maths, for instance, it shows me how to break up the math, the sums so you can work at it rather than looking at it and running away from it. Break it down in stages and I found that a great achievement to be able to do Maths. I found that wonderful. And I found the way I was being taught step-by-step and stage-by-stage even in the reading. Before this I would have just pretended I was learning. I would have sat there and listened and left the room that evening and that was it, I would come back in the next day and I was inclined to wander off as well in class.

Declan

She breaks the words down. They give you sheets and they say tick off the words.

One area where there is a discernible difference between men and women is in their perception of how quickly or slowly they actually learn. More men tended to describe themselves as impatient learners.

Niall

No patience. No I have not got much patience at all. When things aren't going right in the computers I just want to get up and walk out.

Diarmaid

I wouldn't read a manual. I'd have a go at what I want to achieve but as regards over-analysing things, I hate that. I haven't patience for over-analysing. I haven't patience …I'm possibly impetuous.

There was a lot of discussion on who asks questions and in what circumstances people feel comfortable asking questions. In general, the women learners have no difficulty asking questions and the men feel that they can only ask questions in particular circumstances. One group of women felt that men in mixed gender groups are reluctant to ask questions, a point of view that was borne out in one all male discussion group. One woman felt that men have difficulty admitting that they do not know something.

Gertie

Well before, I never asked questions in school and I never learned so now I am here to learn and what I don't know I am going to ask and find out. If you don't ask you will never learn.

Jacqueline

If the teacher said, is there anybody now that doesn't understand that please tell me, 99% of the time it will be a girl that will say I don't understand it.

Rory

Men would be more embarrassed with women there, I don't mind asking questions if there is a man there. If there was a woman there, there wouldn't be a word out of us.

In addition to finding it difficult asking questions if women are present, some men agreed that they have difficulty admitting that they do not know something. However, this is not necessarily the case for younger men.

Garret

If it was in front of others and it was all women mostly, no offence to them but you just don't want to make an idiot of yourself.

Fergal

If you don't understand something you might as well just ask what do they mean. There is no point sitting in class not knowing what someone is talking about. Some men don't care. That's what I think. That is my own opinion. I wouldn't care. I am my own person.

6.2 Sharing personal experiences

Adult and community education nearly always starts from participants' own experience. Initially there was very strong resistance by men to personal disclosure in class. Yet in the course of the discussions many of the men revealed personal details and were prepared to discuss issues without any apparent hesitation.

Bertie

I like to keep my personal life to myself. The word personal is your own so I like to keep it to myself.

Mark

It would be completely inappropriate. I think a farming group wouldn't really be the place to be talking about a subject like that.

Garret

Well I mean it would depend if it was relevant to the situation well and good. It is good to get it out sometimes. [With] someone that you can really trust.

6.3 Feedback on Learning

Both women and men like regular feedback and like to have their progress tested.
One group of men felt that they did not get sufficient feedback and some would like more regular testing. For those with literacy difficulties feedback was particularly important.

John

Well you do get feedback I think because she will tell you especially in the reading and spelling classes, I find that the reading and writing is coming on very good. In the reading and writing class she says do you find yourselves that you think you have got better, she often says that.

6.4 Home as a learning environment

Very few adults do homework while those with children tend to do it, if at all, after the children have gone to bed. Those who did learning work at home said that it was difficult to find the time. In only one group did the adults do any substantial homework activity with their children. They also spoke in general about learning from other family members.

Saul

I'd go over it yes. I'd do stuff now with my ten year old. It also makes you think more about education, see what they are doing.

Diarmaid

Yes, I've sat at the computer with the kids, both before I started the course and since.

Mark

I have a more funny situation now than the rest of the lads actually. I have three tutors at home and I can only learn from one of them – one of the girls. My wife has a computer under her all day. She is quite good at it. Saying that, there is a few things that we have picked up in our exercises that she would not be familiar with. But I can call up my daughter if I get locked up or the computer freezes or something like that she can get me back in action right away. I kind of find it hard to learn from my wife because she goes along with her fingers and points and I am supposed to grasp it but my daughter will let me figure it out for myself. She will show me but let me do it or I'll have to do it because she'll make it very very easy.

Matthew

A few of the group showed interest in doing computers, so one particular day we decided that maybe we'd get enough between us to organise a course of our own. This will be our third night tomorrow. Two hours a night. Eight nights.

One woman in trying to describe the way her decision to return to education affected her life said that she gave up watching soap operas for education. She is left with the last word.

Ailbhe

Yeah, I miss my soaps for Maths.

Section 2 The Views of the Tutors

A total number of eighteen tutors participated in two discussion groups, one in Limerick and one in Dublin. These tutors worked on a range of programmes, including literacy and basic education, Youthreach, VTOS, Community Training Workshops, and courses run by FÁS and Teagasc. As in the first section, pseudonyms will be used throughout.

1. Barriers to access

1.1 Perceptions of Learners' School Experiences.

The tutors' perceptions of the learners' school experiences tally with how the bulk of the learners described their early school experience. There was general recognition that the quality of initial education, in particular for people from working class and inner city areas was very unsatisfactory. For such people, the prospect of returning to education was daunting. In recognition of such difficulties, one tutor suggested that one of the most important roles within an adult education centre is the receptionist.

Jenny

We need to have somebody here on reception that is extremely approachable, which we have. It is so important to create a very welcoming impression from the beginning.

1.2 Personal circumstances

One tutor said that very often there is not sufficient recognition of how problematic are the lives of many adults and how such problems can prevent them from returning to education.

Ray

We have had to deal with attempted suicides, homelessness, young people living on the street, court cases, drugs, young fathers. .

Sally

pretty much the same. You would have a lot of, quite a few people who would be homeless and have a few issues around drugs or recovery and then I suppose crime.

1.3 Childcare and family responsibilities

Responsibility for children was perceived as both a barrier and a motivation to education. Echoing what the adult male learners said, the tutors suggested that children were a motivating factor for men but that the difficulty women encountered in finding childcare was a barrier to their participation.

Claire

One of the barriers is having children particularly for the women. That and all the responsibilities of adult life.

Kieran

One of the groups were saying how it still is the mother who gets the responsibility for sorting out the kids. The fathers don't get the same pressure as the mothers get.

For men, responsibility for children was a motivating factor.

Lisa

I think that many of the men in their thirties and forties who have come back would have come back in order to help their children with their education. The big gain was that they were better able to handle things like parent-teachers meetings…They would have avoided them before…

According to the tutors, women still have primary responsibility for maintaining the home and they have to juggle their return to education with a host of other responsibilities.

Heather

The barriers for women in education have not really changed all that much. It is not even just the question of childcare or that; it is all the other things that are involved. If the woman decides to go back to school you have all these kind of invisible pressures against her, not just trying to fit in cooking the dinner or whatever, doing your homework. Also you have the other little kind of pressures, like 'what are you doing that for'? ' Your place is here in the home. Likewise at night the woman can't just up and out and go to the classes at night. So, there is still a lot of what I call invisible barriers, that nobody speaks about.

Heather was talking from personal experience as she returned to education as a mature student and then qualified as a tutor.

Heather

I would have been a mature student myself. I know how hard it is to try to be everything. You really do have to be committed. If it was hard for me it is a lot harder for somebody with younger children. Not everybody is going to have somebody at home. Actually I would say very few are going to have somebody at home that would say, 'oh, that is great, off you go to classes now'. Whereas the men can do all of that and would be encouraged even at home and from all sides. I think it is those invisible barriers that are still very much around.

Lisa

I don't think it is just childcare. Women have to be home to do the tea and if they were here all day there was the washing and the cleaning and the dusting to be caught up on. When that is finished it is too late to come in here

Richard

Really I think what Lisa has said there makes sense. Yeah, I feel with some of the students here they have not only a lack of support but sometimes opposition to what they are doing. It does make life difficult for some of them who are trying and they are coming in against that kind of a background.

1.4 Attitudes to learning

The barriers men experience are, at the same time, more internal than external and both are very much connected. According to one tutor, there is a stigma attached to men returning to education. This stigma is internalised by many men who are in turn very embarrassed about their level of education. Such embarrassment may be one of the reasons why some men are reluctant to talk about their return to education

Lisa

The bus driver who drove them in and out the local bus routes, he would say I hear you are out with your school bag. There was a lot of joking. The interesting thing is, a lot of people were saying they had trouble with neighbours laughing. One guy had a terrible roasting from a neighbour across the road and it wasn't at all funny.

Carmel

Yeah. I think the embarrassment thing is huge for men.

One tutor said that men are more likely to come to education on their own while women are more likely to come with a friend. The tutor linked this to male embarrassment. This tutor's comments on how difficult the first day can be for students reflects what the adult learners, particularly the men said in their discussion group.

Ivor

I think it is equally difficult for both, but the women are more inclined to come with a friend whereas the men usually, not always, come on their own. They all talk about the difficulty

and how hard it was to actually come the first day, to look for an application form, that that was the most difficult thing.

One tutor said that there were strong cultural factors which adults brought with them into education. One of these was the norms that governed the relationships between men and women.

Sally

A lot of our Centres are based in the inner city. Culturally I am starting to learn that there is a huge division between men and women within the community and that carries forward into the centre. Men and women really don't communicate (or) there is very poor communication. There is a lot of conflict between men and women on a lot of levels within the community.

Another tutor continued on this theme.

Janet

There is a lot of slagging that goes on between them, men and women. Between the men and the women the slagging is unbelievable. You would just be going 'oh my God'. I walk away at times because it is fairly heavy going you know…

Another tutor argued that group cultures can be very restricting and that it is difficult for people to break out of these imposed restrictions.

Ivor

I see it with my son's group. It is very, very hard to break out of the group to do something different because everybody will focus in on you and you could get ostracised or whatever. Yeah, I think the women are more tolerant of each other. That is what I meant by males being threatened by the group that they are in, if people start improving themselves.

1.5 Social class

There was consensus amongst the tutors that the social class of the tutor did not make any difference. However, one tutor felt that having students from different social classes in the one group could be problematic.

Julian

Students don't see any problem if the tutor is of a certain social class. But within the class of students, if one person came from a middle class background, …there was a big problem in teaching that group. It is very hard to deal with.

1.6 Financial circumstances

One of the tutors was anxious to draw attention to the opportunity costs involved in accessing education, particularly for poor people.

Veronica

There is a fellow in my group actually he is about twenty-five. He is very bright. He is street wise. He has being doing odd jobs since he left school at the age of 15. He actually had to turn down jobs to come to the Centre and he might be missing for two days or whatever because he sort of works for someone, so there is that kind of a thing…

1.7 Family Support

In a departure from what the students had to say, the tutors thought that women learners get very little support from their male partners at home and that men are more likely to resist women's participation in education. Conversely, women are, according to the tutors, much more likely to support their male partners.

Lisa

Women tend to be very much less supported in what they are doing. Women tend to be leaving their children to childminders if they have children at that age, or dropping their children to school, collecting them, running the house with not a lot of extra support. Men (when they are studying) hand all that over to all the women at home.

Lisa went on to say that women are more likely to keep their intentions about returning to education quiet until they are about to return, whereas men are more likely to discuss and plan aloud.

Lisa

One of the things that is very significant is that prior to the course it is much more likely that men would have discussed at home or talked about what they are going to do. The women don't discuss it as much at home and when they do they tend to find that people at home don't push them or encourage them quite as much to go forward. There is resistance to them moving out and moving on. I think women have to be very focused to get their Leaving Cert. because they are going to have to do it on their own. They are going to have to find time among so many other things. Sometimes they may miss time and have to catch up in a way that the men can often get somebody else to cover for what has to be done.

Lisa reported that men are more likely than women to avail of study facilities in the evening than are women. She thought men found it easier to get out of the house in the evening as they had fewer home responsibilities.

Lisa

We have a study facility available here at night and it is interesting to see it is mainly males who use it…I think is because they would be free to come back and don't have other things that they have to do at night.

One tutor reported that in rural areas, getting the support of women, particularly mothers is very important in getting young farmers to access education. Fathers try to block their son's return to education partly because of the pressure of work. This tutor argued that mothers put a greater value on education for their farming sons. This view would appear to be compatible with what the farmers themselves said.

Eoin

It was always said that rural families valued education as a means to improve their life, that the farm could only support one and there was often more than one child. That's true in general. But it is not particularly true of the son who stays at home. The parents would often be quite reluctant to even put them forward for education, even agricultural education for fear they might learn too much and see that this was not a hugely attractive way of life. The father is also afraid that he might lose that extra pair of hands. If I can get to the mother in those situations I am pushing an open door. I always make it my business to get the mother, I make sure that if she is not there and not available I ring another day or I call another day.

1.8 Peer Support

The tutors were very conscious that vulnerabilities can come to the fore in an educational setting and that men are particularly vulnerable to having the world they have constructed publicly undermined. The fact that men are actually returning to education and not getting a job can in itself be problematic.

Claire

I think the perception of the male being the breadwinner, even though it is diminishing, is still very strong.

Janet

There is an element of not showing any kind of vulnerability around their skills or whatever, that's an issue for men.

One tutor observed that there is greater pressure on men to conform to a particular construct of masculinity and this is particularly the case in rural areas. He suggests that there is greater peer criticism of what might be regarded as non-traditional forms of masculinity. Slagging is a form of social control.

Ivor

What really surprised me, living in a rural area is how much people slag each other. You are not encouraged to do for yourself. I am involved in Junior soccer and one of the things I had to do is to get young lads to stop slagging each other. When somebody makes a mistake, they are pulled down straight away.

2. The Learning Environment

2.1 The Role of the Tutor

The tutors made several comments on their own role and what constitutes a good tutor, but they also made some general comments on the conditions of tutors, the turnover of tutors and how these conditions affect students and their learning. One tutor felt that there is a lot of wastage in the adult education sector as each centre develops its own materials and resources.

Ray

In the last four or five years there has been a high turnover of staff and no in-service training really for the new staff that have come in.

Another tutor said that adult education work, particularly literacy work is very isolating and that such isolation contributes to the high turnover. Sally expressed concern that there is a lot of unnecessary duplication of effort

Sally

There is a sense sometimes that you are reinventing the wheel. The way the curriculum is set out means that you don't have to follow specific materials and you can come up with your own which will suit your group. But sometimes there can be a lot of time and energy put into redeveloping materials which, if they are not shared are kind of wasted. There is a real sense of human resources being used badly. I think it is about organising some materials between centres

Tutors are always learning, and, given the lack of training for their job, they are sometimes unprepared for the work they have to do.

Kieran

A lot of it is self-learning. You enter into a Centre and you are given module descriptors. For instance if it were B tech or City and Guilds you are given the curriculum you are to follow and you as a tutor are to go and research it yourself. It is self-learning and peer learning through your colleagues, asking questions and learning through your students as well. There is an awful lot of that in adult education.

Two tutors identified the absence of permanent career and pay structure as having a negative impact on learning and continuity.

Jack

A lot of people have worked really hard (yet) there is no sort of progression or permanent employment for them. They feel that they are working really, really hard and really, really enjoying it but a time comes where a lot of people decide whether they have to make choices and move on into another area. I think that that is really the unfortunate thing that a lot of people have been lost because of that.

Helen

The salary in comparison to the workload is just not enough. I mean they are feeling severe pressure. It is not an incentive for them to stay on and then they have the staff turnover thing again.

The relationship between tutor and students is crucial to the learning experience. One tutor said that she could build a relationship more easily with women students.

Carmel

Multi-functional, buckets of patience, sense of humour. A sense of humour is very important?…With the women I would develop a relationship much quicker, they would confide in me, talk about things, share experiences.

Lisa

You have got to be excited about what you are teaching. Because it is that excitement which carries over. But they won't be accepted, someone that is being patronising. You can't cross that line.

One tutor said that students were very conscious of the level of attention they each get from a tutor and students are quick to pick up on any disproportionate attention that might be given to males or to females.

Lisa

I think both genders would be equally likely to notice or to feel sometimes that they are not being given enough attention. I don't think that that comes from either one. I think maybe both are quick to come up and say 'well the men seem to be getting more attention', or 'the women seem to be getting more attention than the men are'.

Two tutors said that tutors need to be open with their students and that students are quick to sense if tutors are being insincere or patronising.

Helen

I think if you are very open or if you are yourself they appreciate it, and they are interested to find out where you come from and the difference can be really enriching.

2.2 Physical Environment

There was general consensus that the physical environment plays a crucial part in creating a good learning environment.

Ivor

I am after getting a new premises a new room and it has made a huge difference. We are accessing it for different literacy classes, the mother and toddler group even though it is one way of introducing them to family learning. I have a kitchen and a toilet and these things mean so much to the students and the room is bright and it is modern and it is inviting for them to come in.

Within the classroom a more informal seating arrangement is, where possible, regarded as the ideal.

Lisa

When you talk about atmosphere our classrooms are all laid out like this we don't have classrooms with their own seats. We sit round in circles.

2.3 Organisation of Classes

The tutor's comments on class size matched that of the students. The ideal class size is between ten and fifteen. One tutor commented that class size should be dictated by the ability of the students. Weaker ability students need smaller numbers, whereas Leaving Certificate students can live with larger classes.

The tutors felt that many students but particularly men feel more comfortable in single gender settings and this perception is borne out by what many of the men had to say. According to one tutor some men were reluctant to come to the Centre because it was perceived (incorrectly) by them to have been a Centre for women.

Sally

There was a big perception amongst the men in our Centre that it was a Women's Centre. A few men that were coming in kind of thought, 'this is the women's centre'. But now we have just had somebody employed to develop the men's education and that was partly around the fact that they didn't want to be seen in the centre where it was all women.

Once in the Centre, both women and men tend to self-select into single-gender groups both in terms of the classes they attend and also in terms of the facilities they use.

Janet

A lot of the groups would self-select into one sex over time. Certainly a couple of groups I worked with, if there was a core of more men than women it would become a men's group over time, and if there were more women than men it would become a women's group. That would actually just happen quite a lot I would say. I think they would probably feel more comfortable going into an all men's group than going into a mixed group.

Sally

We have a canteen in the Centre. In September, my men's group started [saying] 'where are we going to have your tea'? 'We don't want to go in when all the women are there'. So I decided to get a kettle and biscuits and said 'we will set it up in the room'.

2.4 Approaches to Learning

The tutors perceived a number of differences in the way women and men negotiate learning. One of the factors that impedes men's ability to learn, according to one tutor, is fear, a fear based on macho values.

Heather

I would have a lot of young boys and girls. They are different in the way that they learn. The girls are quick to come forward and say 'oh, I can't', but the boys will not. The girls will come forward quicker but as a result they learn quicker. They are not afraid to seem foolish whereas the boys always have to have this macho image and they are ashamed to say that they don't know so they are more likely to come in and mess act.

One tutor said that women are more interested in the process of education than are men.

Sally

I think that the women are more interested in the process, in the actual process or in the learning and enjoying the sessions rather than the kind of end result but a lot of the men are sort of coming in for one class to do their Leaving Cert.

The majority of tutors agreed that women learners are more willing to ask questions than are men, a view with which the students concurred.

Ray

Even though the class I teach is very practical, the women would tend to ask more. Maybe that is because traditionally they wouldn't have had the skills and wouldn't have worked in wood before. They would be more eager to ask and to find out how to do this and the names of stuff. The men maybe again not to let the side down maybe they think they should know how to use a saw and stuff. They would try and do that on their own and maybe go off on a tangent and do something wrong. But I definitely think women are more eager to do it properly the first time and they will ask. The lads will kind of chance it and see what happens.

Janet

I think that men are much more embarrassed about asking questions with reading and writing in basic groups and much more uncomfortable about appearance. I think that is not only for younger men I think that goes across the board.

Maureen

I think that women are more demanding that if they want something to be shown on the computer or a Maths problem or whatever that they are gonna say 'will you fix this for me'. Whereas the men are more inclined to sit there and work it out for themselves.

One tutor thought that the self-esteem of men coming to classes was lower and this had an obvious impact on their confidence and their ability / willingness to ask questions.

Carmel

I notice with the male students, it takes a long time for their self esteem to build up. All the human baggage they bring with them.

Rather than ask questions in class, the men will often approach the tutor afterwards.

Veronica

The men are great at getting you outside the room if they want to know something, on your way out they will grab you on the way out.

One tutor felt that men were more assertive than women were and did not hesitate to say what they wanted.

Lisa

Men would say in class, 'could you give me that again'? or 'what do you mean by that' ? I would have found that in the classrooms the men tend to be assertive. The women would

tend to negotiate a little bit more. They wouldn't kind of say flat out 'I am not doing that' or 'I am not interested in that' or whatever. The book December Bride is on at the moment and I remember saying we might do this two years ago and one guy saying 'no, I know what that is about, I am not touching that book'. No negotiations, straight out. The women would come more gently, more softly. You can cajole them.

She went on to say that men are also more likely to persist.

Lisa
I think both probably ask questions but men are more likely to persist. When you give the answer they are more likely to come back for further clarification. I think women maybe sit back and think about what you said and then maybe come back to you, whereas men are more likely to keep going with it.

Embarrassment was a theme that the tutors returned to again and again. According to the tutors, it was something many of the men experienced, particularly literacy students.

John
I remember a chap who was working with us he was in a group and he got very embarrassed because he didn't know stuff that was going on and it was a mixed group. I am thinking that the lads around 18, 19, they are macho. There is a lot of embarrassment. They like girls and think they are good looking but they don't like to think that they are stupid and so there is a lot of embarrassment there. I think that in a mixed group that could be an issue. It might be better letting these guys with another bunch of guys where they could support one another.

One tutor said that men find some aspects of experiental learning embarrassing, particularly fun / game type activities.

Janet
Very often when you do something that is a bit creative or something they [the men] want to know why you are doing it …It was just a kind of ice-breaker and they are really embarrassed. Why do you want us to do this? Whereas women I think go with the flow and most of the time they are open to almost anything.

Many women in the home, who return to education, are shy, particularly on the first day.

Jenny
A lot of them were twenty years probably at home and they found when they actually came into it at first they were shy and weren't sure if they were going to come the next day.

One tutor thought that women were more committed learners.

Eoin
We have some females who want training in Agriculture, and they are very committed because obviously in a physical job and a job that hasn't been particularly open to women

they have to be very committed to want to have anything to do with agriculture/farming. So the ones we get are great students. They are excellent, they are committed, they want to do it, and they have a focus on their lives so we have absolutely zero problems with it. They are much more mature when they come to us.

The general consensus was that men are less patient learners than are women, they are more likely to get frustrated and give up. This strongly concurs with the students' views of themselves as learners. This is the one significant area where a difference can be identified between the learning styles of women and men.

Lisa

The men move on before they have digested what you have given them. I also think that maybe when things are a little bit difficult the men may be quicker to come to the point where they say; 'I am not doing it'. I think the woman will go away and persist and persist until she has got it. I think the men think, 'I can't do this' and give up.

John

Sometimes you can see one or two of the men looking at the others and you can see people going um… Then suddenly you can see the person changing and it is nearly always the guys where they start getting a little bit you know frustrated and restless. They want to be going out, going for a smoke and then they are not coming back after dinner. You spend a lot of your time then trying to keep them on board.

Ray

Again it comes back to frustration, you see the frustration building up on the men more and that will be it, it does have to stop. Whereas the women will go on more, they will ask, you get in there before it kind of gets to that level. To kind of get around that I would have to be working on two projects at the one time so if the men get stuck on one I would say 'leave it and go on to the other one'.

One tutor said that men do not have patience for long explanations. She believed that men preferred more bite-sized explanations.

Veronica

Mostly, men don't like too much talking and you see some of the men switching off after half an hour of theory or talking about something. You might literally see them switch off whereas the women are sort of interrupting me in between or asking questions or something, which is grand.

Another tutor said that men could be very dismissive if what they hear does not make immediate sense to them.

Ivor

The girls won't be quite so up-front about dismissing things very, very quickly. The lads will do that. They will tell you 'fuck that kind of a thing'. There is no discussion, no debate. But you

can actually say, 'wait a second, look at this', and they will kind of reason it out. I find it very hard to generalise.

2.5 Teaching Resources and Methodology

One tutor stated that for men task orientated learning works very well. She illustrated her point by referring to a book a local adult literacy group was writing.

Janet

Having a project I think is tremendous. The men are working on a book. They are gathering local folklore. They are interviewing older people in the community and typing them up and then we are going to do some photographs. These are men who would not traditionally access our service at all. But they are here and this is keeping them. They are moving on into doing spelling. They come in as doing computer work and now they are kind of addressing their literacy skills. I think the project, having something concrete, is going to pull a group together. We were trying to think of something, something real and something that will keep the group together so they kind of came up with the idea themselves. At the moment it is on a high because we are driving to have it finished for June. It has been a fantastic learning experience in terms of keeping a group together and keeping a group who traditionally would not participate in adult literacy, keeping them coming in.

Another tutor highlighted the need for flexible teaching if the learning environment is to work effectively for students.

Heather

A lot of people left school precisely because they didn't, couldn't adhere to a strict timetable and curriculum. You would be insane to try and reintroduce it.

One tutor was very positive about the way in which computers can generate interest for students.

John

With computers you can actually engage them. I'm working with young people. The buzz is in computers. Computers puts them on to something they want, that they will enjoy and they are interested.

A tutor said that men were reticent when it came to handing up homework. She felt that men were more self-conscious and more critical of their own work.

Lisa

Sometimes it is your best students don't want to hand up written work say to be assessed, and it is not that they haven't done homework. When it actually comes to handing up written work to be marked and assessed and commented on, the men are more likely to draw back from that or be sensitive about how it is handled than the women are. You actually find out afterwards they have it done and it is usually people who are very articulate and maybe looked up to a little bit by the others as having good general knowledge. Maybe outside of the

place they have been involved in things and people have thought 'oh, he will know that' and they don't want to (admit) the extent of their knowledge.

3. Motivation for returning to learning

There was general consensus that word of mouth is still the best form of recruitment.

Janet
One of the successes of this particular group was that they were recruiting themselves in the community. They brought in people - friends and relations.

According to the tutors, men's participation is very much linked to financial reward, real or perceived. Financial remuneration does not appear to be a motivating factor for older learners according to one tutor.

Eoin
They come obviously because there is quite a number of state aids but they also need agricultural training to just do the job. And our female students will always come for the reason of training rather than for the reason of the grant which is the main way men have of looking at everything. 'What is in it for me', 'Show me the money'. Our females do not have that attitude. They come because they want to come. They are our best students. They are first in and last out and they never miss a day or night.

Claire
Some of the older ones are there as this is the first time they have had an opportunity in something like this. It isn't necessarily that they are looking for work out of it afterwards or it's not money. It is just that they want to learn. I think I notice more males.

Work although not an exclusive motivating factor does draw women back into education.

Maureen
Some come to update their skills, others come to acquire new skills, to go into the workforce but they are very motivated. They are very, very committed.

One tutor argued that it is not possible to reduce people's motivations to one or two variables. She argued that people's motivations are complex and vary considerably over their lifetime.

Janet
I think certainly there are so many factors - where people are in their lives, how much time and energy and mind space they have to dedicate to their learning, whether they are doing it full time, part time, whether they are working, whether they have young children – these influence motivation.

Another said that the vocational draw only applied to younger middle-aged workers. For older students there was the realisation that work had passed them by.

Janet
In our Centre there was a lot of basic groups who were maybe not specifically aiming towards a particular goal like the Junior Cert or Leaving Cert where there was a basic group. I think that has to do with age.

According to some of the tutors many of the adults coming back to education have unrealistic expectations of what they can achieve and the time in which they can achieve it. According to one tutor this may apply to men more than women as men often feel that their primary role is in the workplace. One tutor commented on one student in particular

Carmel
I think he sort of wants his education to improve in a shorter space of time. He thinks hopefully he will have reached X level by June so then he can have X job or whatever. It is not always possible.

Another tutor agreed with regard to unrealistic expectations.

Jack
I think adults can have unrealistic expectations of what they can achieve in the time frame. I think what happens is when people don't see themselves progressing they get very frustrated and they go 'ahhhhhh'. I think that can happen with adults where they have very clear goals, they have very clear expectations but they want it now. Particularly if they were giving up something else like, if he can make very good money doing something else.

Two tutors stated that the title of courses often influences participation. One tutor commented that Business Studies Secretarial was a turn-off for men.

Maureen
In one particular group now, a business studies secretarial group I have noticed in the last two years in particular we have had all women. A few times the girls themselves have actually commented that they don't have any men in their class but men just haven't applied for the course. Maybe the title of that course, Business Secretarial, may seem more orientated towards women.

Richard
Maybe an interesting point is last year I taught a programme here, which was on PC maintenance and networking. And I would think that men would see that more as their type of thing, macho rather than secretarial and I think ECDL has the connotation of office work.

Short telephone interviews were conducted with personnel from one agency and four service providers The were: Berni Brady, Director, AONTAS, Mary Maher, Director DALC, Mary Beggan, Manager, Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities, FÁS, Thomas Woulfe, Director of Education, Teagasc, Co. Clare and Eileen Curtis, Adult Education Organiser (AEO), Co. Kilkenny.

1. Participation in Learning

Traditionally adult education has attracted people who have already benefited from formal education, who are motivated and are able to afford to continue with their education. The development and growth of locally based community education provision in the late eighties and nineties created access opportunities for non-traditional adult learners. Women have been to the forefront of this. Concern is increasing at the numbers of men remaining outside of this process. All interviewees were asked why large numbers of men are remaining outside this process. Both Berni Brady and Mary Maher were keen to emphasise that, while a segment of the male population remained outside the adult education loop, overall more men than women were accessing education and training opportunities.

> *While it is true that adult education is generally perceived as women's domain, in reality that is not so. It is true that a lot of women did become involved in the 1980s in community education. It was a time of high unemployment. A lot of women were in the home and they got out of the house and organised courses for themselves. They got childcare sorted and were to the fore. Although I have to say that in the 80s, there were also a lot of men involved in education, particularly in the evenings. At present in the Centre, there are about equal numbers.* *(Mary Maher, DALC)*

Berni Brady agrees that the perception does not always match the reality.

> *It is important to remember at the outset that if we look at the broader range of opportunities created through workplace learning, continuing education and lifelong learning, men still outnumber women in adult education. That is not to deny that there are a significant number of men outside the loop. It is very important that this message is highlighted. And in the current debate this has not been highlighted sufficiently. It is also clear that marginalised men – if I can use that term – are not accessing second chance education. They did not access education first time round either.* *(Berni Brady, AONTAS)*

Eileen Curtis emphasised the devastating impact that the unemployment of the 1970s and 80s had on men's psyche and their sense of themselves. Many felt rejected and broken and their morale was severely tested.

> *I think the very high level of unemployment that affected men in the 70s and 80s, and particularly working class men, had a huge debilitating effect on them. And not just on their earning capacity. It was as if their world of regular work and their social interaction collapsed, and left many of them disorientated, dislocated and floundering. It was an eventuality that many were completely unprepared for, and given the experience of two decades of unemployment, many men were reduced to a sense of despair and despondency. I suppose at the time the impact of the disjuncture that occurred was not fully appreciated. Against that backdrop of dislocation, education just did not seem relevant to many men.*
> *(Eileen Curtis, AEO)*

She went on to argue that unemployment also impacted heavily on women, but they coped better with its consequences.

> *Women too were affected by the economic changes that occurred. But their response was different. They turned to each other and to the community. Both their analysis and response were decidedly different. This is not to suggest that men did not have a relationship or indeed an engagement with their communities.* *(Eileen Curtis, AEO)*

Thomas Woulfe argued that farmers had very sophisticated and well developed non-formal educational networks and that many did not see the need for formal structures. Given that many farmers learned their farming skills from their fathers in a non-structured, organic way, they were less inclined to prioritise formal education over practical on the farm training.

> *Formerly, particularly in the 1940s 1950s and 1960s, farmers did not need much formal education. They had great confidence in their own farming education, and in some respects that is one of the reasons farmers are or at least were reluctant to access formal education. They had very sophisticated informal networks in place that provided very valuable education and drew on their first hand experiences of farming. These meetings used to take place at marts, fairs, creameries and also in each other's houses. Thrashings were also great meeting places for farmers. Four or five families would come together and work each farm in turn and these provided a tremendous opportunity for informal education. Such settings provided a rich vein for education. There is a very long tradition of informal education in farming and the level of debate and discussion was of a very high quality. I remember in particular around the time of accession to the EC, the issue and its potential impact on agriculture was strongly debated and contested.* *(Thomas Woulfe, Teagasc)*

2. Barriers to Access

According to Mary Beggan, women returning to education can experience particular difficulties and their decision to return can change relationships in the home. While most of these changes are negotiated without undue difficulty some tensions can arise.

Women returning to work can result in tensions and difficulties in the home. Women are often very enthused by the training they receive and are very often changed by these new experiences. That process of change can impact on their husbands and partners and can change the power relationship resulting in men feeling threatened by that change. There is some anecdotal evidence that some men try to control women's access to education but when these issues emerge in courses, women with peer support do get opportunities to discuss how best to deal with these type of situations. Usually these kinds of difficulties only occur during the transition stage of returning to training. (Mary Beggan, FÁS)

Traditional understandings of the role of men were also identified as a barrier. Men see themselves as the breadwinner not as lifelong students.

In the past and still to some degree, men see their role as breadwinner, and once they are fulfilling that role they tend not to see a need for education. Many unemployed men don't see the link between education and work. They do however see links between education and helping their kids and that is a route through which men can be targeted. (Mary Maher, DALC)

A lot of it has to do with tradition. Men were the traditional breadwinners and many continue to see that as their primary role. Unless their work can be furthered by education, then most men are not interested. (Eileen Curtis, AEO)

Both Berni Brady and Eileen Curtis say that gender is a key barrier

There are, of course, issues around men's identity and what they regard as essential to being a man. Men don't like to be seen as fallible. Their notion of themselves does not accommodate that concept. (Eileen Curtis, AEO)

I think there are a number of issues pertinent to men. Peer issues for example. There is the sense that education is not really for the real man. That education is soft in some way. Men tend not to support each other while women tend to be quite supportive of each other. For women, education is a positive thing to do. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

Financial barriers are seen as being central to understanding why people do not participate adult education.

One of the biggest barriers for all – and this applies to both women and men – is the financial issue. Money is a big issue. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

People get their dole and 50–60 on top. Not a huge amount of money. There are a lot of costs for students. The bus fare. Maybe they need better clothes. A cup of tea in the Centre. Women have to give up cleaning, men bits of work. (Mary Maher, DALC)

Age and access to transport are also major barriers to participation.

In terms of rural people, transport is a big issue. There are two sides to this coin – getting provision in to outlying rural areas and getting people out of rural areas into more centralised learning ... lot of people like to leave their local area and meet new people, get new perspectives and seek new directions. There are also issues around age and provision for older people. Some older people like same age groups, and some like learning in across-the-ages environment. That can be really enriching. (Eileen Curtis, AEO)

Both Brady and Maher also identified the initial experience of education as major barriers.

Their school experiences are so bad, so horrific that they think if they come back to education that it will be the same. (Mary Maher, DALC)

For many adults their initial experience of education was quite brutal. Arising out of that, confidence is a big issue. Many people just associate education with fear. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

In relation to literacy difficulties, Brady, Woulfe and Maher felt that there was a strong stigma attached to having low levels of literacy, and therefore people were more inclined to hide or deny their problems.

There is a big stigma associated with returning to education. There is the fear of being seen to be stupid. And the more disadvantaged you are, the more fear and the more the confidence issue kicks in. But fear also applies to women. Women who have worked in the home are also more likely to experience that kind of fear and lack of confidence. There are in fact many similarities between the issues that affect men and the issues that affect women. But once in, women are better at making connections than are men. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

Literacy is a barrier. Lack of familiarity with reading and writing. Many would not have been great at school. Those given the farms were often the ones who were weakest in school. However, that was not the sole criteria. Many were given the farms because they were pleasant; they could get on with the father and were easygoing. Many of these parents did not see the value of formal education. (Thomas Woulfe, Teagasc)

Stigma is the biggest barrier. It's a major issue for men, much more so than for women. It's so important that their best friends don't know that they can't read or write. It is such a basic thing, reading and writing, that they think it reflects badly on them if they think they can't read or write. There is a lot of shame attached to it. They're afraid of being seen as stupid, and who'd want to be seen as stupid in front of their friends? (Mary Maher, DALC)

Maher argued that even though the stigma attached to poor literacy was deep-rooted, so too are other stigmas and they have been named, confronted and addressed. This she felt should give those trying to address the issue of poor literacy some hope.

Certainly there is a stigma attached to illiteracy. But that should not be seen as a problem. As a society we have confronted the stigma attached to domestic violence. For years people did not mention it. It was not spoken about. The same with being gay. If we could now do the same for literacy. There is a huge silence around the issue. Particularly in rural areas. We need to make it more normal. (Mary Maher, DALC)

Mary Beggan also agreed that literacy can pose a problem but she felt that there was good coordination between agencies.

Literacy and numeracy are the big barriers. However, we liase closely with education providers. We have very god relationships with NALA here in Dublin and the same applies around the country. Literacy work needs to be integrated into all areas of work and so it becomes less of an issue. Apart from that, there are in fact very few barriers for men. They don't have the same childcare issues to contend with that women have. *(Mary Beggan, FÁS)*

Woulfe identifies three further barriers that he felt had particular relevance for farmers:

Time is also a barrier for farmers. Many now have part-time jobs and finding time to do courses is difficult. The difficulty also in sourcing relief workers also inhibits participation in farm work. Lack of childcare is also a difficulty, as many farmers' wives are working outside the home and farmers do the collecting of children. *(Thomas Woulfe, Teagasc)*

3. The Learning Experience

In terms of basic education Brady emphasised flexibility as one of the keys to meeting the learning needs of students.

In terms of methodology, I'll tell you an experience I once had. It was during the Iran-Iraq war. One day a group asked me 'what was it all about'? I said that I'd need to check up a few things and that I'd come back the next day. So, I did my usual thing and got my box of goodies together, newspaper cuttings and so on. Now being a Geography teacher, the first thing I did was to bring in a map. I brought in the map and most students had never read a map. So we started looking at the map and they were saying 'hey look at Ireland we're stuck off in the edge of the world' and then we started looking for London and Brussels. We spent the time then looking at other countries, and eventually came back to Europe and that got us on to the European Union and politics. It emerged that none of them had voted. And as there was an election coming up. I brought in the register and a voting paper. So they ended up registering and voting. We never did get to discuss the Iran-Iraq war and I still have the box untouched. *(Berni Brady, AONTAS)*

Beggan agreed with the need for flexible learning.

I think the way in which programmes are delivered is very important. Flexibility is the key. Short, part-time courses have greater appeal than longer full-time programmes. Programmes need to be user friendly and non-threatening. The approach one takes with adults is also crucially important. Training has to be part of an agreed plan. *(Mary Beggan, FÁS)*

One of the fears Brady expressed is that a lot of that kind of flexibility at the level of basic education will be lost.

There is a lot of freedom in basic education to do things like that. One of the fears I'd have with certification and professionalisation is that you would lose that freedom. *(Berni Brady, AONTAS)*

There was general agreement that men tend to be more focused and instrumental in their approach to learning, and that women like to integrate their life experiences with their learning.

Men tend to be fairly focused. They don't want to be talking about Osama bin Laden. Women like that. Women have a more holistic approach men, tend to do their work quietly. Men are more instrumental, more focused on the product. Men are also more private, more confidential. *(Mary Maher, DALC)*

With men, you need more precise building blocks. Men need to feel that it is all going somewhere. Most of us who have worked with women take 15 minutes or so at the start of class for personal time. It happens naturally, then ease into the work. Men, however, expect you to have the work ready and have a product at the end of it. Men are much more product orientated. *(Berni Brady, AONTAS)*

Men seem to prefer learning by doing. Men prefer more activity-orientated learning. It would seem that men don't like personal issues intruding into their learning space. Maybe we see relationships in a particular way. Maybe service providers see men in a particular way, and men see service providers in a particular way. Maybe that relationship is fossilised, crystallised. Maybe statutory providers have to go beyond their perceptions. Maybe there are ways of engagement that we have not tried. Maybe we are too cautious in what we aspire to. *(Eileen Curtis, AEO)*

Thomas Woulfe's initial reaction was to agree, but then he went on to talk about a new initiative that facilitates a more personalised approach involving men.

Definitely farmers are not interested in exploring personal issues in these classes. They are very single-minded in this respect. However we just started a pilot programme, before Christmas called the Opportunities Programme. It will look at the more personal side of farming – issues like isolation, the workload, inheritance, the future of farming and so on. This will run for six months and will involve three group sessions and each farmer will also have two individual sessions. *(Thomas Woulfe, Teagasc)*

Maher also made reference to the low participation by men in the life of the Centre and their reluctance to become involved in extra-curricular activities.

A lot of men who come to the classes are very focused and don't want to get involved in the Centre other than attend their classes. So they come and go more. *(Mary Maher, DALC)*

Brady made reference to men's isolation and the need within basic education for a variety of learning situations, including individual and group learning. For the most part, Brady argued, tutors need to follow their instincts and join with their students in an educational journey of exploration.

Tutors often go on their instincts. The priority is to get the group comfortable, get them talking. It is very hard to describe the methodology. A tutor does need very good general knowledge on all kinds of things. They also need to be confident, to change direction quickly and to develop

stuff. An interest in geography is good. I found that the study of Latin has proved to be a huge help with literacy. People do have a fascination with language and its origins. A tutor has to be able to go with the flow. Really it's about going on a journey with the students – it's an exploration as much as anything else. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

Woulfe said that he would be very conscious of women in the group.

I'm always conscious of ladies in the group. Their presence usually improves the class immensely. People concentrate more. The males don't show off as much – they are not cod-acting as much. It's easier to control the class. Young lads don't like to make a show of themselves in front of women. (Thomas Woulfe, Teagasc)

4. Creating Greater Access

Brady argued that adult education could be made more attractive for men if it is linked to the world of work, a view with which Woulfe agreed.

More outreach work is needed. It has a greater chance of success if it is linked to jobs or to particular projects. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

Farmers are interested in reducing costs and they hope that in attending courses that they will be able to do that. They also need guidance on the whole range of schemes and administration that is now a very important part of farming. That is also an incentive. So I suppose you could say that money, either through savings or ensuring that they qualify for whatever grants are going, is an incentive. (Thomas Woulfe, Teagasc)

Brady felt that the location in which adult education takes place is very important.

I think it is so important to work in spaces where people feel comfortable, that they are familiar with. Schools, for example, are out for many literacy students, because they are places of fear. Locally based provision is so important. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

Maher thought that a more creative approach could be adopted, particularly in relation to literacy.

We could also be more creative in the way we do literacy. It could be linked with getting the driving test. More work based. Computers can also be a great link to literacy. Computers can build confidence and interest in learning. Literacy could also be linked to health and safety. (Mary Maher, DALC)

Curtis said that funding remains a core issue.

There has to be a level playing field. Well perhaps given years of under-funding, there has to be positive discrimination in favour of this sector. That means putting more people into the system. Many people coming back into education for the first time require one-to-one contact and this is particularly true in the context of the men. Many people coming in to us feel very threatened. (Eileen Curtis AEO)

Reaching people who need adult education most, is one of the most difficult issues, and disadvantaged men are harder to reach than any other target group.

Beggan believes that access to training has to be made as easy as possible and bureaucracy and form filling kept to a minimum.

Accessing education and training has to be made as easy as possible. We are currently designing a new process to facilitate that whole process. It has to be very open and very attractive. Bureaucracy and form filling has to be postponed for as long as possible. We now have a free telephone service so people don't even have to come through the door to register. People sometimes make wrong assumptions about qualifications needed for particular training and these kinds of issues can be sorted on the phone very easily. Once having made the contact, a good guidance / advisory service is very important. (Mary Beggan FÁS)

She also stated that people have to have control over the decisions they make and the role of agencies is to facilitate and support people in making the best decisions for themselves.

When we engage with people, particularly long-term unemployed men, as part of the guidance and counselling process they agree a process for themselves that may include education and training. So therefore they choose to do the education or training programme. A plan is negotiated with them. (Mary Beggan FÁS)

Brady and Curtis are in agreement on the importance of word-of mouth.

In terms of making contact with students, through the AONTAS information services, from research we have done in AONTAS and from anecdotal evidence, we know that word of mouth is a key means for recruiting people. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

One of the interesting things we noticed here in Kilkenny is that people come back to education because they know someone who has made the break. There is a kind of a domino effect. (Eileen Curtis AEO)

Maher echoes students with regard to the lack of clarity around benefits, which has a detrimental effect on access.

Another thing men are unsure of is to what extent participation in adult education will impact on their benefits. There is a lack of clarity around benefits. (Mary Maher DALC)

Maher and Brady appear to disagree on the importance of education-related public events as recruiting fora.

People can also be contacted through high profile activities. Years ago, we've had up to 100 people at reading evenings where people from literacy classes had produced a book and read publicly what they have written. These occasions are really powerful. (Berni Brady, AONTAS)

The other point that is also worth making is that men are not as visible even in the centre. They are slow to get involved in extra-curricular activities, or attend public functions like book launches. So the impression is often given that only women are involved in the Centre. (Mary Maher, DALC)

Maher also argued that access; particularly men's access to education has to be seen in the context of men's general reluctance to access all services.

In general, men are reluctant to avail of services. They are reluctant to avail of AA or of counselling services. So fear is a big barrier that they have to overcome. *(Mary Maher, DALC)*

5. Exit Comments

The service providers were asked for some concluding comments. These were:

Each county should have an adult education centre with provision for all types of learners, some central structure with childcare. In a centre like this adult education would be recognised and it would have all the required facilities like childcare and guidance services. In these Centres, the educational experience should be noticeably different from any previous experience.

I think also that there is a serious personnel shortage within adult education. Very often we are putting square pegs in round holes. We need to learn from the partnership structure, in terms of securing proper resourcing. We have always operated on the basis that even though we don't fully have the resources we should be offering the service because the need is so great. *(Eileen Curtis AEO)*

Health and Safety – particularly around the use of sprays, insecticides and machinery. When fatalities occur it can be hugely traumatic not only for the immediate family but also for the whole area. A lot more needs to be done on this area. Improving the economic viability of farming is always going to be a major challenge. *(Thomas Woulfe Teagasc)*

I'd put money into Community Education. I'd continue to develop adult literacy programmes. I'd abolish part-time fees for mature students and I'd set up the structures recommended in the White Paper. *(Berni Brady, AONTAS)*

Lifelong learning is now an accepted part of adult life. We all have to update our skills. Community-based delivery of programmes is a very good mechanism for bringing people back into the workforce. Flexibility, tailor-made courses to meet individual needs is what is required. *(Mary Beggan FÁS)*

The big task is to take the stigma away. Try to normalise it and to value learning.
(Mary Maher, DALC)

6. Conclusion

While the research found that the learning styles of men and women did not differ significantly as measured by the instruments, the qualitative data shows that there are some differences in the process of learning as experienced by men and women. For example, men experienced higher levels of frustration, and were less likely to persist with learning if the outcomes were not immediately evident. There is also difference in the motivation for learning. Men were

more highly motivated when the outcome was project or vocationally orientated, and women were more prepared to explore wider options.

In the context of the learning group, men were less likely to engage in questioning and in personal disclosure, for fear of ridicule, and the peer culture is a more significant form of social control for them. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to support each other and to engage in the wider learning environment, and to perceive adult education as a more holistic developmental experience. Because women have more networks within the community, they are more likely to become involved in educational activities, while disadvantaged men tended to experience much more isolation, and were consequently, less likely to access whatever provision there was. Once adult learners became engaged in the learning process, their needs were strikingly similar, pivoting on a learner-centred approach by the tutors and providers.

Chapter 7 Findings and Recommendations

1. Findings from the Quantitative Analysis

Chapter 5 details the findings of Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) and Allinson and Hayes' Cognitive Style Index (CSI). The findings from these two quantitative instruments in this study have produced contradictory results.

- The findings from the Kolb instrument indicate that the majority of male and female participants (85%) in this study are Type 4 *Dynamic Learners* (64%) and Type 1 *Imaginative Learners* (21%). (Kolb Type 1 *Imaginative Learner* and Kolb Type 4 *Dynamic Learner* correspond to Allinson and Hayes' *Intuitive Learner*).
- The findings from the Allinson and Hayes instrument indicate that the female and male participants are more likely to be *Analytic Learners*, – producing an average score of 47 on the analytic side of the *Intuitive-Analytic* continuum. (Analytic Learners as defined by Allinson and Hayes correspond to Kolb's Type 2 Analytic and Kolb's Type 3 Common Sense Learners).

Despite their contradictory results, both instruments would appear to show that there are no significant differences in the way adults, both women and men, learn.

A gender analysis of Kolb's instrument indicates that:

- The majority of both men and women in this study are Type 4 *Dynamic Learners*. However, more women (74%) than men (54%) are likely to be classified as Type 4 *Dynamic Learners*.
- Five per cent (5%) of women and 10% of men in this study are characterised as Type 3 *Common Sense Learners*.
- Two per cent (2%) of women and 12% of men in this study are characterised as Type 2 *Analytic Learners*.
- Nineteen per cent (19%) of women and 24% of men are characterised as Type 1 *Imaginative Learners*.

A gender analysis of Allinson and Hayes indicates that:

- On a continuum from 0 to 76 the average score obtained by men in this study was 44.8, while the average score for women was slightly higher at 48.2.

This study highlights a significant difference between the adult learners, both men and women, in this study and the random populations used by both Kolb and Allinson and Hayes. It should be noted that the random populations used by Kolb and Allinson and Hayes consisted of undergraduates in the United States of America.

- Kolb's instrument indicates that women and men in this study are twice as likely to be characterised as Type 4 *Dynamic Learners* than the sample random undergraduate population in the United States of America.
- Allinson and Hayes's instrument indicate that women and men in this study are more likely to be characterised as *Analytic Learners* than the sample random undergraduate population in the United States of America, with an average score of 47 as opposed to 38 for the random population.

The findings from Kolb and Allinson and Hayes, the two instruments used to measure learning styles contradict each other. Notwithstanding these contradictions, both agree that there is no significant difference in the learning styles of women and men. One instrument (Kolb) indicates that the learning styles of both women and men are significantly different when compared to a larger random sample of undergraduates in the United States of America, while the second instrument (Allinson and Hayes) indicates more marginal differences in the learning styles of this study and a general population in the United States. The majority of both women and men, in the Irish study are according to this instrument, *Dynamic Learners*.

Recommendation

This report recommends that the instrument-based findings from this study as they relate to adult learning styles should be treated with great caution.

2. Findings from the qualitative data

Chapter 6 details the qualitative data, collected from learners, tutors, an agency, and service providers. The findings from the discussions with the adult learners highlight the following:

- Early school experiences were quite negative.
- Poverty and the need to earn a living were the main reasons why the adults left school early.
- For men in particular, children were a strong motivating factor in their decision to return to education, while for some women the need to break the isolation of working full-time in the home was an important factor.
- Work was an important motivating factor.
- Families were supportive to some degree, especially for men.
- In the case of men, friends were less supportive of their decision to return to education.
- A range of barriers were identified including location, cost, lack of childcare, perceived bureaucracy and lack of confidence.
- Without exception the adults were pleased to have returned to education and were very happy with the standard of tutoring.
- Fear, anxiety and embarrassment characterised many of the men's feelings on the first day.
- While men were reluctant to work in single-gender groups, their reluctance to work with women did not extend to having women tutors.
- Both women and men emphasised the importance of learning in a non-pressurised, non-judgemental environment, the need for a sense of humour and in general the need for a relaxed, non-intimidatory atmosphere.
- Initially there was very strong resistance by men to personal disclosure in class.
- Men were more likely than were women to describe themselves as impatient learners.
- Men were more likely to study vocational and business subjects than were women.
- Men were less likely than were women to participate in the extra-curricular life of the centres.

The findings from the discussions with the tutors highlight the following:

- There was general recognition that the quality of initial education, in particular for people from working class and Inner City areas was very unsatisfactory. The barriers men experience are both internal and external and both are very much connected.
- In a departure from what the students had to say, the tutors felt that the adult learners particularly women adult learners receive very little family support.
- The tutors were of the view that men were very vulnerable and fearful, a fear based on how they are perceived as males.
- Many of the tutors were critical of their working conditions and the lack of support they receive in their work.
- The tutors agreed that men tend to feel more comfortable in single-gender settings.
- The tutors also felt that in general men were less patient learners than were women.
- The tutors felt that adults coming back to education often have unrealistic expectations of what they can achieve and the time in which they can achieve their goals. This is particularly the case for male students.

The findings from the discussions with the service providers / agency representatives, highlight the following:

- Taken as a homogenous group, men are accessing education and training opportunities, but some groups, particularly older men, rural men and marginalised urban men are not accessing education.
- Traditional understandings of the role of men allied to early school experiences were also identified as barriers to participation. Men's attitudes can, in turn, act as barriers to education for their wives and partners and many women are actively discouraged from participation.
- Flexibility is one of the keys to meeting the needs of students.
- There was general agreement that men tend to be more focused and instrumental in their approach to learning and that women like to integrate their life experiences with their learning.
- There was general agreement that work, the prospect of work or promotion acts as an incentive to returning to education, particularly for men.
- Given that there is, as yet, no centrally co-ordinated information system in place, word-of-mouth continues to be the most popular way in which adult learners find out about learning opportunities.
- Lack of clear information about social welfare benefits can act as a major barrier to participation.
- One of the biggest challenges is to promote the value of adult education, and to remove any stigma that may be associated with returning to adult education.

3. Recommendations

The findings of this research have implications for the ways in which adult education and training opportunities are organised. Based on these findings, this Report recommends the following:

- That current models of good practice within adult and community based education and literacy programmes be evaluated and documented and that these be developed as models for future provision, supported with realistic funding and resources.

- For men in particular, exploring the provision of education and training opportunities in locations more likely to be used by men, for example, work place, sports clubs, trade union centres, etc. could be a key factor in participation. Current models of practice should be evaluated and documented with a view to developing future good practice

- That any forthcoming Partnership agreements should include agreed incentives with the employers and trade unions and social partners to encourage people within the workplace who have incomplete second level qualifications to return to education.

- That popular media be invited to promote positive images of adult learning, including using role models to encourage adults back to education

- That induction programmes which meet the needs of adult learners be developed for all education and training programmes. Such programmes should take account of the disposition of male and female learners and their experiences of early education.

- The Report recognises the important pilot work of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative in relation to the provision of information and guidance to adult learners and recommends that it continues to be developed and extended to all adults wishing to return to adult education. In particular it recommends that the new service explores ways to service the needs of hard to reach adults through outreach mechanisms which include links with local communities.

- That curricula be developed to take account of the range of needs of adult learners including personal educational and vocational development and that programmes be regularly evaluated by both learners and tutors.

- That adult education centres in designing programmes become more pro-active in encouraging men to become more involved in the whole learning process including in extra-curricular activities.

- That front line staff in adult education centres receive specific training that will enable them to meet the needs of adult learners at the first point of contact.

- That single-gender groups should be available to learners, particularly at basic education level. As people grow in confidence, this Report recommends that all participants would have at least some experience of co-educational settings.

- That class size for basic education should be confined to small groups, gradually increasing as people progress up the educational ladder.

- That adult learners should have access to information and communication technology resources, and be supported in their use of these technologies.

- That the flexible practices and methodologies that have developed within the adult education sector, should be recognised, retained and further developed through appropriate training for staff in the adult and community education sector.

- That capital funds be made available for state of the art facilities for adult learners.

- That childcare support be integrated into all education and training provision

- That the particular circumstances of rural adult learners in relation to isolation, transport and childcare be reflected in flexible funding policies.

- This report notes the recommendation in the White Pape, *Learning for Life,* to establish a Forum for Adult Education Practitioners and an Inter-Agency Working Group to progress the professional training and working conditions of adult educators. This Report therefore recommends the implementation of these recommendations as a matter of urgency in order to insure quality provision in the sector.

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Appendix 1 Questionnaire

To complete this questionnaire mark the phrases in each column that are most like you, second most like you, third most like you and least like you. Assign '4' to the one that is most like you, '3' to the one that is next most like you, '2' to the one that is third most like you and '1' to the one that is least like you. There are no right or wrong answers, please do the exercise honestly.

CE	RO	AC	AE
☐ I get involved	☐ I take my time before acting	☐ I am particular about what I like	☐ I like things to be useful
☐ I am open to new experiences	☐ I look at all sides of issues	☐ I like to analyse things, break them down into their parts	☐ I like to try things out
☐ I like to deal with my feelings	☐ I like to watch	☐ I like to think about ideas	☐ I like to be doing things
☐ I accept people and things the way they are	☐ I am aware of what is going on around me	☐ I evaluate things	☐ I take risks.
☐ I have gut feelings and hunches	☐ I have lots of questions	☐ I am logical	☐ I am hard working and get things done
☐ I like concrete things, things I can see and touch	☐ I like to observe	☐ I like ideas and theories	☐ I like to be active
☐ I prefer learning in the here and now	☐ I like to consider things and reflect about them	☐ I tend to think about . the future	☐ I like to see results from my work
☐ I rely on my feelings	☐ I rely on my observations	☐ I rely on my ideas	☐ I have to try things out for myself
☐ I am energetic and enthusiastic	☐ I am quiet and reserved	☐ I tend to reason things out	☐ I am responsible about things

Appendix 2 Questionnaire

Name .....

Sex (please tick) Male ☐ Female ☐

Age range

18–24 ☐ 25–39 ☐ 40–49 ☐ 50–65 ☐ Over 65 ☐

People differ in the way they think about problems. Below are 38 statements designed to identify your own approach. If you believe that a statement is *true* about you, answer **T**. If you believe that it is *false* about you, answer **F**. If you are *uncertain* whether it is true or false, answer **?** This is not a test of your ability, and there are no right or wrong answers. Simply choose the one response which comes closest to your own opinion. Work quickly, giving your first reaction in each case, and make sure that you respond to every statement.

Indicate your answer by ticking the appropriate box opposite the statement.

T True F False ? Uncertain

		T	F	?
1	In my experience, rational thought is the only realistic basis for making decisions.	☐	☐	☐
2	To solve a problem, I have to study each part of it in detail	☐	☐	☐
3	I am most effective when my work involves a clear sequence of tasks to be performed.	☐	☐	☐
4	I have difficulty working with people who 'dive in at the deep end' without considering the finer aspects of the problem.	☐	☐	☐
5	I am careful to follow rules and regulations at work.	☐	☐	☐
6	I avoid taking a course of action if the odds are against its success.	☐	☐	☐
7	I am inclined to scan through reports rather than read them in detail.	☐	☐	☐
8	My understanding of a problem tends to come more from thorough analysis than flashes of insight.	☐	☐	☐
9	I try to keep to a regular routine in my work.	☐	☐	☐

Please continue on following page

		T	F	?
10	The kind of work I like best is that which requires a logical, step-by-step approach.	☐	☐	☐
11	I rarely make 'off the top of the head' decisions.	☐	☐	☐
12	I prefer chaotic action to orderly inaction.	☐	☐	☐
13	Given enough time, I would consider every situation from all angles.	☐	☐	☐
14	To be successful in my work, I find that it is important to avoid hurting other people's feelings.	☐	☐	☐
15	The best way for me to understand a problem is to break it down into its constituent parts.	☐	☐	☐
16	I find that to adopt a careful, analytical approach to making decisions takes too long.	☐	☐	☐
17	I make most progress when I take calculated risks.	☐	☐	☐
18	I find that it is possible to be too organised when performing certain kinds of task.	☐	☐	☐
19	I always pay attention to detail before I reach a conclusion.	☐	☐	☐
20	I make many of my decisions on the basis of intuition.	☐	☐	☐
21	My philosophy is that it is better to be safe than risk being sorry.	☐	☐	☐
22	When making a decision, I take my time and thoroughly consider all relevant factors.	☐	☐	☐
23	I get on best with quiet, thoughtful people.	☐	☐	☐
24	I would rather that my life was unpredictable than that it followed a regular pattern.	☐	☐	☐
25	Most people regard me as a logical thinker.	☐	☐	☐
26	To fully understand the facts I need a good theory.	☐	☐	☐
27	I work best with people who are spontaneous.	☐	☐	☐
28	I find detailed, methodical work satisfying.	☐	☐	☐

Please continue on following page

		T	F	?
29.	My approach to solving a problem is to focus on one part at a time.	☐	☐	☐
30.	I am constantly on the lookout for new experiences.	☐	☐	☐
31.	In meetings, I have more to say than most.	☐	☐	☐
32.	My 'gut feeling' is just as good a basis for decision making as careful analysis.	☐	☐	☐
33.	I am the kind of person who casts caution to the wind.	☐	☐	☐
34.	I make decisions and get on with things rather than analyse every last detail.	☐	☐	☐
35.	I am always prepared to take a gamble.	☐	☐	☐
36.	Formal plans are more of a hindrance than a help in my work.	☐	☐	☐
37.	I am more at home with ideas rather than facts and figures.	☐	☐	☐
38.	I find that 'too much analysis results in paralysis'.	☐	☐	☐

Adapted from C.W. Allinson & J. Hayes 1996.

Appendix 3 Discussion groups – sample questions for learners

- Education – general
  How did you get to be here?
- Where did you come from? I'm thinking of what kind of schooling did you have before this?
- What sort of training, FAS, Youthreach – that kind of thing – night classes maybe.
- Ok, so you're here now – What was it like deciding to go back to education?
- Specifically what difficulties, roadblocks?
- So how's it going now?
- Why are you staying?
- So you have been here now for how long?
- And in that time what would you say you have learned about the way you learn?
- OK, so in terms of teaching, how do you prefer to be taught? Would you for example prefer:
  - group discussion
  - lecture type teaching
  - practical hands on learning
  - reflection
  - worksheets
  - observation
  - e-learning
- What about the so-called new technologies. Have you used computers, videos, audiotapes. Have the tutors used overheads much?
- And what do you think of them. Do you find them helpful/unhelpful?
- Do you ever remember an activity where you did not learn? Is there some way in which you could have learned from it?
- Speaking of tutors, do you have a preference for women or men tutors?
- Do you think the age or gender of the tutor matters – how?
- Do you think the age or gender of other participants matters – how?

- Coming back to the course, would you change anything about the course you are on and if so what would you change or would you change anything about the way the course is taught?

- If you were given the job of developing adult education courses how would you get people to come to it?

- What do you think people are afraid of in returning to education? I know that's presuming people have fears. What do you think?

- Ok, thanks for that, now the last time we met ... generally this is what we found ...

- Exit Q
  Just before we go can I ask how did you feel about being part of the research?

- What was your reaction to the questionnaires? Anything you did not understand? How did you feel in relation to asking questions? Was there a difference between the 2? Was one more difficult than the other?

- When results of survey are fed back, does the finding reflect what you think yourself? Are you analytic, intuitive etc? Any examples of when you noticed this about yourself?

- Is there one thing that you think should be recorded in this report? What would that be?

- Do you think as men/women we learn differently from the other gender?

- Could you give any examples of where you have noticed this?

- Are you a patient learner? Do you give up easily?

- What can the tutor do to make the best learning experience? What can others do?

- What kind of learning environment suits you best – desk arrangement, noise level, heat, size of group etc.

- Do you like opportunities to talk about personal stuff, like family relationships etc.?

- Do you like to get regular tests?

- What kind of homework do you like? Would you change it in any way?

- Do you get feedback? How often? Is it enough? Does the feedback motivate you?

Appendix 4 Discussion groups – sample questions for tutors

- How did you get involved in adult education?
- What is your role?
- What do you see as your role?
- Teaching subjects or teaching adults?
- What was your personal experience of school?
- What was your perception of adult education before you came into it?
- Which of these captures what you think your engaged in? Adult Education, 2nd chance education, work related education, community based education, education for life, life long learning.
- From your experience do you see a difference in the way men learn and women learn?
- Do you have a preference for teaching men/women? Is age a barrier?
- What kind of social class do you have in your group?
- Does it matter if the teacher is of a different social class?
- Are there issues around the language you use and reference points?
- How do you structure your approach to learning?
- How do you start with a group?
- What confidence/trust building do you do?
- What do you think is the difference in approach in adult education to that in formal schools?
- What size of group do you work with?
- What is the ideal size?
- What subjects are you teaching?
- What do you see as the outcomes of your teaching?

- Do you see it?
- Why do you think the learners are here?
- What benefits do you feel they are getting from being here?
- How long have you been teaching here?
- What barriers do you feel the participants encounter?
- How important is testing, assessment and certification?
- What do you think makes a good tutor?
- Do you use out-of-centre learning?
- Work experience?

Appendix 5 Sample questions for service providers

- Why do you think working class women are more likely to participate in adult education than are working class men?
- Of those that participate, in what way if any, do you think the experience of adult education differs for women and for men?
- From your observations of adult education, have you noticed anything distinctive about the way in which women and men learn?
- How cognisant, in your opinion, is current provision of the specific needs of women and men learners?
- In your experience, what can be done to not only increase working class male participation but also enhance their learning experiences when they do come back to education?